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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Building skills for tomorrow's wine tourism: the International Master on Wine Tourism Transitions and Innovations (WINTOUR)

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Abstract – The International Master on Wine Tourism Transitions and Innovations (WINTOUR) is the first master's degree with European academic certification in the field of wine tourism. The WINTOUR Master has been recognized as Erasmus Mundus since 2015 and has granted the EU support and recognition until 2029. The WINTOUR Master offers a truly integrated study programme that takes advantage of the know-how in Tourism and Oenology of the three universities and European regions: University Rovira i Virgili (Tarragona, Spain; Faculties of Oenology and Tourism and Geography), which acts as a Coordinator; University of Bordeaux (France, Institute des Sciences de la Vigne et du Vin) and University of Porto (Portugal, Faculties of Sciences, Arts and Economics). These universities are in highly attractive touristic areas, recognized with the label of UNESCO Human Heritage, and have a long tradition on wine, producing specialty wines such as sparkling, fortified, aged, red, and sweet. The WINTOUR Consortium also involves associated partners from the academic, private, and public sector, selected based on their excellence in the field of Wine Tourism, who participate in the running of the WINTOUR master and can host students during the different internships included in the training program. The academic programme is structured in 120 ECTS divided in two years and 4 semesters, in which students have mobility among the three universities (first semester in Tarragona, second in Bordeaux and third in Porto). The last semester of the master, students undertake an internship in one of the private or public organizations associated to the Consortium. The programme covers the absence of a new profession that requires multi-disciplinary and multi sectorial knowledge and training while increasing their understanding of winemaking and tourism management. So far, we have had 9 editions, with 221 Students (25/intake) from 53 nationalities. The graduates have had a very high degree of employability, with 70% finding a job in less than 6 months after finishing and 80% working in the private sector. 90% have higher work responsibilities after the completion of the master.

Keywords – European Union, Wine tourism, Oenotourism, Academic Partners, Industry placement, Erasmus Mundus Joint Master.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Wine tourism, defined as visiting vineyards, wineries, and wine festivals while experiencing the wine culture of a region (Hall *et al.*, 2009), has experienced notable growth in recent years and is now a critical and promising sector (Report Linker, 2022; Marco-Lajara *et al.*, 2023). New World countries are leading the way in creating innovative wine tourism practices, while traditional wine-producing

nations such as France, Portugal and Spain are gradually recognizing its strategic importance. This highlights the appeal of wine and wine tourism as a relatively new “lifestyle” product in these countries, in contrast to Old World regions where wine is more deeply embedded in everyday culture (Mitchell and Hall, 2006). The sector plays a dual role, contributing significantly to regional income and the preservation of cultural heritage. Its potential as a driver of sustainable development highlights its importance

for wine regions globally (Montella, 2017). As the industry expands, there is a pressing demand for highly skilled professionals to tackle challenges related to sustainability and to design innovative, future-oriented projects.

Sustainability is one of the core transition processes that wine tourism is facing and will certainly play a major role in its future development (Szolnoki, *et al.*, 2022; Winetourism.com, 2021). Stakeholders in the wine tourism industry can promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth for wine-growing regions by aligning their business practices and strategies with the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations Agenda 2030 (Campos-Andaur, *et al.*, 2022; Duarte Alonso *et al.*, 2021; UNWTO, 2023). Wine tourism can also generate substantial economic and social benefits as well as play an important role in terms of preservation of cultural and natural resources and can provide new ways to experience a destination's culture and lifestyle by responding to the market's evolving needs and expectations (Marco-Lajara *et al.*, 2023). Complementarily, the global report performed by Winetourism.com about COVID-19 Impact on wine tourism (2020) showed that although Covid had an extremely large impact on the wine tourism business, more than 80% of wineries expected that wine tourism will grow in their region during the following 10 years. Innovation and digitalisation were the keywords for the wineries to rebuild their operations and deal with future fluctuations, including designing innovative wine tourism experiences by implementing digital tools, as well as increasing online sales, online wine tastings and digital tours. These are some of the reasons why wine tourism is becoming increasingly important as a means of diversification of the wine industry and as a tool of empowerment for rural communities.

The International Master on Wine Tourism Transitions and Innovations (WINTOUR) is a unique educational joint programme in the field of wine tourism created on the basis of an established track of collaborations among three European universities and regions: *Universitat Rovira i Virgili* (URV) – leading coordinator (Tarragona, Spain), *Université de Bordeaux* (UB) (France) and *Universidade do Porto* (UP) (Portugal). The three universities involved in the project are leading institutions for higher educational training in tourism, oenology, and related fields (Times Higher Education, 2024) and are internationally recognised as universities of excellence (QS World University Rankings, 2024). Furthermore, they are located in highly attractive touristic areas recognised as UNESCO World Heritage Sites and have a long tradition on wine production. A significant group of high-level academic and non-academic institutions from Programme and Partner countries support the project and are part of the WINTOUR Consortium as Associated Partners. This Erasmus Mundus Joint Master (EMJM), the only official master programme focused on wine tourism in Europe, has been funded by the European Commission since 2015 and highlighted as a good practice for its excellent implementation. It started with the ambitious goal of providing the wine tourism industry with multidisciplinary and international experts, having trained

221 students from 53 nationalities across 9 editions (2016-2024).

Being aware of the objectives and priorities of the European Innovation Agenda (European Commission, 2022) and the Erasmus+ Programme Guide (2023), the WINTOUR Master was redesigned in 2023 in order to face the dynamically changing society that is increasingly mobile, multicultural and digital. The general objective of this programme is to prepare broadly trained, highly adaptable and qualified professionals in wine tourism, promoting innovative, digital, sustainable and inclusive developments. By doing so, students from various professional and educational backgrounds get high quality training and preparation to meet the demand and evolutions of the growing wine and wine tourism industry in Europe and worldwide. The specific objectives of the WINTOUR EMJM are selecting and training top-quality students to become leaders in the non-academic and academic sector by equipping them with multidisciplinary skills in sustainable winemaking, wine tourism management, and wine culture preservation. It emphasizes fostering innovation, digitalization, and sustainability in the wine tourism industry while safeguarding cultural heritage. Practical training is a core component, with opportunities for entrepreneurship and management experience through internships. Additionally, the programme prioritizes integration into local socio-cultural and professional environments, promoting inclusion, diversity, and alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

This article presents the comprehensive framework of the WINTOUR education program. The following sections will detail the curriculum and learning approach that equips students with multidisciplinary skills, the pivotal role of industry and academic partnerships in shaping real-world experiences, and the graduate outcomes and broader impact of the program. Together, these elements underscore the program's mission to include skills and competences for the transition of the wine tourism market into a sustainable development, a digital transformation, and into a diverse, multicultural and inclusive market, ultimately shaping the future of wine tourism.

2. CURRICULUM AND LEARNING APPROACH

The WINTOUR academic programme, recognised and accredited in all three participating countries since 2016, is structured in 120 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System), divided in 2 years and 4 semesters (see Figure 1). One of the central elements of the WINTOUR Master is precisely its international mobility. The mobility track is the same for all students and requires that they attend the first 3 semesters each in one of the partner Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) consecutively: Semester 1 = 30 ECTS at URV, Semester 2 = 30 ECTS at UB, and Semester 3 = 30 ECTS at UP.

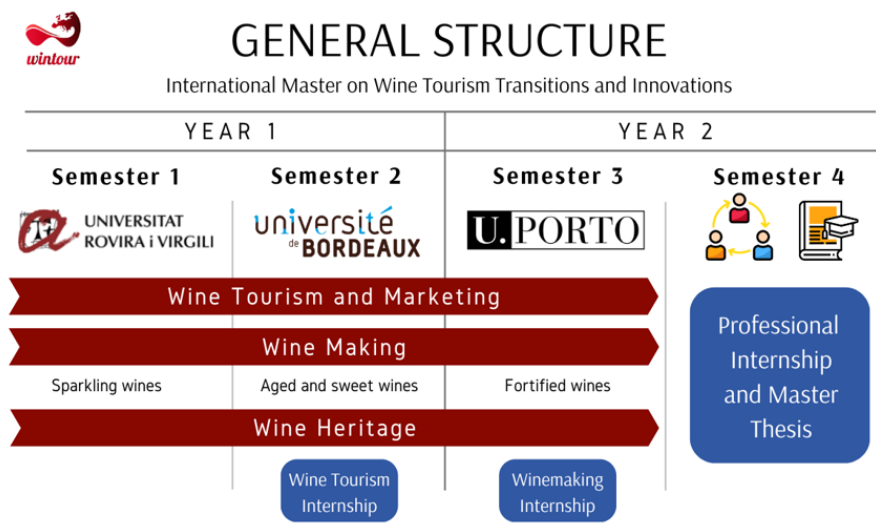


Figure 1: General structure of the WINTOUR Master

The subjects taught each semester provide complementary theoretical and practical knowledge under three main modules: Wine Tourism and Marketing, Wine Making, and Wine Heritage, including instructive field trips and visits that enrich the teaching and learning process. This structure combines multiple disciplines into a cohesive program, providing students with both theoretical knowledge and practical experience. The goal is to integrate the multifaceted nature of wine tourism into a unique, international, and interdisciplinary master program, and to train well-rounded graduates who have a deep understanding of how different disciplines interact and complement each other. The subjects included under each of the modules are designed to provide skills and competences equipping the students for the sustainable, digital, and just transition of wine tourism. The three universities also offer local language courses during the first three semesters of Spanish/Catalan (URV), French (UB), and Portuguese (UP).

The curriculum incorporates two internship periods of minimum 1 month of duration aimed at providing high-quality practical training in-company, essential in the formation of new graduates. On the one hand, a wine tourism internship at the end of the second semester offers students the possibility to join a private company or public organization developing its activity in the field of wine tourism. The objective is for the student to learn and experience first-hand the different wine tourism activities offered by the hosting organization, and how these are planned, organized, and managed. On the other hand, at the beginning of the third semester students are placed in a winery and actively participate in the harvest and winemaking process. The outcome of this training is to familiarize the students with the regular winemaking practices, skills that are fundamental for any wine-related professional.

The last semester is devoted to the development of the Master Thesis and the final Professional Internship (minimum 4 months), which is developed in a hosting company or organization in the sector. The Master Thesis is the result of the whole academic programme, where students have to develop a project related to the field of wine tourism during a professional internship stay at an institution or entity, public or private. This is the final outcome of the overall programme, and so it has to show and put into practice the knowledge and competences acquired on the master courses. The thesis is presented as a report in English and defended in front of the thesis evaluating committee, composed of at least one member of each HEI.

The Consortium enriches the academic programs at host universities by inviting expert speakers and guest lecturers from academia and industry, with approximately 48% coming from consortium partners and over 30% from the non-academic sector. These national and international experts play a pivotal role in enhancing programme quality by offering specialized knowledge, diverse perspectives, and networking opportunities. Students gain insights into fields such as wine tourism planning, wine tasting, and winemaking, while academic staff benefit from collaborations that improve teaching and foster research partnerships. This exchange not only elevates curriculum content but also strengthens the program’s international visibility and excellence.

Overall, the main assets of the WINTOUR Master are: 1) the high number of internships offered, resulting in around 1000 hours in contact with the world-of-work; 2) the mobility track, with all students following the same mobility path and subjects during 3 semesters (except for the internship periods); 3) the multidisciplinary academic programme, which includes subjects on the modules of

wine tourism and marketing, wine heritage and wine making, and 4) the high number of guest lecturers and experts participating in the different modules. The high multidisciplinary backgrounds of the enrolled students are also an asset of this programme, as it brings a wider range of perspectives and experiences, and the opportunity for students to learn from each other.

The three HEIs promote a student-centred approach to learning, encouraging students to take an active role in their education. The programme employs diverse and integrative learning methodologies across the three HEIs, combining classroom training with real-world experiences through field trips, company visits, and on-site tasks. Over two years, students engage in active learning, collaborative projects, and diverse activities such as case studies, presentations, and debates, that require collaboration across different fields of study. This approach helps students acquire skills and knowledge from multiple disciplines, making them more versatile and adaptable in their careers. Additionally, working across different disciplines, nationalities, and backgrounds fosters strong teamwork, communication, and social skills.

3. INDUSTRY AND ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIPS

The WINTOUR consortium has long-lasting relationships with academic institutions and private companies worldwide. The member universities are part of international networks like OENOVITI International (<https://www.oenoviti.com/>), the largest viticulture and oenology research community coordinated by Université de Bordeaux, and actively promote parallel projects funded by competitive funding schemes in the field of wine production and wine tourism. These networks enable the programme to leverage existing relationships and seek new collaborations beneficial to WINTOUR. By being part of these international networks and promoting related projects, the WINTOUR programme can take advantage of these extended relationships and pursue new collaborations that enhance its impact and reach. This strategy also evidences the consortium's efforts in integrating research and teaching efforts across borders, sharing best practices and developing high-quality projects that are relevant globally and promote sustainable development.

The WINTOUR programme draws upon the extensive expertise in tourism and oenology of three universities and their regions, alongside the support of a global network of high-level academic and non-academic institutions that form the WINTOUR Consortium. This diverse network brings invaluable insights from both academia and industry, enabling continuous updates to the programme to train highly skilled professionals in wine tourism, ultimately enhancing their employability and adaptability in a dynamic sector. Associate Partners play a pivotal role in the program's implementation by hosting field visits, delivering guest lectures, and actively promoting the programme to raise awareness. They also contribute to the program's quality assurance by providing feedback on student skills

and performance through surveys and meetings. Furthermore, these partners host internships, appoint professional supervisors, and ensure students have access to the resources and facilities needed to complete their tasks effectively. This collaboration ensures that the programme remains aligned with academic objectives and industry demands while promoting ethical practices and preparing students for successful careers in wine tourism.

The benefits for partners being part of this project are manifold: first, they establish collaboration synergies within an international Consortium including leading higher education institutions, public organisations, and private companies with a wide expertise in the fields of tourism, oenology, and wine tourism transitions and innovations. This also gives them the possibility to meet highly talented and multidisciplinary educated students from all over the world who may add value to their organisation, either by having them as students, hosting them as interns during their studies or recruiting them as new members of their team after graduation. Likewise, such a growing network of students, alumni, professors, and other professionals in the field of wine tourism opens vast dissemination opportunities, as well as facilitates the development of complementary research and knowledge transfer projects with much potential.

4. PROGRAMME IMPACT AND GRADUATE OUTCOMES

In a context of growth, increasing strategic importance and societal transition needs, the WINTOUR initiative is an innovative and multidisciplinary program, which unites consolidated knowledge domains and professional practices such as Tourism and Oenology, which have a wide impact in the economic, territorial, social, environmental, and personal societies paths for development. In this sense, the multiple academic environments engaged in the WINTOUR Master offer the students opportunities to learn, cooperate, and apply intercultural and adaptation skills, enhancing the international dimension of the HEIs involved through student and staff mobility. Therefore, WINTOUR project has impact at three different levels: system, institutional and individual.

At system level, the programme cultivates a workforce with a unique blend of skills, diverse profiles and varied experiences. It addresses critical gaps in the wine tourism sector by fostering sustainable development, business management, and digital skills. WINTOUR has facilitated the emergence of a professional network, comprising alumni, professors and other professionals who collaborate with the programme in various capacities. Alumni graduated until 2024, 171 in total, have significantly contributed to the sector by developing innovative Master Thesis projects in collaboration with industry partners across 25 countries, demonstrating the program's global reach and influence. The research themes primarily focus on marketing and branding, market diversification and products, destination management, tourism and culture, and

sustainable consumption and production. The works produced have contributed significantly to 10 out of the 17 SDGs, with goals related to decent work and economic growth, as well as industry, innovation, and infrastructure being the most prominent (UNWTO, 2023).

At institutional level, since its first funded project in 2015, WINTOUR has significantly advanced the internationalization and visibility of the participating HEIs. By fostering interdisciplinary cooperation, WINTOUR has reshaped higher education programs, reinforcing their participation and leadership in international projects. This includes additional EMJMDs and an Erasmus Mundus Design Measures (EMDM), Alliances, the development of Blended Intensive Programs and the creation of new wine tourism training initiatives, all underscoring a commitment to innovation and sustainability. By bringing together expertise from diverse fields – from biology to business management – WINTOUR promotes innovation, strengthens research capabilities, and boosts participation in international research projects and publications. This collaboration enhances synergies in teaching, research, and innovation, positioning Tourism and Oenology as areas of academic excellence for the three collaborating institutions. It also establishes reference hubs that integrate teaching, research, and knowledge transfer, supported by a highly active and innovative teaching staff. Thus, WINTOUR plays a central role in enhancing academic cooperation, supporting joint teaching initiatives, and driving

improvements in quality and excellence within higher education.

At individual level, the WINTOUR programme has significantly enhanced students' employability and has made rural areas attractive for high-value job opportunities. In the 9 editions to date, the programme has trained 221 students from 53 nationalities (Figure 2), boosting the international visibility of the organising universities and aiding in recruiting more students globally. The programme boasts an employability rate of 82.5%, with 77.5% of graduates working in private companies within the field and 5% launching their own businesses as self-employed entrepreneurs. Additionally, 5% of alumni continue their education by pursuing a PhD. Among those employed, nearly half (50%) secured their positions within a month of graduation, while 29% found jobs within one to six months. Graduates report that their roles are directly related to the wine and wine tourism sectors, encompassing areas such as marketing, winemaking, and management. Furthermore, 85% indicate that their job responsibilities have expanded compared to previous positions, with 93% assuming new tasks and responsibilities. They also highlight increased involvement in new projects and product development, as well as enhanced networking opportunities, with 88% reporting broader professional connections since completing the programme.



Figure 2. WINTOUR students' network (2016-2024)

5. CONCLUSION

Tourism is a growing global activity, with specialized tourism gaining momentum due to increasing consumer demand for diverse and meaningful leisure experiences. Cultural and gastronomy-focused tourism, in particular, has

seen a surge in popularity (Report Linker, 2022; Marco-Lajara *et al.*, 2023). As we move further into the 21st century, global economic, social, and environmental transformations have presented new challenges for the tourism industry, while intensifying pre-existing issues that were brought to the forefront during the COVID-19

pandemic (Szolnoki *et al.*, 2022). The sector also faces significant transformations driven by climate change, which impacts markets, operations, and mobility as economies shift towards low-carbon production systems. Tourism stands at the forefront of these dynamics, with wine tourism emerging as a potential catalyst for fostering a more sustainable travel and visitor industry (Montella, 2017). In response to the growing global emphasis on resilient, regenerative, and green economies, tourism must evolve to create positive impacts—not only enriching the experiences of visitors but also contributing to the well-being of destinations by leaving them better than they were found (UNWTO, 2023).

In the context of wine tourism, this transition involves offering rich, original experiences that go beyond traditional wine-growing knowledge and tasting practices. This sector holds vast potential for growth, particularly in the post-pandemic era, which has transformed the tourism market and reshaped traveller behaviours and preferences. To realise this potential, the wine tourism industry requires highly skilled professionals who are not only experts in their fields but who also possess a comprehensive understanding of emerging business strategies, industry trends, and societal goals such as sustainability and inclusion. This growing demand calls for well-trained, multidisciplinary professionals with expertise in areas such as wine production, tourism, marketing, culture and management. Equipping professionals with the right skills has a profound impact not only on the wine tourism industry but also on the local and regional development of wine-producing areas, fostering sustainable growth and innovation.

Currently, no other training program offers the diverse skills and competencies of WINTOUR Master in a cooperative and international format. WINTOUR stands out as a unique and innovative master's program, bridging various disciplines to provide comprehensive education in wine tourism. By addressing a critical gap in professional training, the program integrates fundamental coursework with practical internships, delivering a well-rounded education that extends beyond traditional academic frameworks. The active involvement of non-academic partners, including guest lecturers and hosts for field trips and internships, enriches the curriculum with real-world insights and hands-on experiences that are invaluable for students' future careers. Beyond equipping students with essential skills, WINTOUR significantly contributes to the wine tourism sector by fostering entrepreneurship, expanding work opportunities, and elevating recognition for the industry.

Furthermore, offering this programme in Europe underscores the region's leadership in wine tourism education and positions the European Higher Education Area as a competitive force globally. The program's ability to attract a diverse cohort of international students demonstrates the strong demand for such specialized education and highlights its value as an investment for aspiring professionals in wine tourism. Overall, WINTOUR

not only enhances career opportunities for graduates but also advances the global wine tourism industry, driving innovation and ensuring its relevance in an evolving global landscape. By doing so, the programme establishes itself as a cornerstone for shaping the future of wine tourism on an international scale.

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