

**TOURIST EVALUATION OF TOKAJ WINE REGION****Ágnes Béres-Virág<sup>1</sup>, Krisztián Ritter<sup>2</sup>**<sup>1</sup>assistant lecturer; <sup>2</sup>associate professor<sup>1,2</sup>Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences, Szent István UniversityE-mail: <sup>1</sup>virag.agnes@gtk.szie.hu; <sup>2</sup>ritter.krisztian@gtk.szie.hu**Abstract**

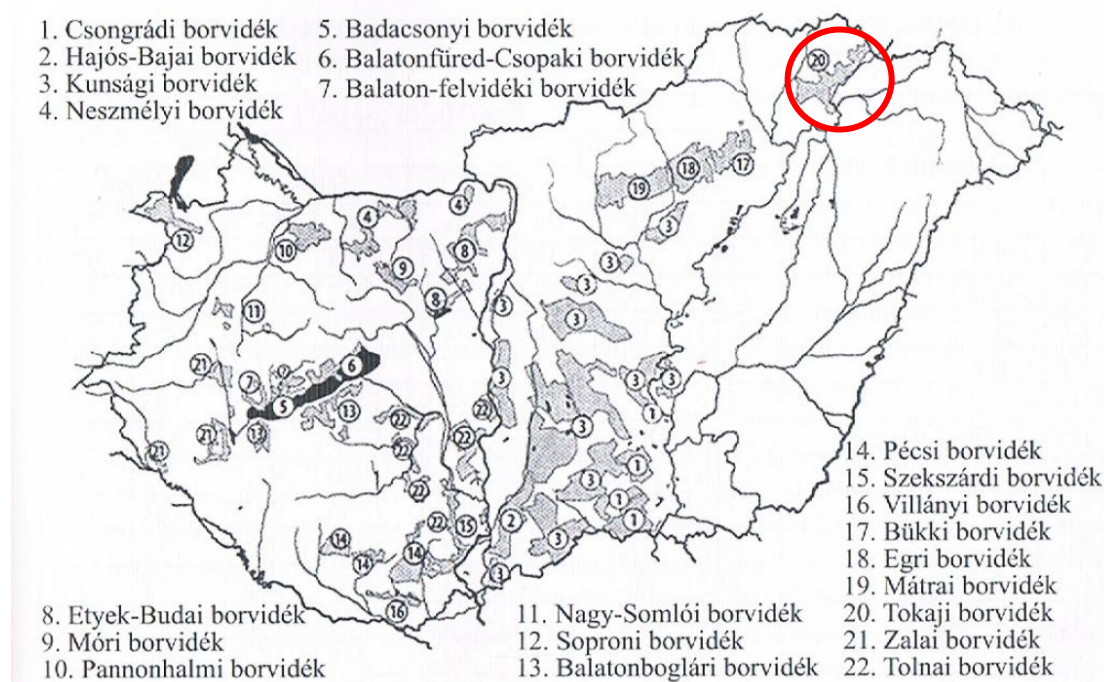
Despite being one of the most famous wine regions of Hungary, the Tokaj Wine Region is a disadvantaged, rural area. Those interested in tourism in the wine region consider tourism as a possibility, so they seek to develop it. In the development of the Tokaj Wine Region, it is also necessary to take consumer demands into account, so we considered it important to examine how the Hungarians see the situation of tourism and future chances of the wine region. In our opinion, the wine region can become an important destination of wine tourism in our country with complex developments.

**Keywords:** tourism, Tokaj Wine Region, consumer demands**JEL besorolás:** L83**LCC:** G154.9-155.8**Introduction**

The economical, sociological and technological changes occurred in the 20th century created principles of modern tourism. Travel conditions improved, people's income grew while the list of supplies also expanded in parallel. The range of services and attractions became even wider. In Hungary, after the change of the regime, the utilization of the agricultural landscape became a priority, so did the exploitation of possibilities in connection with wine and grapes in the wine regions (Fodor and Gemma, 2011). The main agricultural product of wine regions is grape while the wine made from it should be considered as an outstanding tourist attraction, as it is able to provide a complex travel experience for visitors via some additional services (Forman, 2010). Domestic viticulture, wine consumption and wine tourism have undergone significant changes in the years following the change of regime. Hungarian wineries have recognized the diversity of opportunities in connection with wine-related tourism so they started to organize cellar visits and wine tastings, where visitors became acquainted with the mysteries of winemaking and wine consumption. From the 1990's the demand for domestic wine regions has started growing among tourists which has boosted wine-related tourism in Hungary (Bodnár, 2000). In today's travels, not only visiting attractions is the main goal, but also an increasing demand is being shown for knowing what local gastronomy has to offer. The touristic value of wine regions is significant also because grapes and wine can be linked to a complex supply of attractions, which makes it possible for tourists to become acquainted with the natural, social and cultural values of a region. Economic (employment, chain of services, income generation) and social (establishment of public institutions from the taxes paid, cultural values and traditions) benefits can broaden the potential of rural areas (Guth, 2013; Michalkó and Vízi, 2006).

Each wine producing country has wine regions that have unique wine types and styles (Bodnár, 2000). In Hungary, the term for a wine region is the following: "a wine-growing area covering the administrative areas of several settlements, that has similar terrain, soil and climatic conditions, typical variety of cultivated plantations, vine-growing and wine-producing traditions, producing unique wines" (Bényei et al., 1999. page 352). Hungary has very good

opportunities for viticulture (Forman, 2010). Competitive wine tourism is based on the uniform formation and development of products and various other means and services (such as accommodation, catering, programs). Our country has significant history and traditions in viticulture and wine production, most of our country is suitable for growing vineyards (Kovács, 2011), with a total of 22 wine regions, of which the Tokaj Wine Region is outstanding both internationally and domestically (Figure 1).



**Figure 1. Wine Regions of Hungary**

*Comment: Tokaj Wine Region is highlighted with a red circle*

*Source: Lőrincz et. el. 2015. 263. p.*

The Tokaj Wine Region is a heavily segmented hilly area located between the Nagykopasz and the Sátor Hill at the foot of the Zemplén Mountains. (Boros et al., 2012). The Tokaj Wine Region has been a closed wine region since 1737, ie a "place of production whose products are worthy of distinct protection; while special rules are needed for the cultivation of grapes, wine production and treatment and for placing them on the market" (Bényei et al., 1999). Climate, soil and hydrographic conditions, grape varieties, and the noble mold (*Cladosporium cellare*), which ensures uniqueness, is the basis for quality wine making in the Tokaj Wine Region. The historical past of the wine region also contributes significantly to its uniqueness. Tokaj and its area was an important commodity producer and mediator, characterized by openness and acceptance, yet preserving its conservatism to this day (Beluszky, 2009). Historical factors are reflected in the everyday life of the wine region today as well. The Tokaj Wine Region is officially formed by 27 settlements: Abaújszántó, Bekecs, Bodrogkeresztúr, Bodrogkiszfalud, Bodrogolaszi, Erdőbénye, Erdőhorváti, Golop, Hercegkút, Legyesbénye, Mád, Makkoshotyka, Mezőzombor, Mono, Olaszliszka, Rátka, Sározsadány, Sárospatak, Sátoraljaújhely, Szegi, Szegilong, Szerencs, Tállya, Tarcal, Tokaj, Tolcsva and Vámosújfalud (Boros, 2012). In 2002, the UNESCO awarded the wine region as a world heritage (Frisnyák et al., 2009). The best-known product of Tokaj Wine Region is the Tokaji aszú, which has been declared a hungaricum. During our previous research at Szent István University (Tóth et al., 2014; Ritter et al., 2014) it was clarified that with proper management a Hungaricum product can be the basis for local development, and it is important to deal with its development and marketing.

Numerous literature deals with the economic and social problems of rural areas; as well as with their solutions, future opportunities and developments. (Áldorfai, 2014; Ritter, 2014; Oláh et al., 2013; Nagy et al., 2012). In recent decades, the importance of development based on endogenous resources has been increasingly emphasized (Kassai, 2016), with which the tourism performance and the potential and role of rural areas are becoming more appreciated. The Tokaj Wine Region is one of the best known wine regions in Hungary, yet it is a disadvantaged rural area. Despite the economic and social problems affecting the settlements of the wine region, tourism is considered a breakthrough point by various rural actors (Virág, 2017a; Varga-Nagy, 2017). We agree with Csorba (2012) that the Tokaj Wine Region could be one of the best advertisement for the country if the services and developments worth of its aptitude were realized in the region. The Tokaj Wine Region was declared a major tourism development site by the government in 2017 as part of the priority tourism areas of Tokaj, Felső-Tisza and Nyírség. The concept of a priority tourism area has been defined as the following: "a tourism area that is of paramount importance in terms of tourism, or where such importance can be achieved as a result of targeted developments and therefore there is a national interest in its focused development" (Government Decree 429/2016 (XII. , Magyar Közlöny, 2016. p. 82117). The National Tourism Development Strategy 2030 considers wine, gastronomy and natural and cultural values as touristic values in the Tokaj-Hegyalja region. The region's range of experiences can be expanded as wine and gastronomic offers can be combined with hiking or cultural programs, thus creating a diverse product structure within the wine region, which can have a positive impact on the development of the complex area. In our opinion, special attention should be paid to the use of subsidies to implement targeted developments that are capable of improving the complexity of the wine region in long terms. We believe that the touristic development of the wine region can be greatly assisted by knowing the needs and expectations of tourists. The question arises as to how consumers perceive the Tokaj Wine Region, how satisfied they are with tourism and other conditions, what kind of improvements and services they would like to see. Developments based on local aptitudes and resources are a priority, but it is also important to take consumer demands into account. Therefore, we have been researching the consumer's judgment of the wine region.

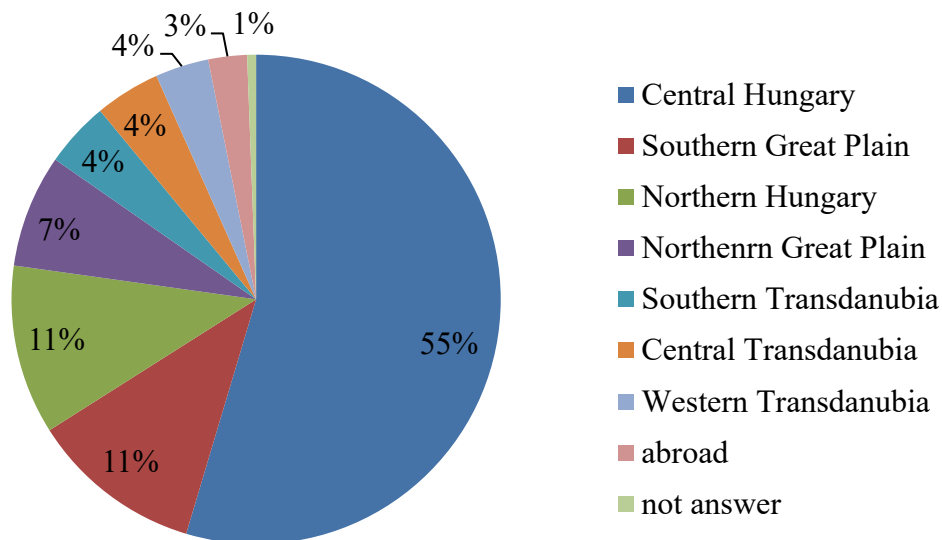
### **Material and method**

During the development work, we find it important to get to know the demand (the opinions of the consumers) since many new directions of development can be determined from their analysis. Our aim was to get to know the opinions of domestic travelers as much as possible, so in our questionnaire survey we focused on the touristic evaluation of the wine of Tokaj and the wine region. First we considered the advantages and disadvantages, and finally the questionnaire was launched by snowball method electronically. The questionnaire started with general questions and then subdivided into other parts depending on whether the filler had been in the Tokaj Wine Region or not. The views of both consumer segments may be important, as significant financial support comes to the region in the next time period. It is of the most importance to explore the needs of visitors, as this can lead to accomplishing much more conscious developments.

### **Results**

A total of 509 evaluable responses were received during the consumer questionnaire survey. The following is a detailed description of the test results. The proportion of female fillers was 56%, while 44% of respondents were male, so women were in majority by gender, but not significantly. In the case of the distribution of the place of residence, most respondents (55%) resided in the Central Hungarian region, including the proportion of the inhabitants of Budapest

(65% of respondents from this region live in the capital city). Many filled questionnaires came back from the Southern Great Plain and Northern Hungary regions (11-11%), while the proportion of respondents from other regions and abroad was already below 10%. Only 1% of fillers did not answer this question. In addition to the predominance of the Central Hungarian region, the territorial distribution was heterogeneous (Figure 2).



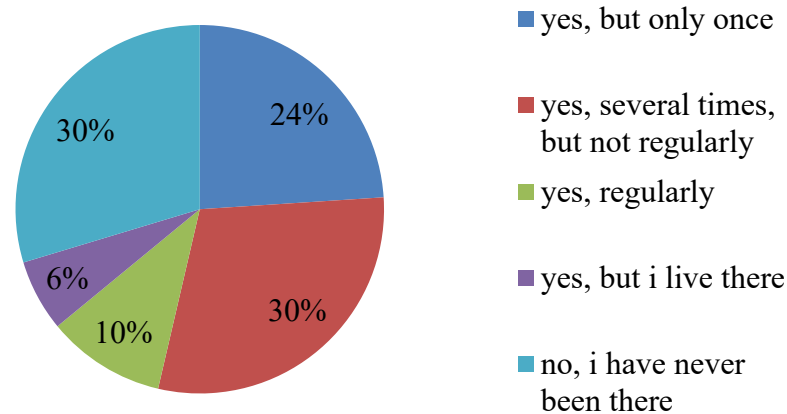
**Figure 2. Regional distribution of respondents' region of residency (%)**

Source: My own research and editing, 2017. (n=509)

Looking at the age distribution of respondents, the majority of respondents were between 21 and 30 years old (44%), while the proportion of 31-40 year olds (22%) and the 41-50 year olds (15%) was also significant. The proportion of fillers over the age of 51 reached 12%, while the least number of fillers (7%) came from age 15-20. The classification started from 15 year olds, because in my opinion, young people already have their own value judgment and travel experiences, and the main purpose of the research was the touristic evaluation of the wine region and not wine consumption.

First we asked the fillers to describe the first three thoughts that came to mind regarding the Tokaj Wine Region. In the case of the Tokaj Wine Region, consumers associated with the word *aszú*. Along with the *aszú*, words like sweet, furmint, grape and quality were also mentioned many times. All in all, the Tokaj Wine Region in the case of respondents is clearly related to sweet *aszú* wine and quality.

We also considered it important to examine whether the respondent had been in the Tokaj Wine Region or not (Figure 3). We consider it as a positive result of the survey, that the majority (70%) had already visited the region, so they had different experiences. 24% of those who had already visited the wine region had visited the area only once, while 30% of them had visited it several times, but are not regular visitors. The proportion of regularly returning guests was 10%, while the proportion of people living in the region was 6%. 30% of respondents had not visited the wine region so far.

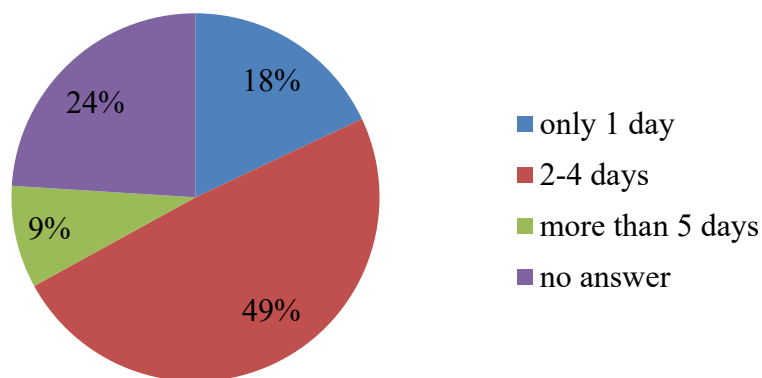


**Figure 3. Attendance of respondents in the wine region**

*Source: My own research and editing, 2017. (n=509)*

In the following, we have analyzed the answers of respondents who have not visited the wine region yet (n = 151). These respondents do not have any specific experience related to the wine region. First, we examined if they had any motivation for visiting. The majority of them (74%) had no travel motivation for the region, while a quarter (25%) did not plan to visit the wine region yet. 1% did not answer the question.

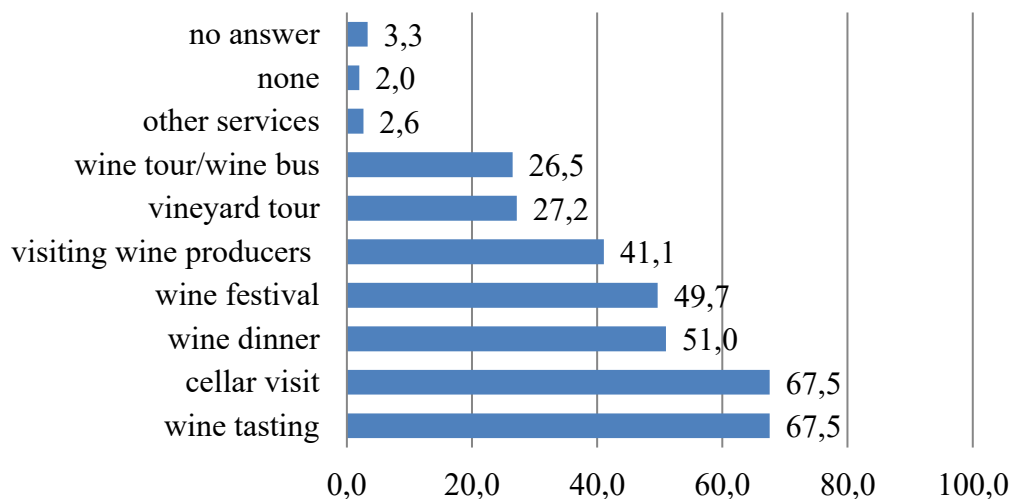
In the next question, we asked how much time they would like to spend in the wine region (Figure 4). Almost half of the respondents (49%) plan to spend two to four days, while 18% would spend only one day in the wine region. Only 9% of respondents would spend 5 or more days in the region, while 24% did not answer the question.



**Figure 4. Distribution of planned visits according to the length of stays**

*Source: My own research and editing, 2017. (n=509)*

With the following question, we examined that what sort of wine tourism services would interest the most those who have not yet been to the wine region (Figure 5). Most of them are interested in wine tasting (67.5%) and cellar visits (67.5%), but there is a significant interest in wine dinners (51%), wine festivals (49.7%) and in visiting wine producers (41.1%). There was less willingness towards services like vineyard tours (27.2%) and wine tour / wine bus (26.5%), and it is also likely that the respondents do not know these services. 2% of respondents did not like any of the offered services, while 2.6% suggested other services such as sport or vintage programs or wine-free family programs.



**Figure 5. Frequency of interest for wine tourism services among the respondents concerned (%)**

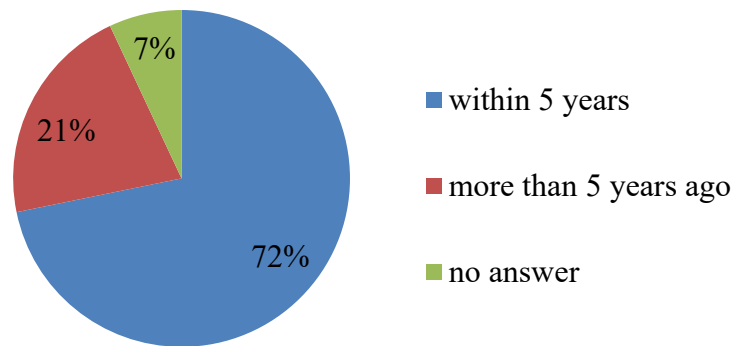
*Comment: Multiple choice question*

*Source: My own research and editing, 2017. (n=151)*

We considered it extremely important to find out which communication channels did those who have not visited the wine region yet find the most effective. The internet is considered to be the most important communication channel, but television has top priority as well, but experiences and opinions of friends and acquaintances are also highly effective. Representatives of winemakers and wineries, radio and leaflets come next, while magazines were classified as the least effective.

In the following we examined whether they know that the Tokaj wine (aszú) and wine region has a Hungaricum or World Heritage Site. We wanted to find out how can Hungarian consumers link different awards to the wine region. 21% of people who did not visit the wine region so far know the correct answer, which is that the Tokaj Wine Region owns both titles. Nearly half of the respondents (47%) could only link the Hungaricum award to the wine region, while 29% of respondents only designated the World Heritage title. 3% did not answer this question. Knowing the motivation of visits and the interests in wine tourism services, we found it important to finally discover what they thought about the wine region, how to promote the wine region and its potential. There were clearly two major areas of promotion, a much more intensive and unified marketing (86%), while quality and unique programs (72%) are needed on the other hand. The other category got 58%, mentioning the quality development of wines, special offers or just infrastructural developments.

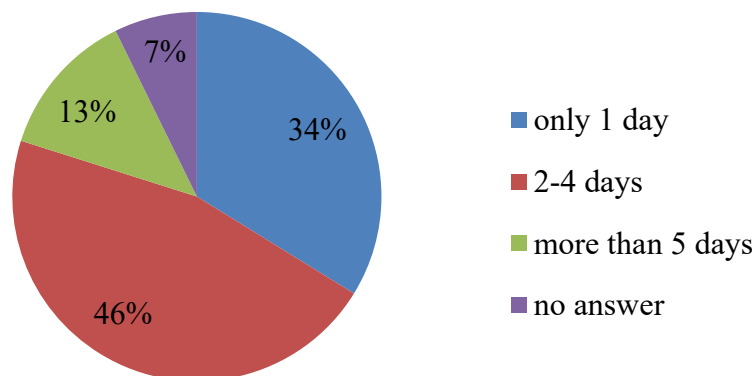
Below we present the answers and opinions of those who have already been to the Tokaj Wine Region with a total of 358 respondents. First, we surveyed that when was the last time that these people visited the wine region (Figure 6). The vast majority of respondents (72%) had traveled to the region in the previous 5 years, meaning that they have relatively fresh experience in terms of judgment. Nearly a quarter of respondents (21%) have been in the surveyed wine region more than 5 years ago, while 7% of respondents did not answer the question.



**Figure 6. Proportion of the time of last visits amongst respondents concerned (%)**

*Source: My own research and editing, 2017. (n=358)*

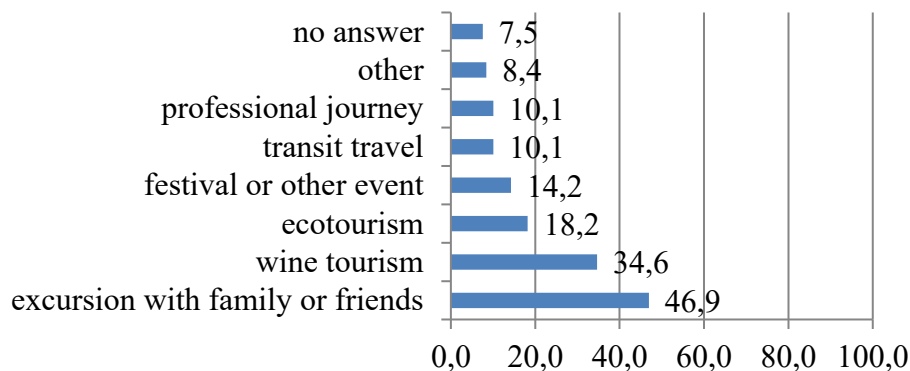
We also asked how many days visitors had spent on their longest stay (Figure 7). The majority of respondents (46%) had spent 2-4 days in the wine region, but there was a high proportion of those who were only in the area for a one-day trip (34%). The group of those who had spent more than 5 days (13%) in the wine region was much smaller. 7% of respondents did not answer this question. Most of the respondents of this question had spent one to four days, suggesting that the Tokaj Wine Region is characterized by few day long visits.



**Figure 7. Proportion of respondents concerned according to their longest stay**

*Source: My own research and editing, 2017. (n=358)*

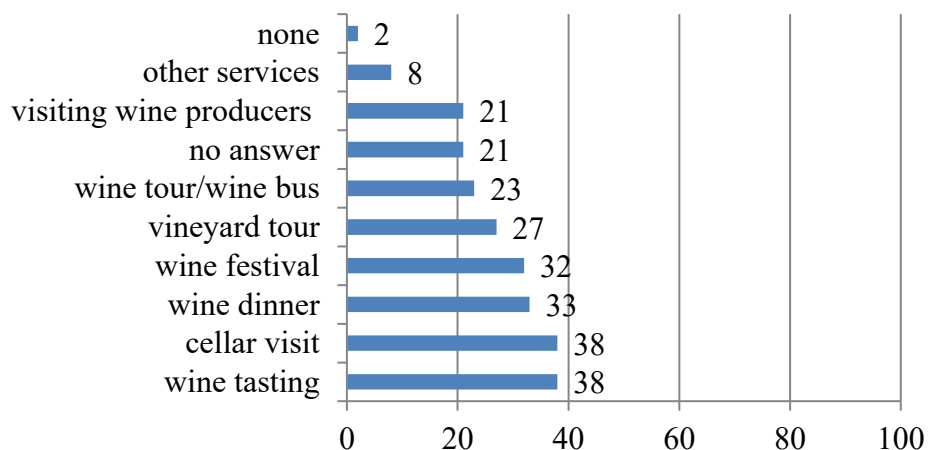
In the next question we asked about the goals of trips (Figure 8). Excursions with family and friends (46.9%), and wine tourism (34.6%) were mentioned mostly. Ecotourism (18.2%) was also an important goal of travels, but festivals and other events (14.2%) were significant motivating factors too. Professional travel (10.1%), transit (10.1%) and other (8.4%) travel motivations were less mentioned, while 7.5% did not answer the question.



**Figure 8. Goals of visits in the wine region**

Source: My own research and editing, 2017. (n=358)

In the next question, we have revealed what kind of services would interest these people in the future (Figure 9). According to the answers, the highest percentage was wine tasting (38%), cellar visit (38%) and wine dinners (33%). The wine festival (32%), the vineyard tour (27%), the wine bus / wine tour (23%) and visiting the wine-maker (21%) are also attractive programs for many. 21% did not answer, while 8% had other wine tourism needs, such as visiting a vintage, an open cellar and professional lectures. 2% would not attend wine tourism programs.



**Figure 9. Proportion of interests for different wine tourism activities (%)**

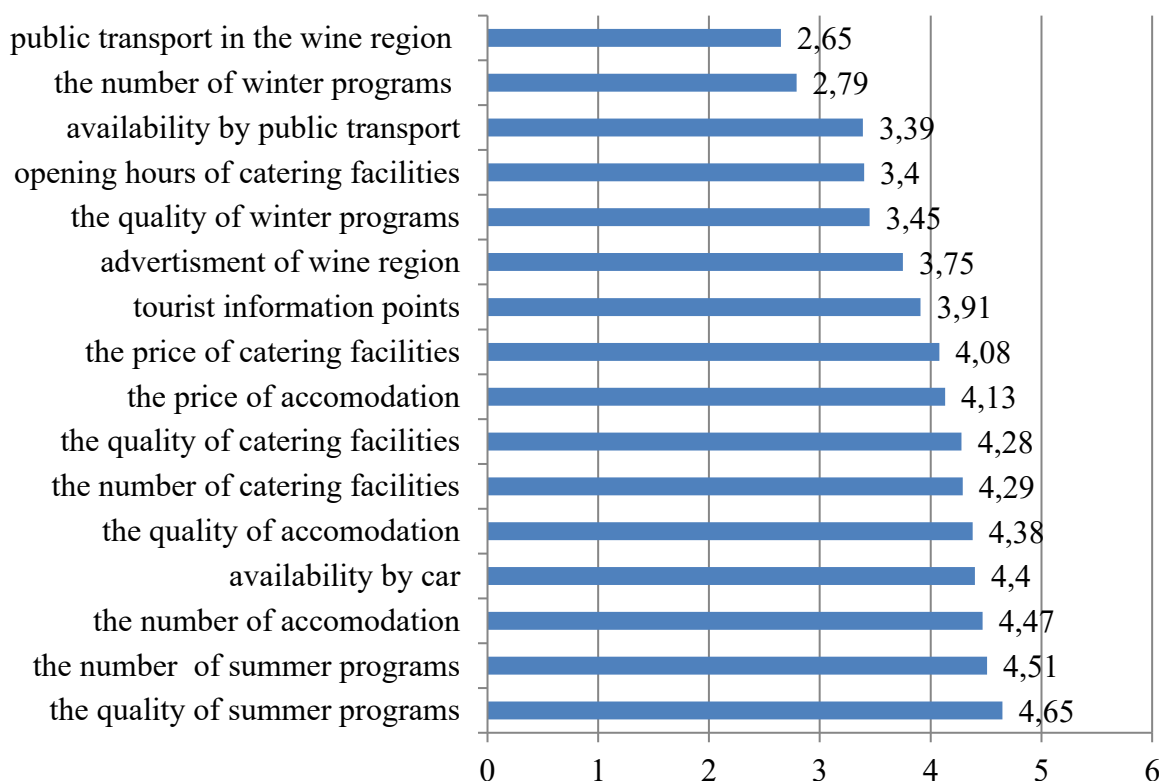
Source: My own research and editing, 2017. (n=358)

Amongst the respondents who have already been to the Tokaj Wine Region we have also examined the efficiency of communication channels. The same order appeared in this group as well. The internet was considered to be the best communication channel, second place was the television and the third most effective was the recommendation of friends and acquaintances. Next came the winegrowers, winemakers, radio and brochures, followed by newspapers and magazines.

We also considered it important to examine how well do these respondents know the fact that the Tokaj wine (aszu) or wine region has both a World Heritage and Hungaricum title as well. 39% of the respondents could only link the World Heritage title to the wine region, while 34% named the Hungaricum. 25% of respondents knew that the Tokaj wine (aszu) and the wine region had both titles. There were two percent who thought no title could be linked to Tokaj wine and wine region.



As 70% of respondents have already visited the Tokaj Wine Region and almost half of these respondents visited the area within the past two years, they have relatively recent experience and opinions regarding the tourism supply linked to the wine region (Figure 10). The people concerned had to evaluate the wine region's offer according to the given criteria, so we could recognize how tourists see different tourism potentials. On a scale of 1-6, public transport in the wine region (2.65) and the number of winter programs (2.79) got the worst averages. While the quality (4.65) and the number (4.51) of programs organized during the summer season received the best values from visitors. Overall, average numbers indicate that according to tourists, significant improvements in the area are still needed, so these combined results should be kept in mind for future planning.



**Figure 10. Average judgments of visitors regarding tourism potentials**

*Comment: Scale of 1 to 6, where 1: unspeakable; 6: excellent*

*Source: My own research and editing, 2017. (n=358)*

Tourism professionals are concerned about how to attract as many tourists as possible to a region as well as how to reach the most people with supplies, so this topic could not be left unanswered by respondents who had already visited the wine region. The respondents concerned marked more consistent and unique marketing (86%), increasing the number of offers (73%) and better use of opportunities (51%) as the most important areas for popularization. Special offers and quality services can also be tempting for tourists (34%). Popularity can be boosted by some other ideas (14%) as well, such as a stronger international appearance or strengthened co-operation.

During the last open question, respondents who had already visited the region expressed their views on what developments would be needed in the wine region. In the largest proportion (84%), infrastructure improvements would be needed, for example to focus more on the improvement of roads, vineyard roads and public transportation. In addition to the development of infrastructural background, there is a need to expand the range of supplies (71%). Besides

wine programs, additional family and other programs are also important factors. 51% expressed their needs for developments related to marketing, accommodation and hospitality. The development of the human infrastructure (34%) and other areas (29%) were also significant, within the latter, for example the development of wineries and the strengthening of co-operation were mentioned.

## **Conclusions**

The Tokaj Wine Region is a unique wine region of our country, with many favorable characteristics from touristic point of view. Numerous natural and cultural values are present besides the vineyards, yet it is not among the best performing tourist destinations. It is an economically and socially disadvantaged region, where different economic and government representatives see tourism as a breakthrough point (Virág, 2017b). Over the past few years, the government has also shown a strong interest in the area, and in 2017 it was declared a priority touristic development area along with the Felső-Tisza and Nyírség regions. (1092/2017 (II. 21.) Government resolution, Magyar Közlöny, 2017). The National Tourism Development Strategy 2030, in addition to the development of wine- and gastro-tourism, aimed at the utilization of natural values in tourism, and the expansion of supplies in the future. The importance of this was backed by the Consumer Survey, but the proper infrastructural background should not be forgotten neither. The 1092/2017. (II.21.) Gov. Resolution linked some of Tokaj's non-wine-growing settlements to the priority development area, so the development of the world heritage site, cultural and active tourism and the development of transportation within the expanded territorial unit were determined as main goals.

With the survey we found that respondents link the Tokaj Wine Region to sweet aszu wine. 30% of the respondents did not go to the wine region so far, but within this group, a significant majority (74%) plan to visit the area, where they are most likely to spend 1 to 4 days, they are interested in wine tastings, cellar visits and wine dinners. Similar results were also obtained from respondents who had already been to the wine region. Most of them (80%) spent 1 to 4 days, the goals of their visits were excursions with family and friends and wine tourism. This group is interested in wine tastings, cellar visits and wine dinners too. Regarding the travel period, the majority of respondents made or planned trips in the wine region for 1-4 days. Based on this, it is expedient to think about creating tourism product packages that would last 1 to 4 days within the wine region, during which other touristic opportunities, services and programs are needed besides the knowledge of grape and wine culture. This fact is strengthened by the result, that both groups (those who have already been to the wine region and those who have not) have considered it important to develop a diverse range of programs that should be directed towards consumers through appropriate and intensive marketing. Modern product development is of the utmost importance for supply development, and there are many positive examples of introducing innovative products such as spa developments or the construction of water sports facilities at domestic lakes (Remenyik et al., 2017). The "smart" development of destinations, in this case the wine region has the same priority (Pásztor - Béres-Virág, 2017), which may be based on the Horizon 2020 ("smart village") program of the European Union that was spread to rural regions, whereby rural touristic areas can increase their competitiveness (Káposzta - Némediné Kollár, 2017). Both regions should be kept in mind in the development of the wine region's future supply.

The survey also revealed that both groups agreed in the usefulness of communication channels in the wine region, they considered the Internet, the television, and friends and acquaintances

to be the most effective information sharing channels so it is expedient to take this into account for future shaping of marketing and supply. The research also revealed that most of the participants are not fully aware of the fact that the Tokaj wine (aszu) and wine region has both the World Heritage and Hungaricum titles, which are valuable both internationally and domestically, and not just from a touristic aspect. These special and unique titles could be brought to the attention of wine-lovers through more distinctive marketing activities and the organization of unique programs.

As a positive result of the survey, 72% of travelers visited the region within the past five years, so they had relevant experiences to be able to evaluate the wine region according to various touristic aspects. In the opinion of respondents, the main shortcomings can be related to public transportation within the wine region and to the programs offered, so these areas should be given priority in future developments.

Based on the results, first we recommend a more robust marketing activity. Secondly it would be worth focusing on increasing of the popularity of available programs and opportunities. It would also be advisable to create and offer 2 to 4-day product packages in the wine region.

Overall, it can be stated that complex developments can be realized through touristic infrastructure, supply expansion and proper marketing activities, which will enable the Tokaj Wine Region to become a touristic area that is appropriate to its capabilities both domestically and internationally.

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