

The Impact of Digital Technologies on the Development of Wine Tourism in Georgia

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Abstract

Purpose of the article The aim of the research was to determine the current situation of wine tourism in Kakheti, to identify the problems identified during the pandemic and to find ways to solve them for the post-pandemic period. Wine tourism is quite popular in Georgia, but according to certain regions the picture is differentiated, traditionally Kakheti region is the unconditional leader, but in other regions as well, for example, Adjara, Imereti, Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, Racha-Lichkhumi and Guria, etc. Sh. There are a variety of wine tours. However, Kakheti region has the greatest potential for the development of wine tourism.

Methodology/methods Statistical observation, grouping and analysis methods were used in the research process. Domestic tourism can save wine tourism in the era of digital transformations. To determine these expectations, we conducted a survey of wine tour consumers and wine companies and family wineries involved in tourism. To do this, we used the platform Google Drive and, in the format available there, use a pre-compiled questionnaire to assess the impact of the pandemic on the winemaking business.

Scientific aim Identify the factors hindering the development of the wine tourism business and look for ways to overcome the existing problems.

Findings The way to survive wine tourism is in the development of domestic tourism. It is necessary to support it from the state and increase the awareness of the population.

Conclusions The results of the research show that the pandemic has had a huge negative impact on wine tourism, the near future is impossible to reach the level of 2020, respondents believe it is necessary to intensify domestic tourism, strengthen state support, promote wine and tourism, Introduction of digital technology innovations, etc.

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Introduction

2020 turned out to be a year of radical change and transformation of public relations around the world, which changed the way of life and rhythm of people, which still retains the status of passive viability. The pandemic significantly changed the economic development parameters of the countries, which put business entities in a difficult situation.

The tourism sector is one of the sectors most affected by COVID-19 in terms of both demand and supply. (Abesadze, O. 2020) That is why 2020 will go down in world history as a year of transition to the economic uncertainty phase of tourism. (Kinkladze, R., Abesadze N., Abesadze, O., 2020) It is true that in Georgia, as well as in other tourist countries, the basic statistical characteristics of tourism have changed significantly, there are expectations in the revival of tourism, especially domestic tourism, and they are positive. This is confirmed by the results of our research, according to which Georgian residents are on standby, have selected tourist packages, have selected attractive tourist locations and are ready to make tourist visits after the stabilization of the epidemic. On demand and popular tours are sorority wine tours, which has always been popular with both international and domestic visitors.

Currently, in the country as well as in many countries around the world, a third wave of the virus is raging. Therefore, the area of active tourist activities is still limited. Since the most active period for wine tourism is still summer and autumn, we should hope that the area of spread of the virus will decrease and after the successful implementation of mass vaccination, against the background of a calming epidemic, wine tourism will gather strength and begin the process of its rise. At the same time, it should be noted that for both international and domestic tourism markets, it is important to create high-quality tourism products and ensure a safe corridor and accessible air and land traffic. (Abesadze, N., 2020)

The main challenge facing wine tourism today is the restriction of closed borders and visits caused by epidemics. Wine tourism existed mainly at the expense of international tourism. As the research results show, the share of international tourism in tourism revenues was so large that the wine companies and wineries involved in the tourism sector were virtual without revenue. Problems were also created in the sale of wine. It is true that there are prospects for the development of domestic tourism, but compensation for losses through domestic tourism alone is virtually impossible. From June 1 of the current year, almost all the airlines in the Georgian market have resumed their work, the intensity of booking places in hotels is strengthening, and domestic tourism is gaining strength. All mechanisms for providing information to the population have been activated.

The use of digital technologies acquired new practical value during the Covid-19 pandemic when society faced new challenges.

New digital platforms will play an important role in promoting wine tours. Creating a thematic portal, where it will be possible to identify the tours offered by all companies by the principle of one window, the possibility of virtual tours, the use of a voice guide application during the wine tour, etc. It will be very important how Georgia's popularity will increase and their attractiveness in the digital world will increase. And, in general, what will be the response to the activities of travel companies in the post-pandemic period in terms of digital transformation.

To identify problems in wine tourism and to determine its development expectations in the future, we conducted a survey of wine tour consumers and wine companies and family wineries involved in tourism. To do this, we used the Google drive platform and in the format available there, with a pre-compiled questionnaire. We assessed the impact of the pandemic on the winemaking business, identify the factors hindering the development of the wine tourism business, and looking for ways to overcome the existing problems. The questionnaires were refined based on a pilot study.

Statistical observation, grouping and analysis methods were used in the research process. The information base was formed on the basis of completed questionnaires, the data were grouped according to the classification marks, and then conclusions were drawn on the basis of cross-tabular analysis.

1 Wine tourism in Kakheti region

Although wine tourism is quite popular in Georgia, but the picture is differentiated according to certain regions, traditionally Kakheti region is the undisputed leader, but in other regions such as Adjara, Imereti, Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, Racha-Lichkhumi and Guria, etc. There are a variety of wine tours. We will focus on the tourist potential of Kakheti wine tours. The selection of this region was conditioned by several factors. First of all, the

Kakheti region has the biggest prospects for the development of wine tourism. It is in the first place in terms of the harvest, as well as the popularity of wine abroad and in Georgia. And secondly, the picturesque nature, unique historical-cultural monuments, cuisine, the possibility of offering a wide variety of high-quality tour products, according to the results of our research, the existence of demand for wine tours in Kakheti, etc. (Bakuradze N., Vatsadze I. 2020)

Kakheti is the main region of Georgian winemaking. Out of 24 wines of Georgian origin registered in Georgia, 18 are produced in Kakheti:

- Tsinandali, Gurjaani, Vazisubani, Manavi, Kardenakhi, Tibaani, Kakheti, Kotekhi, Napareuli, Mukuzani, Teliani, Kindzmarauli, Akhasheni, Kvareli, Khashmi Saperavi, Akhashmi Saperavi, Akhami.

Among the local and cultivated varieties of Kakheti are:

- Rkatsiteli, Saperavi, Mtsvane Kakhuri, Kisi, Khikhvi, Budeshuri Red, Kakhetian Mtsvivani, Safena, Kumsi Yellow, Cabernet Sauvignon (French variety), Tavkveri, Ikalto Red.

Others Wines produced in Kakheti are also distinguished by great variety:

- Binekhi-Kakhetian-light amber, Alaverdi traditional-wine made by Georgian monks in accordance with the ancient traditions in Alaverdi Monastery, Eniseli Wines - Kakhetian-light amber, refectory-10 pitchers-dark golden green, - Amber, Tsinandali - Light golden, Rkatsiteli - Light beige, Saperavi Merlo - Condole from the vineyards - Dark cherry, Chardonnay - Light beige, with golden tint.

Such diversity leads to the admiration of tourists and is the catalyst for their tasting.

Prior to the pandemic, Georgia had a good and successful experience of how to "sell" Georgian wine tour products through digital marketing or the Internet in different parts of the world. The country was popularized with various videos. But in a thirty-second clip, it is difficult to make all the messages, and in terms of outdoor advertising, it is unthinkable to show all corners and all directions of Georgia on the billboard. Digital technologies allow groups of potential visitors to be provided with various types of messages about Georgia that may be of interest to them.

There are often cases when they have a wrong view of wine tourism and wine tour and have completely different activities in their imagination. Wine tourism does not include just coming to any company, tasting wine and listening to long toasts and many hours. Today, there are more than 195 wine companies in Kakheti, most of which are involved in wine tourism, or intend to be involved in the future. Even growers are already thinking of introducing wine tourism. They have already realized that the help of wine tourism raises the awareness of the country, raises the economic status of the cellar, improves relations with other countries and so on. Sh. Various wineries and travel companies offer a variety of services to visitors, such as wine tasting, a wide variety of food, accommodation and other additional services. (E.g., cycling, horseback riding, pool, bar, etc.). Such wineries are: "Teliani Valley", "Twins Wine Cellar", "Chateau Mere", "Schuchmann Wines Georgia" (wine production company - "Schuchmann Wines Georgia" in the village of Kisiskhevi, Telavi district, opened a wine spa where customers are offered red and white wine baths, health massages, saunas, as well as a special mixture of grape seeds grown in the local vineyard, which, according to the hosts, prevents aging), "Winery Khareba" and others.

There are many ways to plan wine tours in Georgia. It is also possible to share the experience of foreign countries. For example, in Italy there is a so-called "Vespa" tours, which involves the newlyweds traveling to wine areas, which promises them new adventures. This is made possible by the specific wine cellars produced in the region. We also consider it important to introduce Australian practice, which provides that every winery has a wine-related souvenir shop and wine collection (enoteca) where souvenirs and collectibles can be purchased. However, today, sellers of wine tourism products need to do much more to succeed, in particular, to create a different and individual experience that encompasses the real and digital "life" of the country. The sales approach must be complex and modern.

Today, people are increasingly actively communicating with travel companies through electronic devices. When they start searching for any type of information, it adds spontaneity, which is reflected in mobile devices. It will be of great importance to popularize the use of mobile apps that will offer customers different tours and through modern virtual reality, users will be able to see what different parts of the city looked like during the past era. The special effect will be created in addition to the built-in voice guide feature, which informs the user about a unique, customized tour of rarely told stories. With the help of a virtual guide, tourists are given the opportunity to visit

often unnoticed and unknown places. Digital technologies are transforming the tourism industry and introducing new tourism products and services.

2 Survey of wine tour consumers and wine companies and family wineries

What are the expectations and problems for the development and revival of wine tours in Kakheti during the pandemic and post-pandemic period?

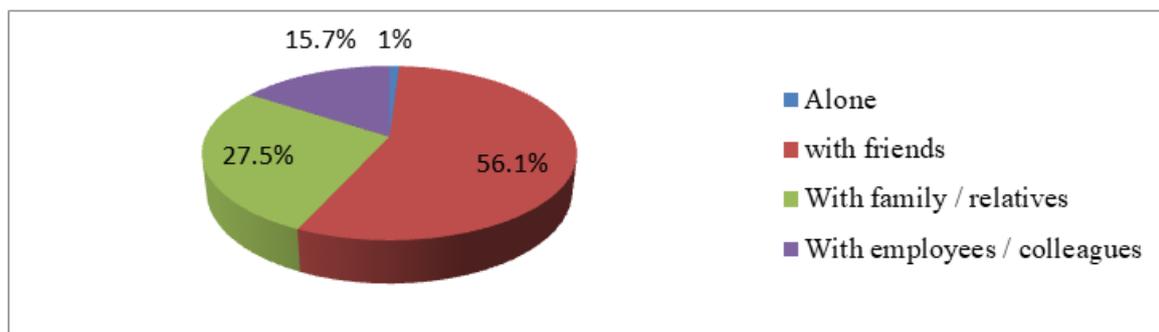
To address these problems, we conducted selective surveys of wine tour consumers and large wine companies and family wineries. With the Google Drive app where we uploaded the questionnaires with the selected design. 400 respondents participated in the consumer survey. The design of the study was intended to answer 14 questions. And 30 business entities participated in the survey of wine companies and wine cellars.

The aim of our research was to determine the current situation of wine tourism in Kakheti, to identify the problems identified during the pandemic and to find ways to solve them for the post-pandemic period.

Like other types of tourism, the wine tour also showed a systematic growth trend. According to the respondents, the wine tour was more attractive for foreign visitors as well, although the load rate was high during domestic tourism as well. Tourists were fascinated by the imitation of vintage, grape picking, crushing, processing, fermentation, different stages of wine production, tasting, comparing different wine flavors with the famous Kakheti table, which took them to the real world of Georgian wine making.

In the survey, 68% of respondents were female and 32% were male. The most active were found to be young people, aged 20-24 (57.7%) and then aged 25-44 (25%). It is very important that almost 55% of the respondents were students-youth. The most attractive locations for the respondents in the Kakheti region were Signaghi, which was visited by 61.5% of the respondents during the last year, Telavi (58%), Kvareli (48.1%), Gurjaani (26.9%) and a. Sh. 28.8% of respondents visited Telavi Wine Cellar and Kvareli Viticulture Khareba, 23% visited Kindzmarauli Cellar in Kvareli, 19% in Tsinandali Estate, 17% in Eden Love, 15.4% in Rostomant Cellar in Telavi, 13% were in the Napareuli twins' cellar, etc.

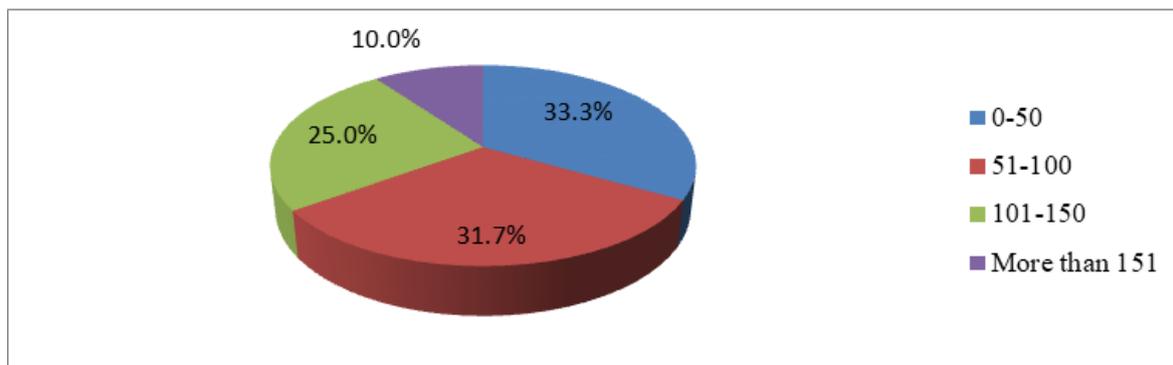
These locations were visited by 56.1% of respondents with friends and 27.5% with family members. (See Figure 1) The fact that the vast majority of respondents were satisfied with the tour gives hope for the revival of wine tours and 98% said they would take part in the wine tour again.



Source: The results of our research

Figure 1 Distribution of respondents according to persons accompanying the trip

Was it interesting how much visitors spend on a wine tour? 33,3% of survey participants spent an average of 51-100 GEL during a wine tour, 31,7% spent 51-100 GEL, 25% spent 101-150 GEL, and 10% spent more than 150 GEL.(See Figure 2)



Source: The results of our research

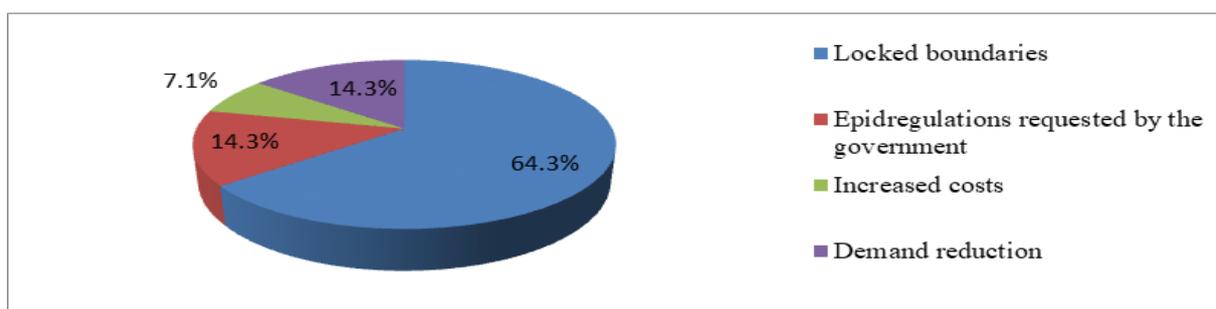
Figure 2 Distribution of respondents according to the amount of expenses incurred

In the conditions of the above-mentioned intervals of expenses, we found out what services the visitors used. As it turned out, 49% of respondents participated in wine tasting, almost 60% visited local sights, 53% visited vineyards, 45% got acquainted with the technological process of wine production.

Given the dire financial situation of the wine cellars due to the pandemic, 69% of respondents believe that raising public awareness and promotional jobs during domestic tourism is important for the promotion of wine tours and growing demand. % Believes that a safe environment and quality of service are important. In the case of international tourism, 67% of respondents believe that the diversity of tour products and the quality of services in line with international standards is important, while 57% believe that it is important to increase public awareness and advertising, 44% think it is necessary to create a safe environment.

As for the survey of wine companies and family wineries, 30 companies and wine cellars were interviewed. These were 1/3 of the wine companies operating in the tourist market in the Kakheti region. In addition, the most active and well-known companies and wineries participated in the survey. Therefore, we must consider that the problems that have been identified are typical for the entire Kakheti region.

62.5% of cellar owners surveyed said the COVID-19-induced pandemic had severely affected their business, leaving them virtually without income, 25% halved their income, and 12.5% said their pandemic had not affected their business. 14,3% of respondents believe that the main difficulty that hinders the development of their business is the government-introduced epidemiology, 14,3% believe that all of this has been affected by reduced demand, 7,1% name increased costs, and 64,3% believe that it has been influenced by strict regulations. Boundaries closed at the time and then restrictions already imposed.(See Figure 3)

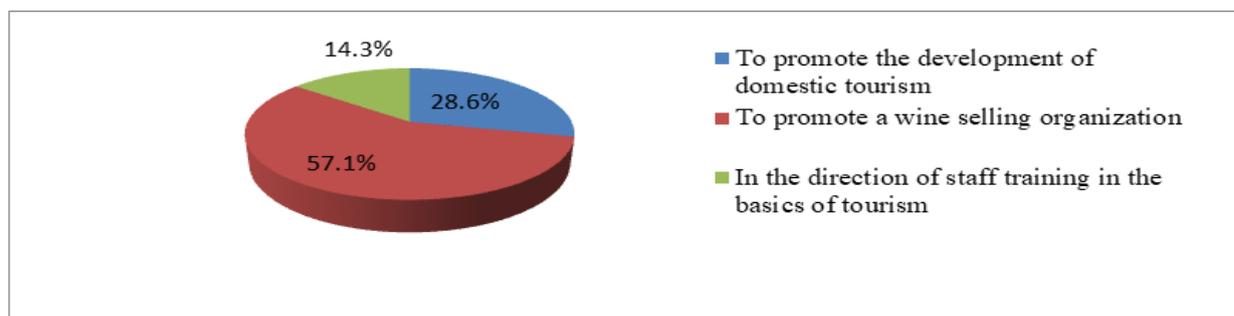


Source: The results of our research

Figure 3 Distribution of respondents according to the factors hindering the development of their business

The fact that the wineries are in a difficult situation is evidenced by the fact that in the last one year, 57% of the wineries have served only 50 visitors, 14.3% and more than 200. 100% of the respondents participating in the wine tour tasted the wine, 85% visited the vineyards and wineries, 71.4% participated in the vintage, 85.7% used the food service. And only 28.6% through placement. Unfortunately, wine tourism is attractive only to international visitors. The minimum number of wine tours during domestic tourism has been recorded in recent years. Of the

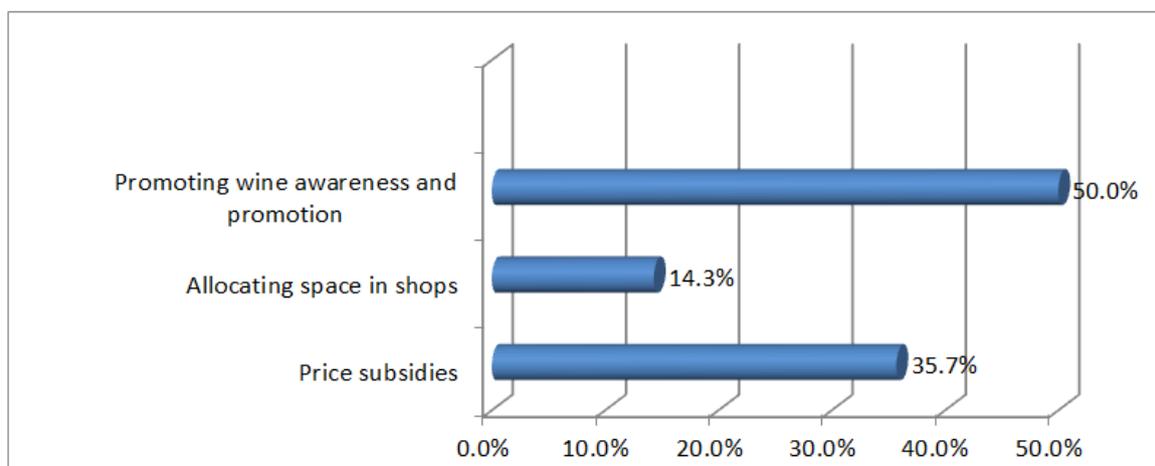
already small number, 85.7% of international tourists were from Europe and 14.3% from CIS countries. 50% of international visitors were in the 36-44 age group. The average cost of a tour per person ranges from 50-100 GEL in 67% of the wine cellars surveyed, while for 33% the price is higher, its range is 50 GEL and varies between 100-150 GEL. 57% of wineries and family wineries believe that the wine business can be saved by activating domestic tourism, while 43% are sceptical. 75% of wine cellar owners think that the level reached by 2020 will not be restored in the near future. Therefore, 57.1% of respondents consider it necessary to strengthen support for wine tourism during the pandemic period on the basis of domestic tourism.(See Figure 4)



Source: The results of our research

Figure 4 Distribution of respondents according to their attitude towards wine tourism support measures

Given the intensification of domestic tourism in the current situation, including the intensive provision of wine tours, it is important for wine companies and family wineries to implement measures to promote wine sales.

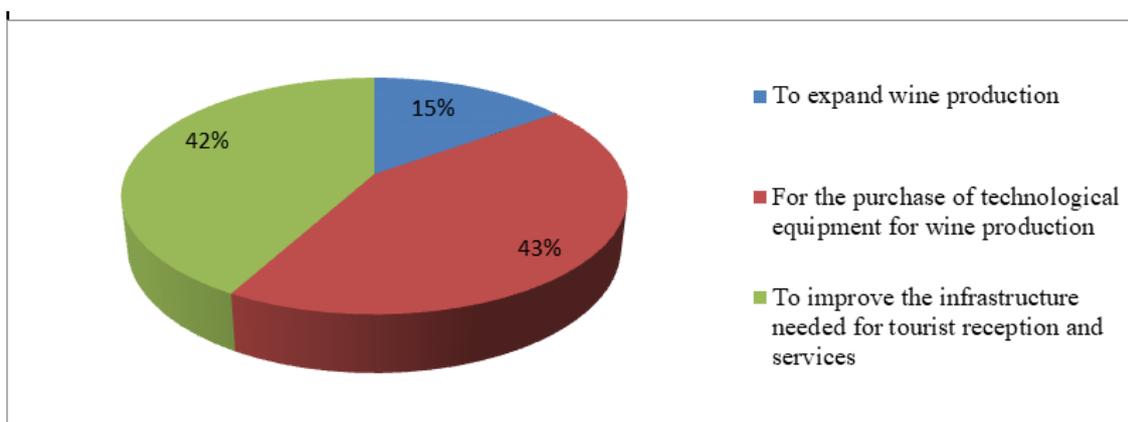


Source: The results of our research

Figure 5 Distribution of respondents according to the attitude towards state support in organizing the sale of wine

To do this, a large proportion of respondents, 50%, believe that it is necessary to promote wine awareness and promotion, 14.3% believe that the allocation of places in stores is an important factor, and 35.7% prefer price subsidies.

When asked what they used their cash resources for during the pandemic, 43% of wineries said they would use it to buy technology, 25% to expand wine production, only 42% to receive tourists, and to improve the infrastructure needed for services.



Source: The results of our research

Figure 6 Distribution of respondents according to the use of monetary resources

According to the survey, the vast majority of respondents were satisfied with the services offered, a large proportion of whom, 98%, would re-participate in the wine tour.

Conclusions

In view of all the above, it can be concluded that the wine tour before the pandemic was in demand and growing rapidly, it was predominantly attractive to international tourists who enjoyed all the services that could be offered by a large company or family cellar, tourists were fascinated Feeling, tasting, comparing different flavors of different wines with the famous table of Kakheti, which took them to the real world of Georgian wine making, their own feeling, tasting, different stages of wine production. The wine cellars of all the municipalities of Kakheti, which were organizing the wine tour, were busy, although the locations of Telavi, Signaghi, Kvareli and Gurjaani were still visible to domestic visitors. The vast majority of consumers were satisfied with the services offered, a large proportion of whom, 98%, would re-participate in the wine tour, visitors spent an average of up to 100 GEL per tour, 62.5% of family wineries were severely affected by the Pademia, they completely lost revenue. According to the owners of the family cellars, the closure of their business was influenced by the closure of the borders and the strict regulations imposed. They believe that it is necessary to intensify support for domestic tourism and support the organization of wine sales, and also trainings for staff training are important. At the same time, it is necessary for the state to support the promotion and promotion of wine, to allocate places in shops, to subsidize prices. 62.5% of wineries during the pandemic, in times of limited financial capacity, primarily used the cash resources at their disposal to purchase technological equipment for wine production, 25% to expand wine production, only 12.5% to improve the infrastructure needed for receiving and serving tourists. To survive wine tourism it is essential that:

- Georgia should become a safe destination for visitors; The need for affordable and safe air and land traffic, which is one of the catalysts for increasing the number of tourists;
- It is necessary to activate domestic tourism;
- Educational projects for small winery owners should be started, family wineries should be trained to give accurate recommendations regarding COVID regulations;
- Family wineries, if necessary, should be given the opportunity to take low-interest loans;
- Important state support for the promotion and development of tourism, including wine tourism;
- It is necessary to have thematic meetings (including online mode), news exhibitions, videos, information banners, virtual tours, applications with built-in voice guides, etc.

Acknowledgment

We conducted a survey of wine tour consumers and wine companies and family wineries using Google Drive.

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