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**Turgut VAR,**  
Professor  
Izmir University of Economics  
**Melike D. KAPLAN,**  
Ph.D. Student  
Izmir University of Economics  
**Oznur YURT**  
Ph.D. Student  
Izmir University of Economics

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## **Challenges and Opportunities of Developing Wine Tourism in a Small Community in Turkey**

This paper offers an analysis of practices in wine tourism and its implementation to Turkey. Wine tourism is a rapidly developing in Turkey parallel to the development of the sector around the world. In this paper, Sirince is selected as a case and an analysis of the situation in the village with regard to wine tourism is presented. The analysis includes a number of aspects along with the implemented marketing strategies, such as design of bottling, packaging and labeling. In addition, the effects of wine tourism on improvement of social and economic situation of Sirince are also examined.

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By  
**Turgut VAR,**  
Prof. Dr., Izmir University of Economics, Department of Business Administration

**Melike D. KAPLAN,**  
Ph.D. Student, Izmir University of Economics, Department of Business Administration

**Oznur YURT**  
Ph.D. Student, Izmir University of Economics, Department of Logistics Management

**Corresponding Address:**  
Izmir University of Economics  
Sakarya Cad. No: 156 Balcova Izmir TURKEY

## **Introduction**

In Turkey, tourism sector has witnessed a rapid development starting from early 80s and served as an important medium to generate foreign exchange sources in times of economic turmoil. It also contributed extensively to the efforts of closing trade deficit and decreasing unemployment rates. Despite the favorable figures, it should be also noted that this rapid development in tourism industry in Turkey is now reaching to a plateau. This is largely due to sustainability problems of tourism activities in the country. For years, Turkey was marketed as a tourism destination that positioned itself extensively on 3S –sea, sun and sand- and the cultural aspects of tourism were mostly overlooked. Therefore, tourism activities become vulnerable to seasonal demand fluctuations, as Turkey was usually seen as a summer destination. This approach is risky in terms of vast competition in shore tourism. Moreover, instability of politics and economics both in national and global sense turned out to be major obstacles in providing demand stability in tourism. In this context, projects regarding a 5.4 % growth per year may prove to be unrealistic in the following years. The only way to realize this growth underlies in new marketing strategies to position Turkey with its cultural and historical values. In this sense, niche-marketing strategies along with mass marketed shore tourism may contribute immensely to Turkish tourism growth.

In achieving a sustainable tourism growth, small villages with unique and authentic characteristics may play a key role. The architecture, cuisine and traditional way of living that are kept unspoiled in these villages are important elements to be marketed for potential tourists. In this context, wine tourism should be considered an important and unexplored niche to develop tourism activities.

## **Wine Tourism**

Wine tourism is defined as visitation to vineyards, wineries, wine festivals and wine shows for which the grape-wine tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of a grape-wine region are the prime motivating factors for visitors (Hall, 1996). Getz *et al* (1999) extend the concept to include experience dimension of tourism activities; and propose that wine tourism is a form of consumer behavior based on the appeal of wine and wine regions, and a development and marketing strategy for the wine industry and destinations in which the wineries and wine-related experiences are the dominant attractions. Wine tourism is today a promising sub-sector of tourism and it has the potential to grow at a much faster rate than most of the tourism industry (Beames, 2003).

Wine tourism has the capacity to play a significant role in national and regional sustainable-tourism-development plans as it contributes to sustain the economic and social bases of regions as well as environmental dimensions (Hall and Mitchell, 2000). Other than helping the sales of local production and creating new jobs, wine tourism also contributes to establishment of new tourism facilities such as specialized restaurants and hotels. When looked overall, it may create a huge market comprising of all tourism activities.

Today, several countries and regions are experiencing an immense growth and benefits flowing from wine marketing and tourism. California and Pennsylvania in the United States, Bordeaux, Champagne and Burgundy in France, Tuscany in Italy, and several districts of Australia and New Zealand stand as significant centers of wine tourism. The economic contribution of wine tourism to stated regions is also remarkable. Following a similar approach, concentrating efforts on

creating wine tourism centers in Turkey will be vitally beneficial to national tourism industry. In this paper, we propose that Sirince, a small village in Aydın, possesses quite a number of characteristics that should be sufficient to initialize such a tourism marketing approach.

### **The Situation of Sirince**

Sirince is a small village located on the west coast of Turkey, about 5 miles from Ephesus. The village Sirince offers a remarkable opportunity for becoming a tourism center due to numerous reasons. First, Sirince possesses a unique architecture dating back to two centuries. These historical houses in Sirince are currently attracting quite a number of local and foreign tourists. In addition, the authenticity of the village charms many people who seek to enjoy cultural tourism. Moreover, the village today is well known with its wineries and local tourists visit Sirince regularly to buy local produced wines. Currently, an average 20.000 tourists visit Sirince each month, and the tourism season lasts for 8 months. Because of the growing interest in the village, tourism facilities are continuously increasing in number.

Therefore, Sirince has a great potential of being transformed into a wine tourism center. Nevertheless, the road to success is paved with a number of problems. First, wine production capacity in the village is quite below the anticipated level. Artemis Winery, which was established in 1995, is the only one central winery in Sirince with a production capacity of 3 million liters and sold 2.5 million liters of wine in 2004. Low sales figures are especially due to lack of sales to foreign tourists. Although quite a number of foreign tourists visit Sirince, their consumption of wine is limited with lunch and dinner they have in the village, but only a small portion of them make wine purchases. However, with adequate marketing strategies, the demand

for Sirince wine may be expected to exceed 4 million years per annum. Second, Sirince Wines suffer deeply from image problems. None of these wine brands produced in the village possess an adequate level of brand image, nor awareness nationwide. Third, the distribution of the wines is at best, problematic. Finally, and most importantly, the promotion and its accompanying communications strategies are still at their infancy.

As the challenging areas are identified, it is of sense to examine a number of strategies that may help Sirince to be a wine tourism center in Turkey.

### **Sirince: Some recommendations**

Getz *et al* (1999) indicate that there are ten critical factors, which influence the success of wine tourism. These are natural resources, wineries and other tourist facilities such as wine museums or information centers, production and consumption of wine, cultural and historical factors, accessibility of the markets, quality and reputation, seasonality, legal issues, organization and marketing efforts, and benefits sought by the visitors.

When these factors are analyzed, it may be proposed that natural resources as well as cultural and historical factors are in favor of Sirince. However, other factors, which critically depend on marketing efforts, emerge as problematic areas for the village. In this context, transforming Sirince into a wine tourism center is basically a marketing case.

A successful marketing program undoubtedly relies on a successful product. Therefore, creating a favorable brand identity and brand image are the key issues to Sirince Wines. This can be achieved through well-designed brand image and identity projects. Hall (1996) stated that successful wines have an existing regional identity, based on climatic, topographical, geomorphologic and hydrological characteristics that combine to produce wine grapes. This means that brand image is closely linked with the regional image especially for the shared name cases such as Sirince.

The quality standards of the wines should be increased and constantly audited. Sirince Wines greatly suffer from an image of inferior quality. This is due to the home-produced wines that have been available in the market prior to the establishment of a modern factory. Because of the lack of control and standardization, the reputation of Sirince wines, especially about health aspect, was perceived not reliable enough. Therefore, the modern wine production process should be declared in detail through some promotional activities.

Second, Sirince wines and the region as a whole need some detailed marketing projects. Beames (2003) stated that, generally wine-makers are focusing on only product orientation, while they are not deeply understanding of tourism marketing. Tourism is a service industry, and marketing of services calls for focus on experiences on the side of the consumer, rather than performances. With such an understanding, the target market for the wine tourism should be revised.

When identifying the target consumers, the motives of the wine tourist also should be put forward. Macionis (1997, cited in Getz *et al*, 1999) states that winery visitors have six main

motives. These are tasting wine, buying wine, having a day out, enjoying the rural setting, meeting the winemaker and learning about wine. Understanding these motives is important in developing appropriate marketing messages.

Following, the promotion strategies of the village and its wineries are of vital importance. Currently, tourists are only being informed about Sirince wines only through tourism agents and/or some brochures delivered at the wineries. It is obvious that such an effort is not sufficient. Sirince wines even lack national awareness and are only known to local citizens. Therefore, national and international exhibitions and events should be considered as great opportunities for Sirince wine producers. Building and promoting websites including detailed information on wine and the region is also a promising strategy. Moreover, Sirince wines should be communicated to the end consumer through point of purchase advertising. On the other hand, salesperson is the most important person during the wine purchase process, because there is a trial period for the product. Salespeople in Sirince should be well informed about the product and underlying processes, as well as serving requirements and sales requirements.

At this point, event marketing as a promotion strategy requires special attention. Today, the success of many wineries worldwide arises from such events and organizations. Wine festivals, celebrations, special events and wine seminars are key areas for event marketing. In addition, cellar door tasting and sales; vineyard and cellar tours may be the effective tactics to increase the sales (Hall and Mitchell, 2000). By these activities, Sirince wine producers' sales will be increased, the customers will be educated and brand and product loyalty will be created.

A portion of the answer to increase sales lies in the distribution issue. Although there is only one central wine producer in Sirince, wines may be purchased from different stores in Sirince as well as in some nearby urban areas. Standardization of the wine selling points and the conditions of the wine keeping emerge as the main problems. Because wine is a special product, there are many problems about the sales and preservation processes, such as storing conditions or properties of the wine glass in which the wine is being tested. In addition, direct marketing of wines especially to restaurants in the tourism destinations nearby should be a serious concern.

Finally, it should be understood that Sirince could best benefit from a collaborative marketing understanding. This is to say that synergy in all marketing efforts is what Sirince seeks. Such an understanding calls for every business in Sirince act in line with the general marketing plan and implement the appropriate measures that are requested by that program. This collaborative activity must be expanded to include governmental bodies and civilian initiatives as well. Individual efforts will at best generate individual results, those which are not much anticipated in Sirince case.

## **Conclusion**

Tourism is a critical sector for Turkey as it serves as a significant source in closing trade deficits and creates thousands of jobs. The tourism strategy of Turkey has long depended on shore tourism, which today proved to be unsustainable and risky. Therefore, once overlooked niches under tourism should be explored and exploited. Wine tourism is one of these niches, as a part of culture tourism.



In this context, wine tourism should be considered an important revenue generator. In Turkey, although there are some regions that could be nominated for wine tourism, the sector is still in its infancy. Sirince is one of these regions and with both advantages and disadvantages it possesses and it can be a perfect candidate to be transformed into a wine center. However, although the village offers promising opportunity to be a wine tourism center, it still has a far more way to go. Appropriate marketing strategies accompanied with a strong will to make the village an important tourism region are the only tools in achieving this aim. A success story in Sirince will create a strong desire from other villages to focus on this profitable niche and lead to the development of wine tourism in Turkey.

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