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ROVIRA I VIRGILI

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MASTER THESIS

Evolution of Customer Experience in Wine Tourism: Clarifying Definition and Exploring New Dimensions

Author: Nataliia Buchko

Master Thesis developed at the winery Schloss Gobelsburg,
Gobelsburg, Austria

Professional Supervisor: Ms. Eva Moosbrugger
co-owner, Schloss Gobelsburg

Academic Supervisor: Prof. Amélia Brandão,
University of Porto

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Abstract

This study investigates customer experience in wine tourism. The research that has been previously done about the topic of CX in academia focus on different dimensions adopted from business, service or general tourism fields, as well as, analyze the customer's point of view. The main objective of this research is to revise the existing definition and dimensions of customer experience, and propose the dimensions in the wine tourism context from a wine tourism enterprise perspective. Abductive method and qualitative approach, namely case study have been used to achieve these objectives. The research took place with the collaboration of the winery Schloss Gobelsburg in Kamptal wine region in Austria. Data was collected through the semi-structured interviews with wine/wine tourism professionals at the winery Schloss Gobelsburg, and examined using context analyses and coding techniques. The study found the similarities of the customer experience definition between academia and wine tourism enterprise, as well as proposed new vision of customer experience dimensions in wine tourism, and new dimensions such as role of the person and philosophy of the place. The results indicate that wine is a central part of experience with strong connections with other dimensions. This research significantly contributes to the academia by filling the gap and providing valuable insight on the existing knowledge regarding customer experience. Also, providing the important framework and important insights for the practical use by managers of wine tourism enterprises. Further research should be done regarding comparing these findings with the customer's perspective, as well as, analyze new industry trends such as technologies and sustainability.

Key words

Customer experience, wine tourism, dimensions of customer experience, definition of customer experience, enterprise perspectives, wine tourism experience

Abbreviations

CX - customer experience

WT - wine tourism

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1. Introduction and Study Overview

1.1 Introduction

Wine tourism is a popular research topic among scholars. The increased interest and the number of publications is confirmed by bibliometric studies of the phenomena (Keskin, 2023; Marco-Lajara et al., 2023).

Currently, wine tourism is one of the most significant types of tourism, which is experiencing steady increase, especially after the hit of pandemic COVID-19. The growth is driven by more interest in wine, rise of interest in culinary tourism and experiential travel, as well, deepening knowledge in wine. On June 06, 2023, the forecast published by Globe Newswire, revealed that the wine tourism market is estimated to reach 13.9 million dollars in 2023 and is expected to reach 47.5 million dollars by 2033 (Future Market Insights Global and Consulting Pvt, 2023).

Kotur, (2023) analyzed the amount of the research and the interest of publications in wine tourism from 2000-2022. The scholar highlighted 4 main areas of research interest in WT, including multi-sensorial nature, technologies, managing WT experiences and its co-creation, research methods to measure and understand WT experiences.

One of the most important topics is customer experience, including various aspects of this phenomena. In the earliest papers Helkkula, (2011) identified three main aspects of interest in academia such as the phenomenon of CX, process of CX, where customers are the central part, and outcomes of CX (satisfaction, loyalty, intention to revisit and buy).

In recent years the focus of research has changed more towards the service design and customer experience.

The connection between WT and the importance of CX is confirmed by recently published industry trends of WT for 2024, related to experiential tourism and holistic experience (Latheesh, 2024; *Wine Tourism and Wine Trends in 2024*, 2024; *WINETOURISM TRENDS 2024*, 2024), as well as, by general travel industry trends emphasizing on local, authentic and immersive experience (2024 Travel Insights, 2023; Foster, 2024; Shute, 2023).

In addition, Terziyska, (2024) mentioned that the experience dimensions are one of the central parts of the research. At the same time, there is a necessity to apply a different interdisciplinary approach for the analysis of CX in further research.

On the upcoming conference in May 2024 in Vienna, organized by Wine Tourism/Culinary Commission, which is responsible for researching culinary and wine tourism, discusses questions about customer experience and about experience quality measurement of wine tourism events (*CWTC Krems*, 2024; Scherhag et al., 2023). The wine tourism industry in German-speaking countries is still relatively young and dates back to the 90s of the 20th century. The Austrian tourism industry contributed significantly to the total GDP: 7,6 % in 2019 pre-COVID year, 4,5 % in 2020 and 4.1% in 2021. In 2022 the

tourism recovery showed upward trends after the pandemic: almost 40 million tourists, including 26.2 international tourists. In total, they spent nearly 137 million euros overnights (*National Data*, n.d.; Scherhag et al., 2023). According to the Austrian Statistics report about wine production and consumption on 4/12/2023, the data of 2022 also gives evidence to the clear recovery after the hit by COVID-19 pandemic and following two years of decline. The export and interest in Austrian white wines and sparkling have increased (*Austrian Wine Statistics Report*, 2023).

Furthermore, the research focus is linked to sustainability in wine tourism (Dias et al., 2023; Dinya, 2023; A. K. Hamilton, 2023; Szolnoki et al., 2023). As well as, the digitalization and implementation of virtual reality and augmented reality tools in wine tourism have increased the interest of various scholars (Festa et al., 2023; Jorge et al., 2023; Sousa et al., 2024).

1.2 Research Gap

The research that has been previously done about the topic of CX in academia are presented in literature review. On the one hand, there is a lack of a unified definition of the term. On the other hand, various scholars defined CX from different perspectives, but having some common characteristics. It would be beneficial to revise the existing definitions and compare them to the point of views of the wine tourism enterprise.

Aside from the definition of CX, there are different approaches to identifying CX dimensions in wine tourism. The presented researchers have used the CX dimensions by adopting from Pine and Gilmore 4E's experience economy model, literature review, or by customer analysis reviews, namely quantitative methods (Annex 1).

The majority of the research papers focus on the following dimensions in CX: education, esthetic, escapism, and entertainment. In contrast, recent research in wine tourism showed that the scholars have applied new dimensions (Brzovska et al., 2020; Kotur, 2022; Santos et al., 2020; Yuqing et al., 2023).

Terziyska, (2024) identifies that the niche forms of tourism, like wine tourism, need to be analyzed separately, because of the various features that distinguish them from the traditional types of tourism. Consequently, some activities in wine tourism may or may not deliver activities, which are related to particular dimensions. As well as that, several activities can have the same dimensions.

At the same time, dimensions of winescape have a closer link to the customer experience in wine tourism. Since the winescape is identified as an interaction between social and environmental attributes, which co-create the customer experience (Kubát et al., 2024b). According to Terziyska, (2024) the following dimensions, such as wine, winery, scenery, staff and food, characterize winescape.

So, the question arises should CX dimensions be complemented by several more aspects which have appeared nowadays?

For instance, sustainability concepts and practices have appeared in the academia research, as well as, part of daily life of people that influence the way people choose certain brands, products or services. Dinya, (2023) have conducted research in wine tourism by approaching 1579 wineries in 42 countries with focus on the importance of sustainability in wine tourism service for visitors. The results showed that 62% of the wineries stated that sustainability is essential for visitors; while 87% stated that it will have more significant influence in the coming 5 years. However, the sustainability aspect was not addressed in CX as a dimension. From this, we can conclude that sustainability can be a part of a “relation” dimension, which appears in some works (Kim et al., 2012; Quinlan Cutler & Carmichael, 2010; Schmitt, 2010).

Furthermore, the novelty concept has occurred in the research of wine tourism. It is believed that new and unique experiences make people more engaged and have positive impressions (Neuhofer et al., 2020). Zhang & Lee, (2022) analyzed the novelty concept and its influence on the experience. They explained that the people are willing to participate and try new things. As novelty statements the scholars used the following: to see something new, to be surprised or experience a different culture.

In addition, everyday life of people is influenced by technology. Digitalization processes are proved to have huge impact on business in post-COVID area (Festa et al., 2023). Santos et al., (2021) proposed the 4 dimensions, which comprise the global wine tourism system, and one the dimensions is focused on innovation ecosystems. It means to focus on the new profile of wine tourists, virtual reality, augmented reality, digital events and hybrid events. Sousa et al., (2024) examined the influence of VR on the decision making process of wine tourists. After gathering 405 responses from the participants, the results showed that the participants think that the VR experience at the destination influences their intention to visit and recommend the destination.

Consequently, there is a research gap and necessity to examine the current dimension of CX in wine tourism and propose the relevant dimensions to the current situation, taking into account new industry trends. Especially, by using a qualitative approach to data collection and showing wine tourism enterprise perspectives.

1.3 Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of the research is to examine the definition of customer experience in wine tourism, study the current dimensions of wine tourism and propose the relevant one. It showed us that there are several questions which should be addressed in this paper:

RQ1. *How do existing definitions of CX coincide with the wine tourism enterprise perspective?*

RQ2. *How do dimensions of CX in wine tourism compare to the existing ones in tourism and business and should they be expanded with new aspects?*

1.4 Study Overview

The study has been developed as a part of obtaining a Master Degree at the program “International Master on Wine Tourism Innovation” in Rovira i Virgili University (Tarragona, Spain), University of Bordeaux (Bordeaux, France), University of Porto (Porto, Portugal) with the support of the European Commission. The 6 months internship related to conduction of own research project based on knowledge obtained during the study program.

The research took place with the collaboration of the winery Schloss Gobelsburg in the Kamptal wine region in Austria.

The framework of research was developed including following steps (Figure 1):



Figure 1. Study overview

2. Literature Review

Literature review is an essential part of the research, which aims to evaluate existing research works on specific topics, to identify gaps and further directions (Chigbu et al., 2023). A semi-systematic approach to literature reviews has been applied, since the topic of CX has been examined by various scholars in different fields. The semi-systematic approach allows to show how the particular phenomena evolved over time (Snyder, 2019). Therefore, various research papers from different years have been analyzed in order to present the definition of wine tourism customer experience and various dimensions. Doing a literature review can be challenging and confusing, when it comes to the grouping and identifying gaps and insight in research. Consequently, at some parts of the research AI tools for literature review have been applied, especially SciSpace, which aims to systemize all the research papers according to the specific topic and by chronological order and briefly shows the main insight, research methods, goals and gaps (Jain et al., 2023). As well as, the

Zotero program was used to gather all the necessary research papers and create a reference section, in order to avoid errors in citations.

2.1 Wine Tourism

2.1.1 The Evolution and Dynamics of Wine Tourism

Broadly, wine tourism is associated with visiting vineyards, wineries, wine events where wine is perceived as the main element (Marco-Lajara et al., 2023). Byrd et al., (2016) defined wine tourism activity from the perspective of who travels to the destination and what tourists are experiencing at the destination. The most established definition of wine tourism was given by Hall stating that “visitation to vineyards, wineries, wine festivals and wine shows for grape wine tasting and experiencing the attributes of a grape wine region” (Güzel & Gromova, 2021). Wine tourism has evolved in time and the definition has been revised. It states that wine tourism includes other important parts, which provide holistic experience for tourists: food, art, cultural tours, cellar doors’ activities (Charters & Ali-Knight, 2002). The Committee of Tourism and Competitiveness of UN Tourism defines wine tourism as a sub-type of gastronomy tourism, “refers to tourism whose purpose is visiting vineyards, wineries, tasting, consuming and/or purchasing wine, often at or near the source” (World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) & Basque Culinary Center, 2019). Apart from being a part of leisure activity for people, wine tourism is a significant part of the tourism sector and economic sector in general, which influences the development of the territories on local, regional and global level. Applying the holistic approach to the definition of wine tourism leads to the interpretation of wine tourism as an activity providing economic benefits, local and regional development, revenues for supporting rural development, as well as, providing jobs and income by engaging local communities in wine tourism directly or in complementary service activities. From a more atomistic perspective it is a form of marketing and communications (Güzel & Gromova, 2021). Moreover wine tourism is an essential part of destination identity and includes important cultural, and historical values. As well as, can be seen as a major driver for the destinations helping them to enrich touristic offer and differentiate target markets (Güzel & Gromova, 2021).

Wine tourism is a complex concept, which can be identified as a service experience, involving the whole territory's attractions, related to various motivations and profiles of wine tourists, as an important tool for regional development (‘UNIT 1 - Wine Tourism’, n.d.). Even now the interpretation of the definition of wine tourism is not static, since the concept in general encompasses many elements and can be defined from the marketing and academic perspective (Borges & Menezes, 2019).

Wine tourism is a successful combination of wine and tourism, which includes culture, territory, landscape, heritage (Ramos et al., 2022). Therefore, there is a need for clear differentiation of the wine tourism elements.

Byrd et al., (2016) proposed the new idea of distinguishing elements in wine tourism. Prior to this, the existing approach distinguishes the core product in wine tourism and supplementary activities, which help enhance the value of the core product and offer more benefits. The wine was perceived as the core product, while customer service, production facilities, tours, vineyards, landscapes, tasting rooms, wine education, entertainment, events, relaxation, recreation, wine clubs, other tourism and hospitality facilities are supplementary. The main idea of this approach was to distinguish the wine as core product from other services, however in reality the connection of the core product and other elements is not that homogeneous. So, Byrd et al., (2016) proposed the new way of differentiating main elements in wine tourism: core product, augmented services and ancillary services. The scholar defined wine as a core product; other activities related to wine as tours, wine clubs, customer service, tasting rooms, wine education, vineyards, landscape as augmented services; while other services and activities, which are involved in providing tourists with the wine tourism experience like recreation, hospitality, entertainment, events are ancillary services. Therefore, wine tourism experience can be provided in various ways: tastings, tours, events, festivals, cultural and heritage activities, education, cellar door sales (Charters & Ali-Knight, 2002).

In connection to the main definition of wine tourism, the motivation of wine tourists has evolved. From the beginning the research focuses on the factors including simply tasting wine and experiencing the region, however this theory has evolved and there has been done a new set of researches proposing that wine tourists want to have a broader experience and not simply focus on wine tastings (Gaetjens et al., 2023; Marco-Lajara et al., 2023; Santos et al., 2021).

The main attention of research in wine tourism was given to the segmentation and profile of wine tourists (Alebaki & Iakovidou, 2011; Charters & Ali-Knight, 2002; Dodd & Bigotte, 1997; *Segmenting Wine Tourists on the Basis of Involvement with Wine*, 2014). It was challenging to distinguish wine tourists among general tourists and create a profile. Since wine tourism is a complex and multiplication phenomenon, there is no single unified type of tourists. Consequently, this unique feature was taken into account during the typology of wine tourists and 5 main categories were established (Charters & Ali-Knight, 2002): wine connoisseur (highly knowledgeable and highly interested tourists in wine), wine lovers (tourists, who have a profound knowledge in wine); wine interested (tourists with not much knowledge or experience in wine, but have already visited a few wineries or attended a few tastings); wine novices (curious, with limited interest in wine); hanger on (people who do not have interest in wine, just visiting wineries or wine events as part of the group).

2.2 Customer Experience

2.2.1 Defining Customer Experience

Before continuing with the more specific terms of customer experience and its influence, it is necessary to define the term “experience”.

According to Cambridge Dictionary, “experience” can be explained from two perspectives: as “the process of getting knowledge or skill that is obtained from doing, seeing, or feeling things, or something that happens which has an effect on you”; or “as the way that something happens and how it makes you feel” (*Experience*, 2024).

The same dual meaning of the word “experience” exists in the professional field, where “experience” can be defined as “direct monitoring (experiencing) of goods”, as well as, to “accumulating knowledge” (Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2013). From the philosophic point of view, “experience” is defined as “natural phenomenon of the way natural organisms interact with social, cultural, political environment” by John Dewey (Berding, 1997). In the Philosophy Dictionary of Arguments, “experience” is explained as “an event that is processed in the consciousness of a subject” (*Experience - Philosophy Dictionary of Arguments*, n.d.). To generalize the term, experience can be described as the process of getting knowledge or interacting with an external environment that affects how a customer feels about it.

The concept of customer experience lacks the unified definition, since various scholars interpreted it from different perspectives, but still including some common characteristics (Annex 2). In the academic world, the definition of “customer experience” can be as an outcome factor that is satisfaction or value, while another thing that is an independent factor that leads to satisfaction (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020).

According to Carbone & Haeckel, (1994), the CX means the set impression, which is influenced by the interaction with the product or service, including what customers are provided with. The same approach to customer experience interpretation has Berry et al., (2002), defining it as clues that are sent to customers. Schmitt, (2010) idea of customer experience is related to living - undergoing - experiencing the situation, which connects customer’s lifestyle and company. Another approach to CX definition was explained by Pine & Gilmore, (2011), defined as a stage or events for engaging customers in a personal way. Hamilton & A., (2014) supported Pine & Gilmore proposal about experience as a stage and the point of view of Teixeira et al., (2012) about co-creation, meaning that experience is co-created through various transactions between customer and brand, transforming these transactions into memorable and engaging experiences. Robinette et al., (2001) has the same idea of CX as various aspects of interaction, including sensorial, emotional and informational exchange. Gentile et al., (2007) pointed out that CX is not only interactions between brand and customers, which includes various elements, but also aligning with the customer expectations through different touch points on the customer journey. Meyer &

Schwager, (2007) concluded that CX is a subjective response of customers to direct or indirect contact with a company, which also includes the whole customer journey. The same idea was proposed by Verhoef et al., (2009): various responses of the customer through the whole customer journey.

Customer experience in tourism refers to the similar holistic approach through the whole customer journey: starting from the planning, interactions, emotional response and customer satisfaction. The overall experience is shaped by various elements: cognitive, affective, sensorial. Customer experience has evolved in time with research focusing on different aspects: technologically-oriented, behavioral and emotional value (Annex 3).

2.2.3 Customer Experience Dimensions

The customer experience has been a central part of a lot of research in different fields (Angelini & Gilli, 2021; Becker & Jaakkola, 2020; Gahler et al., 2023; Godovykh & Tasci, 2020). Various dimensions of characterizing customer experience were discovered, which shows that the customer experience is a complex and multidimensional concept (Annex 4).

Cohen, (1979) analyzed a phenomenon of tourism experience and distinguished 5 main components of experience in tourism. These components are ranked according to the purpose of the trip, from simply looking for fun experience to deeper meaning: recreational mode, diversionary, experiential, experimental, existential. Carbone & Haeckel, (1994) highlighted two types of clues, which form the experience: performance clues, related to product or service and context clues, related accompanying attributes (location, stuff). If these clues are not managed properly, it may lead to a replacement from positive to negative or create in general a negative perception. Berry et al., (2002) proposed 3 types of clues: functionality, emotions: “mechanics” and “humanics”. Gentile et al., (2007) proposed 6 dimensions of customer experience specifically related to tourism destinations: sensorial, emotional, cognitive, pragmatic, lifestyle, relational. Thus, these dimensions are more applicable to the destinations as a whole and are more comparable with a servicescape approach rather than winescape.

The new way of considering experience as an economic value was started by Pine and Gilmore. In their research, scientists propose the way of evolution of economic values starting from the commodities - goods - service and finish with the experience. Pine and Gilmore highlighted that the experience can be consumed only when the service is perceived as a stage and goods as an equipment deliberately create memorable experience. The scientists exemplified commodities as fungible, goods as tangible, service as intangible and experience as memorable (Gentile et al., 2007; Pine & Gilmore, 2011). The new approach to classifying individuals who are in contact with the product/brand or service, has

been applied. Pine & Gilmore, (2011) defined individuals as: whole market for the commodities, users for goods, clients for service and guests for experience. Generally, the experience is described as a stage for the guests, which is memorable and is revealed on a particular duration in time with the personal approach and influence on guests feelings and emotions.

In the research Pine & Gilmore, (2011) proposed a different approach to customer experience classification and depicted it in the “4'E” diagram: education, esthetic, escapism, entertainment. The scientists divided this experience by passive-active participation or absorption-immersion experience. The central part is called a “sweet point” meaning that if the experience consists of 4E's, it fulfills customers and provides a compelling experience (McLellan, n.d.; Pine & Gilmore, 2011). Quadri-Felitti & Fiore (2012) adapted the Pine and Gilmore experience economy model to wine tourism (Annex 5).

A lot of research has been applied to the Pine and Gilmore model of 4E's, for example, the study about the level of importance of 4E's to tourist evaluation of wine tourism has been done in The Republic of Macedonia (Brzovska et al., 2018). Yuqing et al., (2023) also used 4E's models and included novelty and hedonism dimensions. As a result of the research among Chinese wine tourists, scientists identify that escapism is one of the most important dimensions. As well as, the high chances were identified that tourists will visit the winery again and make a purchase when the experience provided is linked to escapism, aesthetic or entertainment. Kotur, (2022) conducted research related to wellness experience in wine tourism after the wave of COVID-19 pandemic, adopting the dimensions from the wellness industry: body, mind, spirit, environment.

According to the research of Santos et al., (2020) comparing Madeira and Porto experiences, wine experience was analyzed in terms of winespace, wine storytelling, wine sensory experience, and wine involvement. The scientist detected that wine is still a core product in wine tourism experience and it is one of the main motivating factors. However, such dimensions as wine storytelling showed the strongest relevance and impact followed by wine involvement, wine tasting excitement and winespace in last place. Quinlan Cutler & Carmichael, (2010) highlighted two spheres of experience: influential realm and personal. The influential realms are categorized as physical or destination (nature and humans), social and product or service, while personal includes knowledge, memories, perception. On the other hand, Kim et al., (2012) analyzed memorable tourism experiences. The scientists developed a scale to measure tourism experience and highlighted the important components, which can affect customer experience, such as hedonism, refreshment, local culture, meaningfulness, knowledge, involvement, and novelty. Hosany et al., (2015) focused the research on the tourists' emotional experiences. As a result of the survey such aspects as joy, love, positive surprise, place identity, place dependance were identified as main.

It is clearly seen that the majority of researchers shared similar ideas about the dimensions of experience in general or related to different spheres. It shows how the ideas of dimensions have evolved over the time, starting from the research of Carbone & Haeckel (1994) till the most recent research about wine tourism done in 2022-2023 (Annex 4). Educational, environmental, emotions and feelings, escapism, as well as, social identity/relation, entertainment and esthetic were the most used by the researchers in their papers. However, more recent research suggested focusing on sensorial experience, memory, perception, novelty, storytelling.

2.3 The Impact of Customer Experience: Focus on Wine Tourism Industry

Over the past few decades customer experience has become a strategic component of the business and a point to stand out among competitors. It is so important for business to keep the customers and make them repeat the purchase, however it is essential to understand that customers do not buy service or product, they want to buy “experience” (Carbone & Haeckel, 1994). Businesses have changed their approach from feature to benefit selling to customer-centric method by providing authentic approach and relevance to the target audience. It means businesses have changed the focus from rational messages to emotional or combination of rational and emotional messages (Schmitt, 2015; Smilansky, 2017).

It influenced a new approach for tourists' motivation and experience in general, which is identified as emergent customer experience or hedonic consumption theory. Prior to this, the Theory of Planned Behaviors had been applied to tourists in general and wine tourists (Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2012). According to the theory, behavior is influenced by three factors: attitudes, subjective norms (social pressure), and perceived behavioral control (how a person can feel about performing certain actions/behavior) (Ajzen, 1991). However, people are human beings, which are influenced by their feelings and emotions. That is the reason for applying the hedonic consumption theory, which focuses on emotional and irrational aspects of buying behavior, rather than on needs (Ajzen, 1991; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2012).

Identifying and managing factors that can improve customer experience has become a crucial element in order to satisfy customers needs. Enhancing customer experience is essential not only for big companies with great reputation on the market, but for small businesses by transforming ordinary activities into special experience, adding emotional values to it (K. Hamilton & A., 2014).

It is necessary to understand that customer experience in the wine tourism industry leads to education of people about the production process, the product, the company and values, and territory. Meaning not only learning new information, but knowing how to appreciate the efforts and the scenery behind the bottle of wine (Angelini & Gilli, 2021). As

well as, CX leads to enhancing customer satisfaction, and intention to revisit the winery in the future (Leri & Theodoridis, 2019, 2020).

Active customer participation in tourism experience, interaction with employees and local residents improve overall satisfaction. Furthermore, it contributes not only to the process of co-creation, but also is seen as a foundational element in establishing long lasting consumer relationships (Rachão et al., 2021; Saliba & d'Ament, 2022). As demonstrated in works of Carlsen & Boksberger, (2013); Carvalho et al., (2021); Leri & Theodoridis, (2019) customer loyalty towards brand/product is a significant factor, which can be considerably influenced by overall CX.

Moreover, the essential outcome, which is generated by CX is economic values, namely increased sales, growth in cellar door sales, and intention to buy more wine in the future (Saliba & d'Ament, 2022).

In conclusion, customer experience is a multifaceted concept, which consists of more aspects than simply selling the product or providing the service. It is a holistic perspective that includes various dimensions starting from how easy a product or service can reach customers to what customers feel while using the product or service (Angelini & Gilli, 2021). The broader implication of CX includes elements such as customer satisfaction, loyalty, sales, recognition, emotional values, and differentiation from competitors. Nevertheless, the ability to evaluate CX will stimulate further development of identifying and providing valuable experience for tourists in the wine industry.

2.4 Summary of Literature Review

The literature review has examined several studies related to the definition of CX and its dimensions, exploring the evolution of context through years and different contexts in tourism, general business and wine tourism.

Firstly, there are various approaches to define customer experience from various scholars, meaning that there is no consensus in academia regarding this question. For the further research development two definitions were chosen as the main focus. Generally, scholars see CX as an outcome of satisfaction or an influencing factor that leads to satisfaction. At the same time, showing the holistic way of CX with various interactions between customers and brand/service/enterprise. For the author's opinion the following definitions fully explain CX, and include components from the other research and can be used as a framework. The first definition proposed by K. Hamilton & A., (2014) with business focus and staging of CX, as well as, its importance for small business. The second definition is proposed by Agarwal & Mohan, (2022) related to the tourism industry with the focus on importance of social interaction, as well as, mentioning the holistic way of providing CX.

Secondly, the same complex view and approaches are related to the defining CX dimensions. There is a consensus between scholars regarding the multidimensions of CX.

However, some scholars use the framework for CX provided by Pine and Gilmore's experience economy model. As was mentioned by Terziyska, (2024) that wine tourism is a special type of tourism, which has to be analyzed paying attention to the typical characteristics and nature of this phenomena. Consequently, some scholars use the new dimensions specifically related to wine tourism.

Overall, the summary of literature review and the framework for the next stage of the research can be illustrated in the following way (Figure 2):

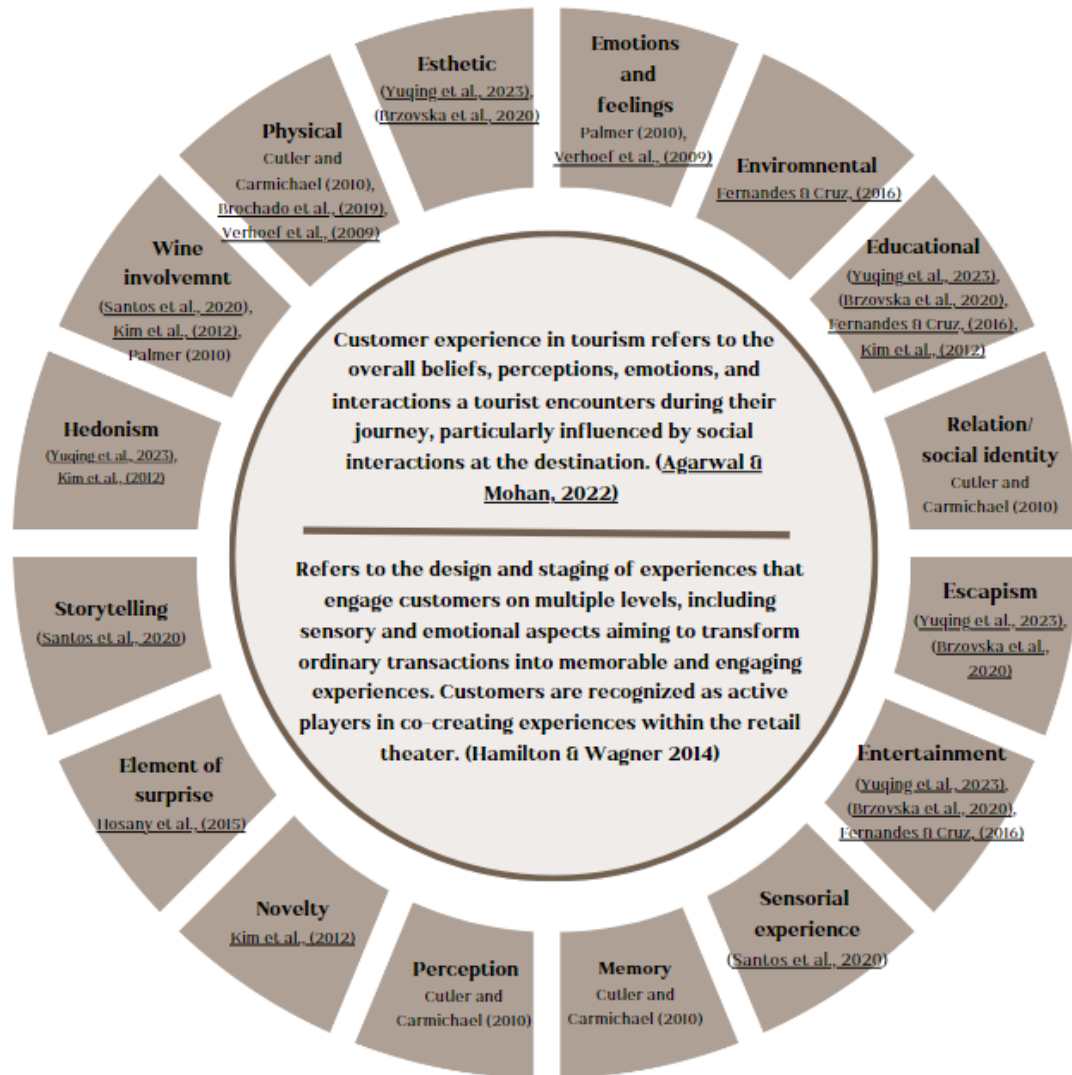


Figure 2. Summary of literature review

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The research is conducted using an abductive method and qualitative approach, namely the case study and semi-structured interviews. The abductive method combines both parts from deductive and inductive methods: research and interview questions deduced from the literature review, while interview data helped to induce new dimensions (Thompson,

2022). Case study method is commonly used in research to examine the particular case in their own special context. It means that the researcher and the research object interact constantly, which helps to experience the phenomena and examine it closely (Aaltio & Heilmann, 2009). The qualitative method has been chosen, because it leads to in-depth explanations, unlike the quantitative methods, which provides the numerical data, and it allows to analyze the phenomena from perspectives of employees and managers (Maxwell, 2012). Qualitative research design allows to communicate and analyze the particular social scene in a real-life setting and see the phenomena without manipulation of the participant's perspective (Kekeya, 2021). For these reasons the chosen methods have been proven to be relevant in this research.

3.2 Case-study: Winery Schloss Gobelsburg

3.2.1 Description of the Company

Schloss Gobelsburg is one the most famous and the oldest wineries in Austria, which used to be managed by the Cistercian monks. Schloss Gobelsburg is located in the village of Gobelsburg in the Kamptal wine region. The wine region is one of the largest and the most successful wine regions in Austria. It is located on the river Kamp with the principal city Langenlois. The Kamptal region covers 3,583 ha of vines with 238 wine producers. The region is famous for producing sparkling wines, as well as wines from Gruner Veltliner and Riesling with designation of DAC Kamptal (*Kamptal*, n.d.).

The estate has a great history dating back to 1074, where the first mention of the village and castle was made. In 1740 the castle was taken over by the Cistercian monastery of Zwettl, who had already produced wine in the region since 1171. In 1996, the Moosbrugger family took over responsibility of the winery and estate operations. Over the past 25 years, the winery has been accepted into the prestigious Verein Österreichische Traditionsweingüter (Austrian Traditional Wineries Association) and the estate has become one of the leading and best-known wineries at international level.

At the moment 40 employees are working at the winery, including the wine production team and the administration.

In total, the production is estimated at more than 1 million bottles per year depending on the year and demand. Currently, almost two-thirds of the production is exported to over 50 markets worldwide. Schloss Gobelsburg distributes the wines mostly to gastronomy, hotels and specialized wine shops.

The winery operates with 85 hectares of wine. Moreover, the winery buys grapes from the local grapegrowers. The most planted grape varieties are Gruner Veltliner and Riesling, and local red grape varieties such as Zweigelt and Sankt Laurent, as well as international grape varieties like Pinot Noir.

Overall, the winery produces 35 different wines: 4 sparkling wines, 16 white wines, 2 rose wines, 7 red wines, 6 sweet wines. All the wines can be classified into 8 categories. 5 of the categories are produced under the Niederösterreich (Lower Austria) appellation: sparkling wines (4 wines with Schloss Gobelsburg label); classics (6 wines with Schlosskellerei Gobelsburg label), historical winemaking (refers to the traditional winemaking, which were made by monks, 2 wines with Schloss Gobelsburg label); red wine (6 wines with Schlosskellerei Gobelsburg label and Domaene Gobelsburg label); sweet (6 wines with Schloss Gobelsburg label).

While 3 of the categories include wine with distinct origin, which are classified according to Austrian classification system, which includes Regional (Kamptal region), Village (Langenlois and Zöbing villages) and Single-vineyards (Spiegel and Steinsetz) and Premier Cru wines (Renner, Grub, Lamm, Gaisberg and Heiligenstein).

The price range starts from 10 euros per bottle in the category “Classics” up to 100 euros per bottle from the category in “Traditional Winemaking”; single vineyard, Premier Cru and sparkling wines cost between 30-50 euros.

The main focus of the winery is wine production, and tourism products are complementary. The estate possesses a unique wine cellar, and the renovated part, which was accomplished in 2021 resembles the cloister of a monastery. This is one of the main reasons, besides high-quality wines, why the estate is popular among tourists. The tours are held on two days (Fridays and Saturdays) per week only, at 2 pm in order to manage the tourist flow and not interrupt the production work. Also, there is a possibility to do private tours at any day of the week by request. The prices of the tour is 29 euros for regular ones and 34.50 for private ones and include 2.5 hours of tour at the winery and tasting on average 6-10 wines.

As it clearly is seen from the concept, communication strategy, prices and wine labels, that the positioning of the winery consists of traditional values, heritage and culture. Schloss Gobelsburg does not approach mass tourism, and wants to focus on more niche markets.

3.2.2 Duties and Activities During the Internship

During the internship period various tasks integral to the maintenance of wine tourism and communication at the winery have been performed. Overall, the activities and duties can be divided into following categories: office work, shop maintenance, tastings and participation in wine fairs.

Office work. The time spent in the office performing tasks was valuable in acquiring administrative skills. The key tasks included invoice register, inventory, filling in Export Value Declarations, monthly accounting, and work in the procurement programs. As well as, tasks related to communication and checking of competitive benchmarks.

Shop work. During Mondays and Tuesdays, as well as weekends the tasks were focused on the direct interaction with customers and providing smooth operation of wine tourism. Main duties include maintenance of the shop (checking the available vintages and wines on stock, price lists, working with the cash register machine) and working with customers (identify customer's needs, recommend wines, explain about history of the place and its philosophy, classification systems and wine identity).

Tastings and wine fairs/events. The main part of the work consists of wine tastings: to host the tastings, to explain about the winemaking process, wine aromas and flavors, offer wine pairing combinations, help to understand the wine and find out the perfect option, to explain about the place and its philosophy, enhance customer experience at the place. During the period of internship it was possible to take part in several fairs and events, namely: WEIN & GENUSS Krems, Open cellar doors, Tour de Vin, Vievinum.

3.3 Data Collection and Sampling

3.3.1 Semi-structured Interviews

A semi-structured interview approach has been chosen for data gathering, since it suits the purpose of the study and leads to the obtaining personnel, first-hand unstructured description of phenomena that they have experienced and how it relates to their lives (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). The main advantages of the semi-structured over the structured interviews is the opportunity to extract additional clarification in order to analyze complex phenomena as customer experience (Nuzhat Naz, Fozia Gulab, Mahnaz Aslam, 2022). The issues with the methodology design influences the accuracy of the over research results. Consequently, the guide for designing semi-structured interviews for case study developed by Nuzhat Naz, Fozia Gulab, Mahnaz Aslam, (2022) have been used. The guide includes the framework for conducting semi-structured interviews for qualitative analyses, which has been developed by Kallio et al., (2016) was the main supporting pillar to create the questions for interviews. Several studies of different spheres have been applied to this method (Koseoglu et al., 2019; Martínez-Falcó et al., 2023; Mohamed et al., 2019; Nelson et al., 2020). As well as, the study in wine tourism researching omnichannel customer journey (Linnéa Jansson Pålsson, 2023).

Kallio et al., (2016) proposed 6 stages of developing semi-structured interviews, which have been applied in this research in the following order: 1) identifying the prerequisites for using semi-structured interviews, which were mentioned below; 2) retrieving and using previous knowledge, which have been analyzed in literature review and revised previous research applying semi-structured interview; 3) formulating the preliminary semi-structured interview guide; 4) pilot testing the interview guide with one of the workers of

the enterprise, which help to amend some of the questions; 5) presenting the complete semi-structured interview guide (Annex 6).

3.3.2 Sampling and Procedure

A semi-structured interview guide has been applied in order to discuss customer experience and some main aspects of it with wine/wine tourism professionals at Schloss Gobelsburg from the perspectives of the enterprise and their visions on CX. The respondents were asked questions about their experience with tourists and some key aspects, as well as, potentially important things for CX. The majority of questions were focused on the professional experience of respondents to work with wine tourists in the wine industry, as well as some direct questions about aspects of CX. The interviews lasted approximately 20-30 minutes. Interviews were recorded and transcribed with the permissions of all the participants. The interviews continued until it reached saturation point (6-7 interviews) in order to confirm that no or little new information was obtained. The saturation point was calculated using the approach proposed by Guest et al., (2020) and stopped until the level of new information obtained through the interviews showed 2 %. According to the Guest et al., (2020) if the level of new information states less than 5%, it means that the saturation point was reached (Annex 7). After the saturation point had been reached, one more interview was conducted to confirm it. As a result, the percentage of new information obtained stated 0%

The respondents will stay anonymous and will be mentioned as Participant 1, Participant 2, etc. Some general information about the gender and age gap is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic information about participants of interviews

Age groups	Number of participants
0-24	-
25-34	1
34-44	1
45-54	3
55+	3
Gender	
Female	5
Male	3
Total number	8

The interviews were analyzed by using an inductive approach, namely thematic content analysis, which allows to analyze the transcripts, identify the main themes in the data and gather together examples from the text. This approach has been explained by Burnard et al., (2008).

After transcription and checking all the qualitative data provided by the interviews, the process of coding was started, which is the first step of data analysis. The coding was done manually without applying any software, in the format of a table, when each answer to each question was analyzed and the key themes were identified (Annex 8).

When the respondes went off the track during the interview from the main question or topic, it was not possible to put the code. As a result, 62 different codes were identified and grouped in the following 10 categories: wine and wine tasting; visual part (architecture, landscape); professionalism (organization, adaptability, hospitality, staff knowledge, enough time, information beforehand, first interaction, customer service, differentiate groups); atmosphere; philosophy of the place (respect, history, culture, positioning, traditions); environment (cleanness); emotions and feelings; role of person; element of surprise; educational part.

3.4 Results

Customer experience in wine tourism

As a result of the interviews about CX at the winery some similarities were detected during analysis of the answers. The majority of participants agreed that the customer experience is a complex phenomena and it is difficult to distinguish the most or least important elements or dimensions, as well as, the participants mentioned the connection between all the elements:

“... it is the sum of parts that makes the overall experience” [Participant 3, Transcribed from the interview]

“... I think that to have a complete experience every single part plays a role. I do not think that one is more important than another [Participant 3, Transcribed from the interview]

“... And at the end of the tasting, they get a whole picture of us, what we are doing. It's really like a complex thing “[Participant 4, Transcribed from the interview]

“Well, I think whatever they expect beforehand they will be satisfied because there's a bit of history, a bit of architecture. There's something nice to see, you can take great pictures to post or to show and there's definitely interesting wines to be tasted, a lot of background information. Ideally if we can show them the vineyards, ..., so they will also see a bit of landscape” [Participant 5, Transcribed from the interview] .

For instance, Participants 2, 3, 6, 7 agreed that in customer experience in wine tourism it is necessary to tailor the experience in accordance to the guests. The most

detailed answer was given by the Participant 6 with the example of different groups like senior visitors, sommelier, tourists, architecture-interested people, meaning that each of the group has to have the tour, which adapts to the interests of the people, but at the same time can show the philosophy of the place.

Furthermore, Participants 3 and 4 mentioned the importance of identifying these needs even before the visit. They highlighted how the pre-visit communication can play a vital role in the whole experience. For example, to explain to visitors about the time needed for the tour, certain conditions like the warm clothes for the cellart and etc.

In addition, Participants 3, 5, 6 and 7 confirmed that the wine tourism experience is a complex thing, which includes a lot of elements related to seeing, hearing, learning, tasting and engaging during the experience.

Wine and wine tasting

Wine was identified as the main element of customer experience in WT, as well as, was mentioned as a main motivation to visit the wine tourism enterprise:

“So for us as a winery, I still see that wine is the most important thing. Showing the visitors our focus, what we are actually doing.” [Participant 4, Transcribed from the interview]

“I think at least they come for the tastings of the wine. Tastings and the explanation about wines and single vineyards” [Participant 1, Transcribed from the interview]

“...as well as being able to taste some of the best wines of the world” [Participant 3, Transcribed from the interview]

“I mean we are a winery, of course I should say that wine is the most important part...” [Participant 3, Transcribed from the interview]

“To get an experience about historic side, historic cellar, top quality wine, which has to be the first point” [Participant 4, Transcribed from the interview]

“You can make this experience through the bouquet and the taste on your palate.” [Participant 5, Transcribed from the interview]

“... at the end it's always the wine that I think is the most important. At least that's what we aim for.” [Participant 6, Transcribed from the interview]

It is confirmed by Participant 3 mentioning that from the wine tourism enterprise it is important that the customers understand the wine better after the visit. As well as, visitors are fascinated about the wine.

Interviews with wine professionals showed that wine was connected to all other elements like the visual part, educational, and cultural, but still remains the central part. In addition, wine together with wine tasting was identified as the most immersive part from the whole tour by the Participants 1, 3, 4, 6 and 7.

“...there is also a second moment when you are tasting wine, when we go through the different stages of quality level and when we finally end up in the single vineyard wines and people experience that they can distinguish one wine from another because of where grapes grow, on which soil and then which climate.” [Participant 3, Transcribed from the interview]

Furthermore, as the main element of the experience, wine has a strong impact on the overall CX. Meaning that the customers come to the place to enjoy the tasting and depending on the wine choice and adaptability of the employees during the wine tasting impacts the overall experience.

“In general, we ask visitors if they are interested in special wines. And then we go into it. For example, if they are more interested in sparkling wine, we focus more on the sparkling wine”.

[Participant 5, Transcribed from the interview]

In addition, the quality factor of wine plays an important role according to Participants 3, 4 and 7.

Visual aspect

The visual part was identified as the important contributor to CX in wine tourism, by all the respondents. The respondents described the visual part as an element, which consists of interior of the castle and tasting rooms, exterior of the place, landscapes, as well as, cellar.

“From my experience, it was the cellar part, cloister part.” [Participant 2, Transcribed from the interview]

“Yes, they are fascinated about the castle, the whole appearance, again the cellar.”

[Participant 4, Transcribed from the interview]

“First of all, when people come to see our place as a visual view, this is the best. The most important thing for me is to bring customers to the estate to see the castle, to see the inner court, to see the cellar, to see the labels by grabbing the bottles. For me, visual things are important. I understand that this is important for customers as well to see it like that.

Whatever you can directly see at the place here, it is fantastic.” [Participant 4, Transcribed from the interview]

The participant 1 mentioned that the visual experience starts before the starting of the tour or learning the story of the place:

“... It starts already when they park their car there and first you see the lions, and then the castle and the courtyard, and then we are tasting and going to the cellar, so I think it is going during the whole tour, beginning from the start” [Participant 1, Transcribed from the interview]

The visual experience starts at the time customers park their cars and see the castle, and continues with the beginning of the tour in the courtyard, then with the view of the

landscapes and vineyards, visiting cellar and finishing with the tasting in the tasting rooms, which impress people with its interior.

“...the rooms and the cellar speak for themselves” [Participant 3, Transcribed from the interview]

In the words of Participant 5, the visual part is extremely important to encourage people to visit the place and experience it from the visual point of view.

“Well, if you get up into the garden on the top, we can show them where the Heiligenstein is, the Grub, the Renner, the Gaisberg. That's a very important visual part for the experience of the guests.” [Participant 5, Transcribed from the interview]

As well as, visual parts contribute to experiencing the history of the place and cultural part, contributing to the entertaining part of the tour. According to Participant 3 and 7, the tour, namely the cellar part, provides people with visual entertainment.

Professionalism

Professionalism refers to the organization and management of the tour from the point of view of employees. All the participants mentioned the importance of this aspect.

Firstly, the participants described the CX from the customer-centric approach, highlighting the importance of providing personalized experience (customer preferences, language, tour content etc) and as a result have customer satisfaction.

“By asking questions, you find out what people need. And this is the first thing you need to do. Not like inquiring, but showing interest about them and then they let you know what they want and what they need, and this is actually customer service. Customers are always at the top and we are here to give them wellbeing, to show them this beautiful place and to show them experiencing this beautiful place in the atmospheric way and we can do it: if we are smiling, if we are friendly, if we adapt to their needs. Even if they do not speak the language, we can find out how we can communicate with them. Sometimes it is not that easy, but somehow we will manage. It is always to try, and you have to find out what the customer needs.” [Participant 4, Transcribed from the interview]

Secondly, all the participants agreed on the effectiveness of the communication and interaction with customers. For example, Participants 3 and 7 mentioned the importance of asking direct questions to better understand people, their needs, while Participants 4 and 6 explained the importance of adaptability and quick response to customers' behavior.

“Well, that is very much dependent on what we can find out about the customer. Normally, when they are booking a tour we get in contact prior to the visit and we try to find out what they are looking for. If they just stop by, we have to find out within our first interaction what they are looking for, by asking them.” [Participant 3, Transcribed from the interview]

“I asked them if they have special needs or preferences, to know what to do. For example, to

have or to taste some special wines (lighter, heavier). That is all we can ask them and, in this way, we can go on with what guest's want." [Participant 7, Transcribed from the interview]

Thirdly, good organization and preparation in advance were mentioned by the Participants 3,4,5,6, especially regarding having enough time for the people, provisioning with enough chairs during the tastings, enough staff for the tour, fresh bread for tasting, enough water, clean place etc.

"... it's very little things, but they make a big difference" [Participant 6, Transcribed from the interview]

Educational aspect

All the participants mentioned the significance of educating people during the visits, since educating people about history of the place, wine classification, wine production and wine culture, since it is the part of presenting culture to the people. As well as, the main goal of the winery to provide people with new knowledge:

"But in our best interest that the customers will remember something that they did not know..." [Participant 3, Transcribed from the interview]

According to Participant 1, learning while tasting enhances the overall customer experience, since this is the main reason for people to visit wineries. However, in order to lead to a memorable experience and customer satisfaction, the way of presenting information should be adapted towards customers. The same idea was presented by the Participant 3 and 7, explaining that people enjoy learning new things while tasting wines, and that it adds value to the overall experience.

"Making (educating) this throughout the wine tasting is the most important. Also, it has its integration part, which is really nice." [Participant 7, Transcribed from the interview]

Then, the Participant 3 mentioned that the education part is the vital part in customer experience in wine tourism, as well as contributes to show the history and culture of the place. At the same time, Participant 4 highlighted the importance of balancing the educational part with enjoyment. That the people are not willing to be taught in a formal way, but in more enjoyable:

"But you have to give people the feeling of understanding and not again being a professor and telling them, but give them the feeling that this is interesting, fun. That it is enjoyable. Wine has to be an enjoyment. Not to analyze the wine. To enjoy the wine, to drink the wine in a decent amount. That is also what I teach. It is the culture of wine, in a wine pairing with food." [Participant 4, Transcribed from the interview]

As well as, the Participant 5 identifies the necessity to understand the historical background, wine production techniques, soils composition while tasting wines, which also contributes to the educational aspect:

“The winery exists with a historical background, and with the educational part of how to taste wines...” [Participant 5, Transcribed from the interview]

Storytelling

All the respondents acknowledged the importance of storytelling for the overall experience:

“It's a very important thing because without history, wine is nothing”. [Participant 5, Transcribed from the interview]

As well as, the great historic and cultural background contributes to providing the important storytelling during the visit. Participants highlights that the storytelling adds more context, meaning and depth to the visit and tastings, as well as, is the main entertaining part, which leads to more memorable and enjoyable experience:

“Storytelling is an important part of the wine business, because this is the best way to transport an experience apart from tasting. And even tasting, is only possible with the right story provided, so people can really have an overall experience. I think it is really important since it rounds the whole experience. Even though tasting is an integral part of the wine world, storytelling rounds the whole experience.” [Participant 3, Transcribed from the interview]

At the same time, each participant focused on a different aspect of storytelling. For instance, the Participants 1,2,5, 6 and 7 highlighted more historical, cultural, architectural, traditional elements in storytelling, while the Participant 3 sees storytelling as an entertainment. In addition, the Participant 4 mentioned the importance of repeating the stories in order to receive a recall in people's minds.

“Storytelling is important, because everyone needs a story to remember. Every story you tell them in this way so they can laugh about it, that they find out this is new, I did not know that. They will remember it. And even mentioning it twice or sometimes three times in conversation, because only after the third time will they remember.” [Participant 4, Transcribed from the interview]

Emotions and feelings

All participants mentioned that engaging customers emotionally influences the overall experience. For example, the Participants 4 and 6 highlight the importance of making people feel welcomed and talking with them, as a vital element in creating positive experience. As well as, the Participant 3 and 7 discussed the importance of serving emotions to customers in order to receive response from them.

“You have to serve the emotions to the customer, more easily get in contact with the emotions and with their inner feelings, if there is a sensory part of the whole interaction. Now

cellar visit is simply seeing, turning a corner and seeing a new room, as well as, feeling the way we are working in the cellar.” [Participant 3, Transcribed from the interview]

“When they come here to the courtyard let them feel the whole atmosphere. Listen to the swallows which are just circling above. To the birds whispering and so on. So let them experience the silence. Hopefully it is when there are no cars coming in. But this is important to give them the feeling that they are with nature. We are working with nature.” [Participant 4, Transcribed from the interview]

Element of surprise

There is the need to separate the element of surprise from the overall emotions, which visitors have during the tour. All the respondents identify it as a key factor, mentioning that the people are surprised by the place, the history or the tour itself, and that they did not expect the way it was organized and professionally done. They mentioned that being surprised during the tour led to a memorable and more enjoyable experience. Elements of surprise create connections between participants of wine tourism experience, as well as, contribute to the authenticity:

“Well, I think there is certainly some surprise. They will see things that they certainly do not expect, it has the element of surprise because they find out something about themselves that they did not know, because we lead them through the tasting. So, I think that the key element here is to be surprised and to learn something that you did not have the knowledge of .” [Participant 3, Transcribed from the interview]

*“Yes, some people do not realize what they should expect. Some come here and they think it is just a nice castle, and they do not know what this beautiful place is.”
[Participant 4, Transcribed from the interview]*

Atmosphere

The respondents highlighted the importance of atmosphere during the wine tourism experience at the enterprise. Generally, the importance of atmosphere was mentioned by the Participants 1,2,4, 6 and 7 stressing on the collective efforts in order to create welcoming and friendly atmosphere during the tour or tasting, ensuring that the guests have a sense of belonging to the place.

“I think because everyone is friendly and everyone wants the customer to have the best time.” [Participant 1, Transcribed from the interview]

“...you give people the feeling that we are taking care of their needs, we take them seriously, we look after their well-being.” [Participant 4, Transcribed from the interview]

Namely, the Participants 1,2 and 6 stressed on the main role of the staff in creating the overall sense of being valuable in customer’s minds:

“... it's always important that you feel at home or that you feel good.” [Participant 6, Transcribed from the interview]

Philosophy of the place

It is one of the most important aspects mentioned by the respondents, meaning that it is extremely important for the winery that the people understand and appreciate the place. The Participant 3 mentioned that the history and heritage of the place is a responsibility for the enterprise, meaning that this a big responsibility to convey it to the visitors:

“And our winery is 850 years old and this is definitely something we emphasize on. This is definitely an integral part and we do not deny this past, but we see this heritage and traditions also as a kind of responsibility. So, therefore we emphasize it.” [Participant 3, Transcribed from the interview]

According to Participant 1, it is significant for visitors to understand and show respect for the place, which influences the whole experience people have. The same idea was proposed by the Participant 2, mentioning that by the visual aspects and storytelling people respect the place and show admiration to its history and heritage.

Moreover, the Participant 4 stressed on the three pillars like history, traditions and cultural heritage, positioning is an integral part of the identity of the place. As well as, the importance to showcase it on the local level (level of the enterprise), as well as, global level (country level):

“I am not talking about Schloss Gobelsburg all alone, I am also transporting the history of Austrian wine. But again it always comes to the Schloss Gobelsburg, because we are one of the big parts of Austrian history.” [Participant 4, Transcribed from the interview]

Finally, Participant 5 mentioned how the workers and professionalism during tours and tastings corresponds to the conveying to the people the philosophy of the place.

Role of Person

Insights provided by the Participants stressed the role of the Person (winery owner, tour guides, other employees) in the overall guests experience in wine tourism. The main focus was given to the personal touch and emotional connection created by the role of the person. The Participant 1 mentioned how it is important to show that behind such a big company with great reputation there is a person, who is managing it, and in this way to provide a sense of personal touch:

“Mr. Moosbrugger made a very good video about the winery a few years ago, which provided a personal touch, with him as the person behind the big Schloss Gobelsburg. So, I think personality is again key, because it is what makes you unique.” [Participant 1, Transcribed from the interview]

According to Participant 4 and 7, the emotional connection provided by tour guides during the tour is extremely important, since the visitors normally associate the experience with the person who represented the estate:

“They always remember you as a person together with the estate, because wine is an emotion and it always comes, it always goes together with the person who is actually interacting with them. Your smile, your appearance, your charming approach, your professional way of tasting with them, your explanations, how you act with them, if you're teaching or not. Giving them a good feeling, and then they remember you, and then they remember the wine estate. So in the first case, it's the person”. [Participant 4, Transcribed from the interview]

Sustainability

All the respondents agreed that the concept of sustainability is getting more popular among visitors; however, the majority of Participants mentioned it is not directly linked to the wine tourism at the estate and does not have direct influence on the customer. Also, the Participants 4,5,6 mentioned the confusion in customers' minds about different sustainable practices and differences between organic and biodynamic practices. Consequently, Participants 4 and 6 mentioned the role of educating people about it and making them aware about sustainable practices at the estate.

Overall, it does not show the significant influence at the estate, and does not confirm the importance of the sustainability in customer experience proposed below. There is an explanation about it: since the winery does not emphasize the sustainable practices, which are applied at the place, in communication. So, the majority of the people are not aware of it.

Technologies

The topic about technology led to discrepancies in answers, however the Participants agreed that this is not the case for implementation technologies at the winery, since it can obscure the strong positions of the brand on history, traditions and cultural heritage. For instance, Participant 1 and Participant 7 were enthusiastic about implementing technologies like video elements, music etc.

“... I think music is always a nice idea. Sometimes videos are also helping to make it clear and explain something better, since you can show something better to customers. Both of them, music and videos I think are really interesting elements. And I think it can be important for a customer”. [Participant 7, Transcribed from the interview]

In contrast Participant 3 had a skeptical opinion about it. Participants 4 and 5 agreed that technological elements can be implemented during the tasting in order to show some elements to which customers do not have access at the estate (vineyards, soil etc).

Participant 6 was concerned about the influence of the technology in the cellar to the regular work of the cellar workers, like changing light, temperature, ventilation and its influence on the wine.

So, there is no unified answer about technologies in wine tourism, which needs to be analyzed in the future.

4. Discussions

4.1 Addressing the RQ1

The results of the conducted interviews lead to obtaining interesting insights. Generally, it is necessary to discuss the definitions of CX in order to answer the RQ1. *How do existing definitions of CX coincide with the wine tourism enterprise perspective?*

The complex and multidimensional character of CX in wine tourism was confirmed by this research and set with previously conducted research in this field. As well as, it shows that interpretation of CX by the wine tourism enterprise and the two definitions proposed by Agarwal & Mohan, (2022); K. Hamilton & A., (2014) have some common characteristics. According to the received responses, CX in wine tourism can be explained as the complex interaction between customers and wine company in the person of its employees, when the wine is the main component complemented by other aspects, where interaction is taking place in nice atmosphere and well-prepared environment, expresses the philosophy of the place and completed by wine knowledge and hospitality of the stuff, and important visual aspect. According to the scholars, CX is a set of interaction either with social character and with destination (proposed by Agarwal & Mohan, (2022) or the interaction between customer and company, so called co-creation process (proposed by A. K. Hamilton, (2023) with idea of various interactions proposed by the wine tourism enterprise. The definitions given by scholars and the WT enterprise emphasize on the holistic character of CX. As well as, highlighted the emotional part and sensory engagement in the overall experience. In contrast, the definitions provided in academia have a more broad vision, while WT enterprise focuses on more specific and practical aspects. Also, mentioning the importance of pre- and post-visit interaction, as well as, the interaction on the side.

4.2 Addressing the RQ2

It is necessary to discuss the dimensions of CX in order to answer RQ2. *How do dimensions of CX in wine tourism compare to existing in tourism and business and should they be expanded with new aspects?*

The wine was identified as the central part and the main dimension, followed by 10 complementary dimensions: visual aspect, professionalism, educational aspect, storytelling, emotions and feelings, element of surprise, person and atmosphere. According to the data obtained by interviewing wine professionals, there is a connection between all those

dimensions in CX. Then, it is confirmed by a few researches related to winescape, mentioning wine as a key element and dimension (Kubát et al., 2024a; Mitrović, 2023; Terziyska, 2024). Wine is the main dimension in the overall wine tourism experience, which connects visitors to the wine tourism enterprise, influencing motivation and interaction between these two sides (Mitrović, 2023).

According to the obtained results numerous dimensions contribute to the overall CX in wine tourism (Figure 3). This phenomena can be depicted in the following way:

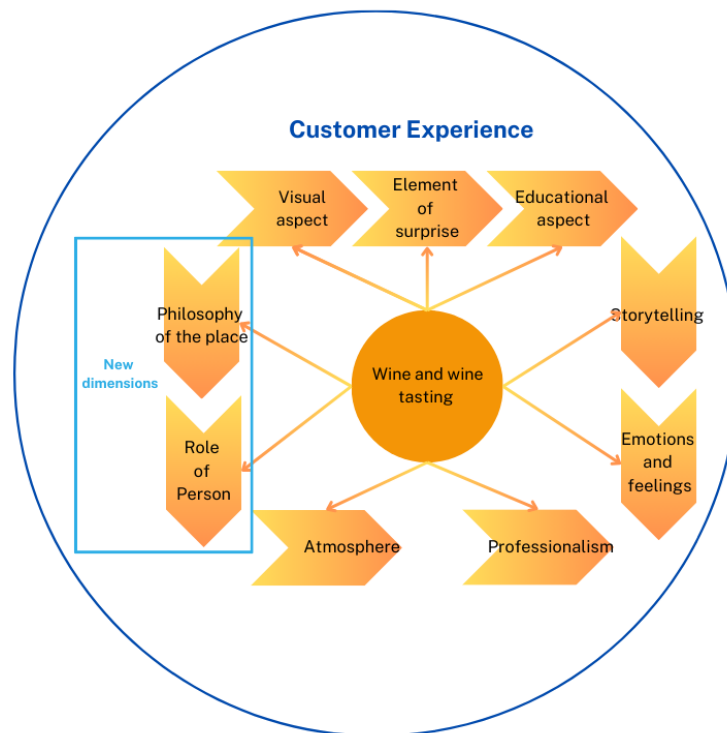


Figure 3. Dimensions of CX in wine tourism (author's own source)

It is clearly seen that there are more similarities with winescape dimensions rather than CX for general business or tourism. Ten identified dimensions of CX have a stronger connection to the winescape, meaning wine producing environment, rather than to the general dimension of CX in tourism or business, which can be explained by the particular features of the wine tourism industry and its different nature from tourism and business. These findings confirmed the idea of (Terziyska, 2024).

The results show that there are similarities between the Pine and Gilmore experience model and proposed dimensions (educational, entertainment, escapism and esthetic), which are confirmed by the data stating that educational and visual aspects are key. There is a controversy with existing research in academia (Brzovska et al., 2020; Yuqing et al., 2023), where 4E's have the central role in CX. At the same time, there is a controversy about the entertainment dimension. It proved the opinion of Terziyska, (2024) that some of the experience can not be included in the same dimension in wine tourism, since the majority of

participants mentioned that entertainment part for the visitors is an educative part (story about place, single vineyards, wine tasting etc), or the whole tour, which includes a lot of elements.

According to Hosany et al., (2015) the element of surprise has a strong influence on CX, which is confirmed by obtained data from wine tourism professionals. That it is important to surprise visitors by the story, place, visual aspect, etc and it is important to be surprised for the guests, since they feel a stronger connection to the place and keep in mind the gained experience.

The idea about storytelling components was also proven by this research. The participants commented and stressed several times about the importance of storytelling. It shows the new light on the research done by Santos et al., (2020), where the data was obtained by questioning customers and using the survey method. It provides us with the important touchpoints between customers and WT enterprise for further research about CX.

Moreover, one more important findings and touchpoint regarding wine sensorial experience that coincided with the research of earlier mentioned Santos et al., (2020).

4.3 New Findings and Insights

The new findings obtained by the conducted research have significant importance for academia.

Firstly, it was researched that the wine is still a central part and the main dimension in wine tourism CX, while the majority of the scholars focused on the other important aspects (Brzovska et al., 2020; Fernandes & Cruz, 2016; Kotur, 2022; Santos et al., 2020; Yuqing et al., 2023). However, Brochado et al., (2019) mentioned the importance of wine, but with focus on the wine hotel field, rather than overall wine tourism. So, the obtained findings can be considered as an important outcome of this research.

Secondly, the significant role of the Person in overall WT experience was shown. This perspective is relatively new in academia, since neither CX nor winescape research focus on this aspect. K. Hamilton & A., (2014) in their research mentioned the importance of the co-creation process. As well as, some new research has focused on the interaction between customers and brand/service/product/destination, which leads to co-creating the experience (Deng et al., 2024; 'Relationship between Sense of Place and Co-Creation Process', 2024). However, not emphasizing on personification of the experience throughout the role of person.

Thirdly, the findings of the research proposed new dimensions of CX in wine tourism as Philosophy of the place. There is a lot of focus on the cultural, historical and educational part of the experience, as well as having a broader vision through only one part of it. At the

same time, the research data shows the importance of understanding the Philosophy of the place, namely the place just simply focusing on the particular part.

Fourthly, all the practical aspects and small details were grouped in a new dimension, namely Professionalism. It states the importance of practical details, which complements the interaction between the place and customers.

In addition, there is a strong connection between all of the mentioned dimensions (Figure 3), especially in comparison to the data extracted from literature review (Figure 2).

4.4 Unproven Assumptions

In contrast to the trend on sustainability and a vast amount of research in academia, the assumption about the importance of this aspect is still questioned. All the participants mentioned the importance of presenting a cultural part for visitors, which can be seen as one of three main components of sustainability (Sebova et al., 2023). In contrast to the research done by Dinya (2023), there was no unified answer from the enterprise.

The role of technologies and its influence on CX created a lot of discrepancies in the answers, which makes it impossible to make a conclusion. On the one hand, it may improve the CX at the place like it was mentioned in a few research papers (Festa et al., 2023; Jorge et al., 2023; Sousa et al., 2024), but at the same time it can overwhelm the experience.

5. Conclusions

Despite a lot of existing research about customer experience and wine tourism, there was a gap in academia regarding the updated definitions of CX and new dimensions. This research contributes significantly to academia by covering the research gap and giving new angles for the analysis of the existing phenomena of CX. The research suggests the new way of understanding main contributors to customer experience in wine tourism from the point of view of service providers, rather than customers, answering the following research questions: RQ1. *How do existing definitions of CX coincide with the wine tourism enterprise perspective?* RQ2. *How do dimensions of CX in wine tourism compare to existing in tourism and business and should they be expanded with new aspects?* The obtained results are useful for understanding the CX and may be applied both for theoretical and practical implementations.

5.1 Theoretical Implication

The findings of the research brings useful insights to the academic world. Firstly, it expands the existing knowledge on customer experience, since proposed new definition of the phenomena in wine tourism. Secondly, it expands the theoretical framework of CX in wine tourism, since it suggests new dimensions. Thirdly, the outcomes of this research confronts the existing vision of CX in wine tourism, and proposes the new approach with the

interaction between all dimensions and wine/wine tasting as a central part. Fourthly, by introducing new dimensions it shows a new way of understanding important factors of CX in a niche field, as wine tourism. Moreover, the empirical research shows the possibility to apply the findings in real-world situations. In addition, the research emphasizes the existing gaps in academia such as the role of sustainability and technologies, which gives a possibility for further research.

5.2 Managerial Implication

Customer experience is a crucial part for the success of the business, especially in wine tourism. Therefore, managers of wine tourism enterprises should pay attention to providing the customer experience, which in the long run leads to brand loyalty, increasing revenue, positioning and differentiating a brand from the competitors etc. Thus, this study offers some valuable insights to the managerial point of view of CX. Firstly, the findings can be used as a framework for wine tourism enterprises to design new or improve the existing service by understanding the new dimensions of CX. Secondly, incorporating such dimensions as philosophy of place and role of person, brands can increase the positioning on the market, as well as, show the significant difference from the competitors. Thirdly, in the case of the Schloss Gobelsburg, it gives valuable insights about the understanding of the tourism approach to CX by workers, namely people who are actively engaged in it by showing the values of the place. In addition, the knowledge obtained in the research can be applied in the further development of wine tourism at the enterprise: improving the exciting wine tourism product, clear division and structure in the wine tourism part, as well as, further development and diversification of offers.

6. Research Limitations and Further Research Directions

The study has potential limitations. Firstly, the research has been conducted at the one enterprise with strong positioning and own vision of wine tourism, which limits the diversification in examples and opinions. Secondly, the sample collection is limited to 7 persons. Thirdly, the analysis of the interview may have biased character, since it was analyzed by the author, who was working at the same enterprise.

The future research may focus on obtaining a larger sample, as well as, compare the options from wine tourism enterprises from different wine regions. As well as, to identify the difference between the customer's and wine tourism enterprise perspective of CX in wine tourism. Moreover, to do further research with the role of sustainability and technologies in CX in the wine tourism industry and about the possibility to identify those aspects as separate dimensions.

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Annexes

Annex 1. Examples of research and methods of CX in wine tourism (2016-2023)

Article	Sphere	Dimensions	Method
Fernandes & Cruz, (2016)	Wine tourism	Dimensions provided based on literature review	Quantitative (survey)
(Brochado et al., 2019)	Wine hotel	Dimensions provided based on review analyses	Analyses of the reviews
Brzovska et al., (2020)	Wine tourism	Adapted from Pine and Gilmore	Quantitative (survey)
Santos et al., (2020)	Wine tourism	Dimensions provided based on literature review	In-depth literature and content analysis
Kotur,(2022)	Wellness wine tourism	Adopted from wellness industry	Netnographic approach
Yuqing et al., (2023)	Wine Tourism	Literature review and adopted from from Pine and Gilmore	Quantitative (survey)

Annex 2. Definition of customer experience

Authors	Paper	Definition
Carbone & Haeckel (1994)	Engineering customer experiences	"The take-away impression formed by people's encounters with products, services, and businesses--a perception produced when humans consolidate sensory information".
Pine & Gilmore (1999)	The Experience Economy	"Events that engage the individual in a personal way".
Schmitt (2000)	Reframing brand experience: the experiential meaning of Harley-Davidson.	The result of encountering, going through, or living specific situations that connect a company and brand with a customer's lifestyle.
Robinette et al., (2001)	Emotion marketing. The Hallmark Way of Winning Customers for Life	As the various aspects of interaction between companies and customers, involving the exchange of sensory inputs, information, and emotions
Berry et al., (2002)	Managing the Total Customer Experience	Clues that are sent to customers: functionality (related to product), emotions ("mechanics" - clues emitted by things and "humanics" - clues emitted by people)), incl. smells, sounds, sights, tastes, textures, environment.
Gentile et al. (2007)	How to Sustain the	A set of interactions between a customer and a product or company, which provokes personal involvement across rational, emotional, sensory, physical, and spiritual levels, evaluated

	Customer Experience: An Overview of Experience Components that Co-create Value With the Customer	through the alignment of expectations with stimuli at various touch-points.
Meyer and Schwanger, (2007)	Understanding Customer Experience	"Customer experience is the subjective response customers have to direct or indirect contact with a company. It encompasses every aspect of an offering: customer care, advertising, packaging, features, ease of use, reliability."
Veroef et al., (2009)	Customer Experience Creation: Determinants, Dynamics and Management Strategies	"Holistic in nature and involves the customer's cognitive, affective, emotional, social and physical responses to the retailer, including controlled by retailers elements (e.g., service interface, retail atmosphere, assortment, price), and uncontrolled (e.g., influence of others, purpose of shopping), encompassing the total experience: search, purchase, consumption, and after-sale phases of the experience, and may involve multiple retail channels"
Teixeira et al. (2012)	Customer experience modeling: from customer experience to service design	Co-created through customer interactions with various service elements, internal and subjective response to designed elements and other environmental factors
Hamilton & Wagner (2014)	Staging consumer experiences in small businesses	Refers to the design and staging of experiences that engage customers on multiple levels, including sensory and emotional aspects aiming to transform ordinary transactions into memorable and engaging experiences. Customers are recognized as active players in co-creating experiences within the retail theater.

Annex 3. Customer experience definition in tourism (*SciSpace Literature Review - Get to the Bottom of Scientific Literature*, n.d.)

Authors	Paper	Definition
Godovykh & Tasci, (2020)	Customer Experience in Tourism: A Review of Definitions, Components, and Measurements	Customer experience in tourism refers to the overall impression and satisfaction a tourist gains from their interactions with a destination or service provider during their travel experience
Agarwal & Mohan, (2022)	Influence of Social Interaction on Customer Experience in Tourism Industry	Customer experience in tourism refers to the overall beliefs, perceptions, emotions, and interactions a tourist encounters during their journey, particularly influenced by social interactions at the destination.
Rehman et al., (2022)	Customer Experience in Tourism and Hospitality: What Do We Know and What Should We Know? Insights From a	Customer experience in tourism refers to interactions between tourists and service providers, encompassing physical environment, technology, well-being,

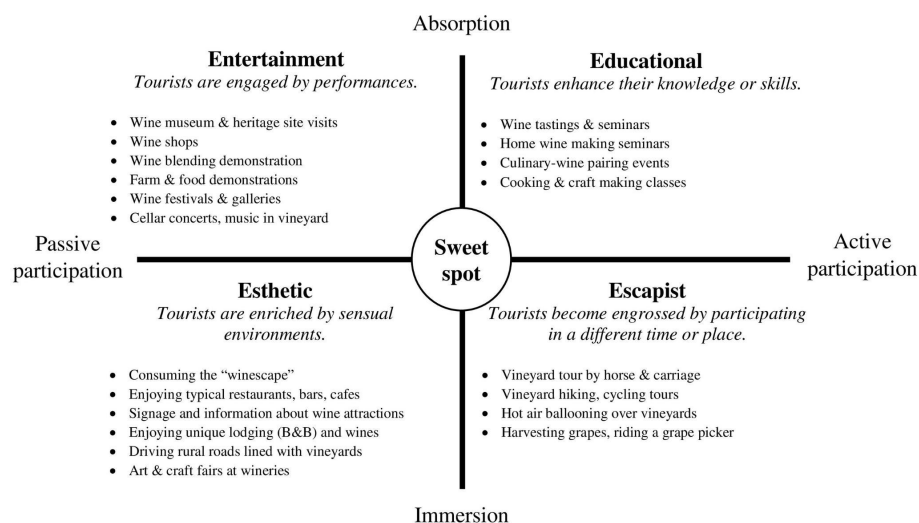
	Bibliometric Analysis	emotional value, behavioral intentions, and overall satisfaction.
Dash et al., (2023)	Big Data for Customer Experience in Hospitality & Tourism Sector: A Review	Customer experience in tourism refers to the impact of big data, especially online reviews, on service, room quality, and value evaluations, influencing guest satisfaction and brand equity.
Sebova et al., (2023)	Experience Tourism as a Smart and Sustainable Form of Tourism in the Twenty-First Century	Customer experience in tourism refers to visitors seeking unique, interactive, and sensory-rich experiences different from everyday life, supporting sustainable development by emphasizing social, cultural, and environmental objectives of destinations.

Annex 4. Dimensions of customer experience (adapted from Godovykh & Tasci, (2020)

Scholars	Research field	Dimensions
Carbone & Haeckel, (1994)	General business	Performance clues, context clues
Cohen, (1979)	General tourism	Recreational mode, diversionary, experiential, experimental, existential
Pine & Gilmore, (1999)	General business	Education, esthetic, escapism, entertainment
Schmitt (1999)	General marketing	Sense, feel, think, act, relate
Aho (2001)	General tourism	Emotional, informative, practice, transformation
Berry et al., (2002)	General business	Functionality, emotions: “mechanics” and “humanics”
Jennings and Nickerson (2006)	General tourism	Traveler, product or destination, local population
Getz (2007)	Planned events	Conative, cognitive, affective
Gentile et al., (2007)	Product brands	Rational, emotional, sensorial, physical, spiritual
Meyer and Schwager (2007)	General business	Cognitive, affective, emotional, social, physical
Verhoef et al., (2009)	General management	Social, physical, emotional

Cutler and Carmichael (2010)	General tourism	Influential realm: physical aspects and product/service aspects Personal realm: knowledge, memories, perceptions, emotions, and self-identity
Palmer (2010)	General consumer behavior	Involvement, emotions, interpersonal relationships
Kim et al., (2012)	Tourist memories	Hedonism, refreshment, local culture, meaningfulness, knowledge, involvement, novelty
Hosany et al., (2015)	Destination	Joy, love, positive surprise
Fernandes & Cruz, (2016)	Wine tourism	Environment, service providers, learning, entertainment, functional benefits, trust
Brochado et al., (2019)	Wine hotel	Wine, lodging (hotel, area and room), food service (restaurant and breakfast), scenery (views and vineyards), staff, transportation and recommendation.
Brzovska et al., (2020)	Wine tourism	Education, esthetic, escapism, entertainment
Santos et al., (2020)	Wine tourism	Winespace, wine storytelling, wine sensory experience, and wine involvement
Kotur, (2022)	Wellness wine tourism	Body (Food, Activities, Detox, Service); Mind (Growth, Revitalization); Spirit (Immersion, Spiritual, Community); Environment (Price, Grounds, Rooms, Overcrowding, Staff)
Yuqing et al., (2023)	Wine Tourism	Education, esthetic, escapism, entertainment, novelty and hedonism dimensions

Annex 5. Typical wine tourist activities within the 4E model of the experience economy (Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2012)



Annex 6. Guideline for the semi-structured interviews

Part 1. Experience

1. Could you describe the last interaction with a customer you had.
2. How do you interact with customers for the first time?
3. When guests book a wine tour with us, what do you think they are most excited about or looking forward to before they arrive?
4. How does our winery's customer service match what visitors want for a unique wine tour?
5. What do you think guests value most when they visit a winery like ours for a tour and tasting?
6. How do you believe our team contributes to creating a welcoming and engaging atmosphere for guests during their visit?
7. How do you adapt to guest needs and preference during the tour/tasting? Could you share an example?
8. What parts of our wine tours do you think guests like the most?
9. Can you describe a moment during a wine tour when you felt that guests were fully immersed in the experience?
10. Which unique experience is provided here for tourists? Why do you think it is important for visitors to experience something new?
11. After guests have completed a wine tour with us, what do you think they remember most fondly about their visit?
12. How do you believe guests' post-tour interactions with our winery, such as follow-up communications or feedback opportunities, contribute to their overall satisfaction?

Part 2. Dimensions

13. What role does storytelling play in creating the overall experience for guests during a wine tour?
14. How does our winery show the cultural part, and how does this influence the guest experience?
15. How does our winery show the visual part of the experience, and how does this influence the guest experience?
16. How does our winery show the educational part of the experience? What is the role of it?
17. How does the winery include the entertainment part in the tour?
18. Which aspect is the most and least important for visitors during the tour?
19. How do you think our approach to sustainability enhances the overall experience for guests during their visit?
20. What role do emotions and sensory experiences play in creating/influencing guests' perceptions of their visit to our winery?
21. What elements stand out as key contributors to the overall guest experience?
22. What is your opinion about technologies during the tour? Do you think that the music or some videos or VR elements will enhance customer experience here?

Annex 7. Calculation of the saturation point by the approach of Guest et al., (2020)

	Base themes			New themes #1		New themes #2		New themes #3	
Interview numbers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total
New themes per interview	25	5	15	5	3	1	0	0	54
	45			8		1		0	

New themes #1		8		18 %
Base themes		45		

New themes #2		1		2 %
Base themes		45		

New themes #3		0		0%
Base themes		45		

Annex 8. Example of coding

Data	Code
<i>What parts of our wine tours do you think guests like the most?</i>	
They always remember you as a person together with the estate, because wine is an emotion and it always comes, it always goes together with the person who is actually interacting with them. Your smile, your appearance, your charming approach, your professional way of tasting with them, your explanations, how you act with them, if you're teaching or not. Giving them a good feeling, and then they remember you, and then they remember the wine estate. So in the first case, it's the person [Participant 4, Transcribed from the interview] .	Emotions Person Feelings