

Article

Vineyards and Wineries in Alba County, Romania towards Sustainable Business Development

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Abstract: Starting from a definition of wine tourism, put in the context of sustainable development, a multifaceted research study was elaborated, aimed at establishing if, and how, wine businesses in Alba County, Romania, can develop on a sustainable path. A mix of desk research, qualitative, and quantitative methods and tools were blended together in this research. An investigation of the wineries' financial situations and online presence was further completed by the interviews with entrepreneurs, local public administration representatives, and residents in order to establish that business development on the wine-route is highly desired and would eventually enjoy the appreciation of both locals and tourists. Instead of conclusions, a framework for the sustainable development of Alba's wineries is sketched, focusing on those elements that motivate international and also Romanian wine tourists to visit this destination, and emphasizing the need for the establishment of a destination management organization (DMO) capable of managing the interests of all stakeholders under the conditions of sustainable development. Measures to be adopted by winemakers are also provided and a list of ancillary services to be considered is also suggested.

Keywords: wine tourism; sustainable businesses; small, medium and large enterprises; hospitality services; desk research; qualitative and quantitative research; demand-side perspective; supply side perspective; profitability rates; online presence; local public administration; residents' perspective; destination management organization; Alba County; Transylvania; Romania

1. Introduction

Entitled The Land of Wine, Weinland, or Țara Vinului, the wine route of Alba County spreads between the Mureș, Târnava Mare, and Târnava Mică rivers, and includes four vineyards: Aiud, Alba-Iulia, Sebeș-Apold, and Târnavă, comprised collectively of 18 administrative territorial units (ATUs) from the county's total of 78 ATUs [1], which add up to 90 localities; of these, 5 are municipalities and towns, with their surrounding villages:

- **Aiud**, with: Ciumbrud, Gâmbaș, Gârbova de Jos, Gârbova de Sus, Gârbovița, Măgina, Păgida, Sâncrai, and Țifra;
- **Alba Iulia**, with: Barabanț, Micești, Oarda, and Pâclișa;
- **Blaj**, with: Deleni, Flitești, Mănărade, Obârșie, Petrisat, Spătac, and Tiur;
- **Sebeș**, with: Lancrăm, Petrești, Răhău, and Sîntimbru; and
- **Teiuș**, with: Beldiu, Căpuș, Coșlariu Nou, and Petelca.

Respectively, the remaining 13 ATUs are communes, with their villages:

- **Câlnic**, with: Câlnic and Deal;
- **Cetatea de Baltă**, with: Cetatea de Baltă, Crăciunelu de Sus, Sântămărie, and Tătărlăua;
- **Cricău**, with: Craiva, Cricău, and Țibru;
- **Galda de Jos**, with: Benic, Cetea, Galda de Jos, Galda de Sus, Lupșeni, Măgura, Mesentea, Oiejdea, Poiana Galdei, Răicani, and Zăgrîș;
- **Gârbova**, with: Cărpiniș, Gârbova, and Reciu;
- **Ighiu**, with: Bucerdea Vinoasă, Ighiel, Ighiu, Șard, and Țelna;
- **Jidvei**, with: Bălcaciu, Căpâlna de Jos, Feișa, Jidvei, and Veseuș;
- **Mihălț**, with: Cistei, Mihălț, and Obreja;
- **Sâncel**, with: Iclod, Sâncel, and Pânade;
- **Sîntimbru**, with: Coșlariu, Dumitra, Gălțiu, Sîntimbru, and Țoțoi;
- **Șona**, with: Alecuș, Biia, Doptău, Lunca Târnavei, Sânmiclăuș, Șona, and Valea Sasului, respectively
- **Valea Lungă**, with: Făget, Glogovăț, Londroman, Lunca, Tăuni, and Valea Lungă [2].

The Road of Wine governmental program was initiated in Romania towards the end of the year 2000 but not much happened afterwards. The association Land of Wine Alba County was established seven years later by the County Council of Alba [2]. The Wine Road in Alba County reaches some 200 km [3] (p. 197). Overall, the coverage of wine tourism in Romania is still low, unlike the case of renowned international destinations approached by many scholars. Thus, according to Preston-Whyte [4], Bruwer [5], and Kirkman [6] quoted by Ungureanu [3] (p. 197), the Anglo-Saxon literature emphasizes the contribution of wine routes to the improvement of winemakers' marketing strategies, their economic performance, and effectiveness. At the same time, most European wine routes are tourist attractions that have evolved from individual attractions, becoming genuine diversified destinations themselves [7] (p. 19) in [8] (p. 75), therefore capitalizing on their cultural elements and landscapes, enriched by their renowned wines and terroirs, etc., as summarized by Ungureanu [3] (p. 197), combining the work of Gatti and Incerti [9], Correia Luís, Ascensão Mário J. Passos and Charters MW Steve [10], respectively that of as well as Boschi and García [11].

The present paper is aimed at analyzing wine businesses from Alba County and establishing whether they are, or can become, sustainable businesses, and, thus, to contribute to the further development of the Romanian specialized literature approaching this topic, previously discussed by authors such as: Ranca et al. [12], Soare et al. [13], Mănăilă [14], Ungureanu [3], etc. The paper consists of the following sections dedicated to: Establishing the theoretical framework of this research article, presenting the chosen research methodology, presenting the main findings of each stage of the research, and formulating some concluding remarks.

2. Literature Review

Wine, food, and cuisine represent a tourist vector and a cultural component [15] (p. 22). As a subtype of gastronomic tourism [16] (p. 144), wine tourism is closely related to agricultural and vinicultural activities. According to a recent United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Report [17] (p. 17), gastronomy ranks third, after culture and nature, as tourist motive to visit a destination. Consequently, it should be regarded mainly as a special form of rural tourism if it takes place on the premises of the vineyard, in the wine-preparation and storing cellars. Understanding and capitalizing on the increasing demand for (quality) wine, winemakers and other entrepreneurs have sensed the opportunity to initiate either businesses in the foodservice area, by opening cellars as places where customers can be served various types of wine with snacks, starters, or regular meals, or by opening stores dedicated to wine distribution. Some of the latter are either presentation shops of various winemakers having limited offers, focusing only on a specific vineyard or vinicultural wares, or just wine stores that sell wines produced by local, regional, national, or international winemakers. Of special interest for the current research paper are the cellars placed in vineyards,

specifically those opened in the proximity of winemaking areas that capitalize on, and valorize, the local brands; these may function in villages or in rather small towns.

According to Gatti and Incerti [9] (pp. 213), the beginnings of the wine road date to the late 1930s in Germany and to the 1950s in France. Generically named Wine Road, a wine route is the trail that links together winemakers, vineyards (where tourists can discover every single detail related to the origin of the tasted wine: terroir, landscapes, grape varieties, tools, processes, process flows, and storing, serving, and distributing conditions) [3] (pp. 195–210). For a clearer understanding, Ungureanu cites Gatti and Incerti's [9] (pp. 213–224) translation of the definition elaborated by the French National Center for Rural Tourism [18] for the concept of wine road: "a signposted itinerary along a delimited area (region, province, area with controlled designation of origin), inviting tourists to discover the wine(s) produced in this area and the activities that can be related to this. This discovery is carried out directly in the farms (enabling the traveler to meet the producer) and/or in spaces specifically organized to raise the profile of wine products (wine tasting centers or wine museums)." [3] (p. 195) [9] (p. 219).

Wine tasting and tourism on the wine route are cultural experiences themselves. Gatti and Incerti [9] (p. 219) further explain that: "Like any other cultural itinerary it must correspond to a real or imaginary path, able to reveal, through a specific heritage, the elements which make up the identity of a geographical area. It is also the way in for the visitor's discovery of the other things which a region has to offer. For this reason, it is important to create a network of itineraries which intersect with others and complement each other so that the visitor does not have a chance to get tired of a too full and single-themed itinerary.". Such an itinerary implies several aspects: Visiting a winery, with or without wine tasting activities; learning about, and discovering, the vineyard and understanding the terroir; if possible, visiting a museum or a wine tasting center; the possibility of buying wines of the house; the possibility of trying local dishes and culinary specialties; and the provision of lodging services [9] (p. 219). The triggering factor for the trend of increasing demand for wine tourism which has been registered all over the world over the past 20–25 years is determined to be "the desire on the part of the general public to learn more about wine, which has become a leisure product, and the wish to escape through the discovery of lifestyle symbolized by the world of wine" [9] (p. 220). Furthermore, the consumption of food and beverages is directly influenced by factors such as taste, cost, state of health and healthcare priorities, satisfaction, and convenience, to which lifestyle may be added, that all generate a specific behavioral pattern and a certain manifestation of human identity and personality [16] (p. 143).

Hospitality services are strongly linked to the persons who interact with the tourist, consequently their quality is strictly dependent on the professionalism of the service provider. Many (in fact, the large that majority) of the wineries present on any wine route are small family businesses. Thus, the owner–manager is most often the face of the wine business. Again, Gatti and Incerti provide a series of lessons to be learned from the more experienced French cellar owners; in this respect, a manager of a winery providing services on the wine route must: Be very well documented and have an excellent knowledge of wine of the region, of the terroir, of the breeds of vine, and especially of wine tasting procedures and skills; have a great, friendly attitude towards groups—be friendly, open, pleasant and easy going; moreover, they must enjoy, and be capable of, speaking in public and answering questions; have language skills and the ability to be fluent in English and one or more foreign languages, with a good understanding of the technical and specialized vocabulary of winemaking; be willing and able to advise (less educated and informed) people in their wine purchases; furthermore, they must be able to invest for the mid-term before expecting to make any gains [9] (p.222) [19].

Getz et al. [20] clarify the definition of wine tourism and of the wine tourism system emphasizing that many theoretical studies have only focused on the consumer's perspective. For example, Hall and Macionis [21] defined wine tourism as the "visitation to vineyards, wineries, wine festivals and wine shows for which grape wine tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of grape wine region are the prime motivating factor for visitors"; thus, wine tourism seems to be a niche market, targeting exclusively those primarily motivated by their wine-related interest. In the same authors' view, "wine

tourism is also a destination planning and marketing strategy, and it is a marketing and sales strategy for wineries and wine companies. All three perspectives must be considered, so research should be directed at both consumer and industry characteristics." [20] (p. 20). Getz et al. provide a more generous definition, according to which: "Wine tourism is a form of consumer behavior based on the appeal of wine and wine regions, and a development and marketing strategy for the wine industry and destinations in which wineries and wine-related experiences are the dominant attractions." [20] (p. 21). The generic factors that influence wine tourism must be briefly reiterated in the context of "wine countries" or wine regions and wine roads/routes, which are described as: "places that are characterized by the presence of vineyards, wineries, and often small towns that serve the local population and visitors as well. These are working landscapes, but to many they seem to offer much more. At their richest, they can be synonymous with civilized enjoyment; food, wine and conversation often come together here in harmonious ways." [22] in [20] (p. 22). Brown and Getz [23] (p. 271) sketch profiles of countries as wine regions depending on their likelihood to be visited by the North American/Canadian sample members, based on factors such as preferred wines by country of origin and previously visited destinations; thus, the destinations are split into: classic wine destination; always a winner (France and Italy); close to home; wine tourism will continue to grow (Canada and United States); modest potential; constrained by distance and lack of differentiation (Chile); major growth potential for wine tourism (Australia); performing well below potential (Germany); potential could be enhanced through packaging with Australia (New Zealand); potential to grow but lacks regional differentiation (Spain); potential to grow; constrained by distance but benefits from appealing image (South Africa); terra incognita; constrained by distance and lack of knowledge (Argentina); the rest of Europe needs differentiation (Portugal, Greece, Slovakia, United Kingdom, Slovenia, Hungary, and other Europe). Romania is not even mentioned.

The key factor for a wine destination's successful development is linked to the establishment of a Destination Management Organization (DMO) capable of properly balancing all stakeholders' interests and priorities with the desires and expectations of the visitors. Such a DMO must handle issues such as: The sustainable use of natural resources, both for winemaking and also for tourist activities; the long lasting and harmonious development of wineries and hospitality and leisure facilities; the production, consumption, and trading of wine on the local, regional, national, and international markets; the preservation, restoration, and valorization of the cultural, natural, and historical heritage; the development of the needed access infrastructure in order to grant tourist accessibility and also to enable winemakers to ship products away; to develop and implement demand and supply management strategies, particularly to ensure tourist flow management and crowd management solutions, to determine the destination's carrying capacity, and to develop appropriate strategies for critical mass management; to establish, implement, and verify quality standards and to create and promote destination notoriety and reputation; to develop and implement demand seasonality strategies; to contribute to the creation of an appropriate legal framework that balances the interests of both demand and supply sides; to develop and organize marketing efforts for the successful positioning of the destination's offer; to assess tourists' visiting motivations and to help suppliers respond to them. [20] (pp. 22–27).

Another central issue of socioeconomic and environmental development is that of sustainability. Without any doubt, wineries and any other businesses on the wine route ought to consider responding to sustainable development needs. In this respect, many specific and multidimensional indicators have been developed over time for the measurement of economic progress, social, and environmental dimensions [24]. Alonso and Liu [25] (pp. 991–993) summarize sustainability issues in connection to the winegrowing and winemaking sector. Thus, an aim of sustainable winegrowing is to positively contribute to the development of the local community, and at the same time leave a small environmental footprint [26]. Sustainability reaches several areas in the wine sector. In terms of agriculture, vineyards as form of land exploitation should be economically efficient and socially desirable, while generating a low impact upon the land and not degrading the earth [27] (714) in [25] (p. 992). Furthermore, sustainable tourism is expected to focus on the needs of the tourists while protecting those of the host regions, with a special target related to natural and built heritage

conservation and their cautious valorization in tourist activities [28] (p. 460); thus, for long-term development, sustainability must skillfully match the interests and priorities of both the demand and the supply sides [25] (p. 993). Moreover, when involving large-scale events such as wine festivals, fairs, and exhibitions, wine tourism intersects the area of business and cultural event tourism, thus inheriting specific issues and challenges [29].

While Swarbrooke discusses the development of diversified tourist destinations by evolving from unique attractions [7] (p. 19) in [8] (p. 75), Carmichael and Sense [30] (pp. 162–165) bring up the competitiveness and sustainability of wine tourism destinations, and have developed, in this respect, a stage model of destination development. A first part of their research covers the stages of development of a competitive and sustainable touring destination, pointing out that the stages of development are determined by two types of interactions: Increasing levels of networking among external forces (government, exchange rates, prices, and competition), and also consider the intensification of tourist movement, reaching critical levels in growth, under the characteristics of the evolving supply side (physical and cultural resources, entrepreneurs, facilitators, and controllers of the tourism industry), and the demand side (users, market segments, visitor needs, and motivations). Obviously, the greatest challenge is to balance all of these elements over the development of the three-stages of their model: (1) Winery Independence (independent operators, that do not interact with, but which capitalize on, the destination's favorable climate, water conditions, and soil), (2) Wine Tourism Development (wineries and attractions begin to link to each other, wine roads are established, and destination marketing efforts appear, leading to increasing tourist flows), and (3) Wine Tourism Integration (wine roads further develop, destinations develop as well, and as marketing efforts, tourist, and information flows intensify, destination management and branding strategies are developed and implemented; ideally, business clusters are established and developed aiming at balancing growth and sustainability).

3. Materials and Methods

The current paper has been developed based on the results obtained using both qualitative and quantitative research methods. In this respect, secondary data analysis was doubled by face-to-face interviews with entrepreneurs and survey-based research addressing the consumer.

For a comprehensive picture, and to obtain more generous results, the secondary data-based analysis was completed using both qualitative and quantitative research methods and tools. Thus, the first step consisted of the analysis of the destination's economic situation, tourism potential, and, particularly, the capacity to develop and implement attractive and successful wine tourism routes. Relying on one of the most relevant platforms that promote wine tourism in Romania, known as Crame România/Romanian Wineries [31], on ListăFirme.ro [32] and on the website dedicated to the promotion of wine tourism in Alba County [2], the authors identified a total of 21 vineyards, wineries, and cellars active in Alba County. Moreover, a total of 11 other businesses declared to be cellars (in fact, wine-shops or wine-stores) were excluded from the present analysis, as these only commercialize wines from other Romanian and/or international winemakers. The final list only included enterprises that were active on the wine market of Alba county, selling local wines either as enterprises (15 limited liability companies, LLC's) or as small individual entrepreneurs (12 authorized natural persons, both individual and family enterprises, who only have the obligation to register confidential financial declarations). Jidvei, the biggest player at national level and in Alba County was analyzed as a business group, including the five companies controlled by the Necşulescu Family: SC Jidvei SRL (mainly dedicated to winegrowing activities), SC Maria Turism SRL (the operator of the Castle and of some wines), SC Provitis SRL (the producer of wine plants), and SC Cetatea de Baltă SRL (in charge of mechanized activities). The business group Jidvei owns and controls many other enterprises but only those directly related and connected to their wine businesses were considered [32]. The owners of Domeniile Boieru, the Dănoaie Family, also seem to control three enterprises connected to their wine business: SC Domeniile Boieru SRL (focusing on grape processing for winemaking), SC Vinoblanc SRL (dedicated to winemaking), and SC Crama Ciumbrud SRL (carrying out gross sales of alcoholic drinks); thus, a second business group has been identified on

the wine market of Alba County [32]. Consequently, 16 enterprises (Table 1) were initially considered for the financial analysis (2 as business groups – Jidvei, with 5 companies and Domeniile Boieru with 3 businesses; 2 were further excluded due to the lack of financial data; thus, the remaining 6 firms were investigated individually). In the end, only for eight of the nine enterprise-players was it possible to collect financial data, as only the financial data provided by commercial enterprises are made public by the Ministry of Public Finances [33] or are available on private websites such as ListăFirme.ro [32] (Table 1). Although, financial data could not be gathered for SCDVV Blaj, the wine research center of Blaj is going to be further discussed as it is one of the most important contributors to the development of viticulture in the area. Further, the online communication tools of the selected cellars were looked up and, if identified, thoroughly investigated using a comprehensive analysis grid. This part of the study included 10 wineries for which the authors were able to gather enough data related to their online presence. Some of the results obtained during the above-described analyses are compared to those of a larger study regarding Transylvanian vineyards and wineries [34] (pp. 198–205).

Table 1. The analyzed vineyards, winemakers, wineries and cellars of Weinland¹ (Alba County).

Type of Analysis Type of Enterprise	Enterprise Name	Year of Establishment & Most Recent Enterprise	Financial Analysis	Online Analysis
Limited Liability Companies	(1.) Cramele Jidvei (Jidvei Group: SC Jidvei SRL ¹ , SC Maria Turism SRL, SC Provitis Serv SRL, SC Cetatea de Baltă SRL, and SC Promotion SRL)	1949, 1972–1974, 1991 ² , 2000, 2005	✓	✓
	(2.) Domeniile Boieru (Domeniile Boieru Group: SC Domeniile Boieru SRL, SC Vinoblanco Florian SRL, and SC Crama Ciurbrud SRL)	2004, 2005, 2009	✓	✓
	(3.) Pivnițele Logos – Crama Plebanos (SC Logos SRL)	1991	✓	✓
	(4.) Rex Vinorum (SC Rex Vinorum SRL)	2006	✓	✗
	(5.) Viticola Gârbova (Viticola Gârbova SRL)	1999	✓	✗
	(6.) Stațiunea de Cercetare și Dezvoltare pentru Viticultură și Vinificație Blaj/Stațiunea de Cercetare și Producție Vitivinicolă Blaj/Crama Blaj (SCDVV Blaj)	1946, 2003, 2017	✗	✓
	(7.) Crama Riviera/Crama Dorel Popa (SC Riviera Company SRL)	1993	✓	✗
	(8.) Crama Țelna (SC Crama Țelna SRL)	1784 ³ , 2004	✓	✓
	(9.) Crama Maier/Moșia Maier (SC Crama Maier SRL)	2015	✓	✗
Authorized Natural Persons/ Individual Enterprises	(1.) Crama Papp Peter (pF Papp Peter), Aiud	2006	✗	✓
	(2.) PFA Popa Ioan, Sebeș	2002	✗	✗
	(3.) Crama Tamás Pince (pFA Tamás András), Aiud-Ciurbrud	1933, 1992	✗	✓
	(4.) Pivnița Takács Borpince (pFA Takács Eszter Johanna), Aiud	2008	✗	✓
	(5.) Pivnița Iepure Ioan (pFA Iepure Ioan), Aiud-Ciurbrud	n.a.	✗	✗
	(6.) Pivnița Köble Tiberiu (pFA Köble Tiberiu), Aiud-Ciurbrud	n.a.	✗	✗

(7.) Pivnița Vass Attila (pFA Vass Attila), Aiud-Ciumbrod	n.a.	×	×
(8.) Pivnița Sallai (pFA Sallai Iosif), Aiud-Ciumbrod	n.a.	×	✓
(9.) Casa Negrea (Vin de Ighiu)	n.a.	×	×
(10.) Pivnița Savu (ÎF Savu), Aiud	2008	×	✓
(11.) Pivnița Toth Csaba (pFA Toth), Alba Iulia	n.a.	×	×
(12.) Cărpinișan Ioan (pFA Cărpinișan Ioan)	n.a.	×	×

¹Weinland is the German name given by the Saxons to the winegrowing region between the Târnavă and Mureș rivers, upon their establishment in Transylvania; viticulture has been practiced in the area ever since the Dacian times [35]. ²Known as SC Perla Târnavăi SRL in 1991, privatized as SC Jidvei SRL in 1999. ³The cellar and mansion date back to the late 18th Century, being today listed as heritage buildings. Source: Own determination based on the websites and online profiles of the cellars [36–41], respectively on other several relevant sources [2,31–33].

Furthermore, the researchers elaborated interview guides and collected relevant information from representatives of the key players in the field of local wine businesses; five interviews were taken with the representatives of the two major players from Alba County, namely Jidvei vineyard (from Cetatea de Baltă) and Domeniile Boieru vineyard (from Aiud); with a representative of the Research and Development Station for Winegrowing and Winemaking from Blaj; and finally with two local entrepreneurs from Aiud. The interviews aimed at establishing the profile of the supply side and its readiness for the development of wine tourism. The following acronyms are used for the interviewed persons: JV—representative of Jidvei, DB—representative of Domeniile Boieru, ST—Stațiunea de Cercetare și Dezvoltare pentru Viticultură și Vinificație Blaj (SCDVV Blaj), ND—local entrepreneur 1, and VF—local entrepreneur 2.

Based on personal interviews, the perspective of the local public administration and that of the local population can also be presented. Thus, five more persons were interviewed as public administration representatives: Two persons from Aiud (the Mayor's representative – MR and an employee of an IT department—IT) and three from Blaj (representative of the local chamber of agriculture—CA, an employee of an accounting office—CT, and a local inhabitant—GP). Their opinions are further analyzed in the context of the responses provided by three local residents: Two from Blaj (MI—local woman and MM – master student, employee of SCDVV Blaj) and one from Ighiu commune (SF—student).

The research was enriched using quantitative methods as well. Thus, a consistent questionnaire was implemented directly (face-to-face) and online (transposed in Google Forms and via various platforms and related discussion groups) among 489 Romanian respondents. The survey contained 32 structured and semi-structured, multiple-choice with one or more possible answers, scale, and open-end questions. The main aim of the survey-based research was to understand the preferences of the Romanian wine tourist in order to sketch their consumer profile.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. Alba County: General Context

During the communist ruling, the economy of Alba County developed mainly in the industrial areas, largely depending on the chemical, wood processing, machine building, and food industries, but also mining, including gold mining, and quarrying industries. After the fall of communism, the county's economy underwent major structural changes, some of its areas being among Romania's less favored destinations. During the last decade of the 20th Century, the transition process particularly affected most of the county's towns: Alba Iulia (county residence), Blaj, Câmpeni, Cugir, Ocna Mureș, Zlatna, and their adjacent villages. While some of these towns have managed to redevelop their industry as well, attracting major international private investors (e.g., Bergenbier and

afterwards Bosch Automotive in Blaj, Star Assembly, a subsidiary of Daimler, in Sebeş [42] (pp. 328–335); [43], or managing to attract and use EU funds (e.g., Alba Iulia, a city that has managed to become a champion of EU funds absorption, both for refurbishing and for development, becoming a tourist hotspot and today working on becoming a genuine smart city [44,45]). Two renowned winemakers are also among the top companies of Alba County: Jidvei (in fact, one of Romania's most important wine producers, both in terms of quantity and quality) and Domeniile Boieru, revealing an attractive activity sector, with high potential of further development. Other major players at County level include, but are not limited to, enterprises such as: Transavia, Roua Florilor, Kronospan, Albalact, Apulum, Cupru Min etc. [46]. The experts who developed the National Territory Arrangement Plan (NTAP) identified in the case of Alba County a total of 30 administrative territorial units (ATUs) with protected areas [47–49]; moreover, the county hosts access points for two highly attractive and valuable natural parks (Apuseni Mountains and Haţeg Dinosaurs Geopark); furthermore, it also features the Transylvanian Canyon (Râpa Roşie). From the perspective of the human built tourist attractions and resources, Alba County enjoys a rich presence of historic monuments and ruins. Tourism has proven to be a successful alternative for many urban and rural areas from Alba County that have faced major economic challenges after 1990. Thus, mountain tourism has developed in areas such as The Apuseni National Park but also in Arieşeni and Şureanu ski resorts; rural tourism is practiced on Arieşului Valley and around Albac, particularly on Aiud Valley, in Rîmetea and Colţeşti heritage villages, two highly attractive sustainable destinations [50] (pp. 1–13). Two of the Romanian UNESCO heritage sites are located in Alba County (namely the Saxon fortified church of Călnic [51] and the Dacian fortress of Căpâlna, Săsciori commune [52]). Moreover, other destinations from the same county are included on the UNESCO Tentative List (Alba Iulia [53], Rîmetea [54], Roşia Montană Mining Cultural Landscape [55]). Various localities in Alba County also possess valuable and attractive castles and fortresses, some of which have already been renovated and included in the tourist circuit, while others still await valorization opportunities; some of its most notorious castles and fortresses are located in towns such as: Alba Iulia (ancient Roman ruins and Vauban medieval military fortress), Aiud (medieval fortress and royal palace), Sâncrai (Bánffy castle—recently renovated and reintroduced in the tourist circuit [56] (pp. 1443–1451)), Uioara de Sus (Teleki Castle), Blaj (Metropolitan Castle—headquarters of the Greek-Catholic church), Obreja (Wsselényi castle), Sânmiclăuş, Şona commune (Bethlen castle), Cetatea de Baltă (Bethlen-Haller castle—bought, renovated, and operated by the wine producing company Jidvei as a restaurant and winetasting area, including accommodation units and office space, too), Galda de Jos (Kemény castle), Sebeş (medieval fortress), etc. [57]. (p. 5). The county also hosts significant religious landmarks (the Roman-Catholic and the Orthodox cathedrals in Alba Iulia, the Greek-Catholic cathedral in Blaj, the monastery of Râmeţ, etc.). Overall, the most developed forms of tourism in Alba County include: Urban and rural cultural and heritage tourism; religious tourism; rural and nature-based tourism; given the grape growing profile of the county, gastronomic, culinary, and wine tourism have developed significantly; winter sports; business tourism; and transit tourism are practiced as well. Event tourism is also practiced. Held at the beginning of fall in Blaj and Alba Iulia, the Golden Grape Folkloric Festival organized by Jidvei since 2000 is one of the most notorious events dedicated to folkloric music, grapes, and wine [58]. Festival tourism has also developed in Alba County over the past few years, an example being the Blaj aLive festival, which has been held seven times [59].

The main purpose of this paper is that of establishing if wine businesses in Alba County are attractive for the Romanian wine tourist and if they can develop sustainably. This section is dedicated to the discussion of the results obtained during the undertaken analyses. Based on the information found online related to the activity of the wine businesses located in Alba County, the supply side can be briefly described as it follows.

4.2. Wineries in Alba County: Facts and Figures

A previous study revealed that from the point of view of the available infrastructure: six (out of 13) of the communes with vineyards present no accommodation, nor food services, while one more, destination does not have any food service providers; furthermore technical and/or tourism related

infrastructure problems are faced by over 60% of the county's ATUs [47–49,60], [61] (pp. 727–737). The same study led to the conclusion that at the level of Alba County, only one wine cellar (two stars) and three classic restaurants named Taverna are officially ranked (three stars); no units named pivniță, Keller, pince, or cellar are registered [60], [61] (pp. 727–737).

Things have not changed much since the previous year. A brief analysis of the officially ranked accommodation facilities and food-serving units reveal the current situation at the level of the localities on the wine route [2] from Alba County [62,63]. Of the 17 ATUs, adding up to 90 localities, on the Wine Road of Alba County, only 12 ATUs (of which five are municipalities and towns and seven communes, totaling 22 villages) have at least one accommodation unit; the remaining 5 ATUs have no officially ranked lodging facility; in fact, a total of 63 localities appear not to have any registered accommodation facility [2,62]. Of the 105 officially ranked lodging facilities, a fifth (21) are located in the rural environment; 15 of these units are boarding houses (only five are agritourist pensions, while the other 10 are rural tourist pensions). The rural environment also presents lodging facilities registered as: Tourist chalets (two), hotel, hostel, motel, and rooms-to-rent (one of each). Urban areas concentrate the majority of the lodging units (80%), specifically 84 of them, split by type as it follows: Boarding houses (35), rooms to let (15), hotels (13), villas and tourist villas (six), hostels (six), apartments to rent (four), motels (four), and camping site (one). Enjoying an increasing trend since 2005 [64] (pp. 71–126), rural areas account in Alba County for 210 rooms and 440 beds, providing an average number of 10 beds per unit and an average of 2.1 beds per room. At the same time, urban destinations offer 3246 beds in 1596 rooms, having an accommodation capacity of nearly 39 beds per unit and 2.03 beds/room. Overall, Alba County has 364 accommodation units, with 3885 rooms and 8133 beds, presenting an average of 10.67 rooms per unit, with 2.09 beds per room. In terms of comfort level, the offer is a budget/economy–mid-scale one. Most of the urban facilities are ranked 3 stars and daisies (50 units), followed by four-star facilities (15), two-star (12 units), one star (5 lodgings), and only 2 facilities ranked at five stars. Rural destinations are also dominated by lodgings ranked at 3 daisies (12 units), followed by 2 and 4 daisies (3 facilities each), 1 daisy (2 units) and only one 5 daisy lodging. Food services are provided by 59 units on the wine route in Alba County [2,63], covering 10 localities that belong to eight ATUs (of which five are municipalities and towns). The offer is dominated by restaurants, with 45 units (mainly classic restaurants, one boarding house restaurant, one self-service restaurant, two cellars, eight bars, of which six were associated with restaurants, two buffet-bars, one bistro, and one gas station fast food). Again, the offer is an economy—mid-scale one, with 28 units ranking three stars, 24 facilities of two stars, four-star restaurants, two five-star facilities, and one one-star unit. Although one of the enterprises, Resort Company, runs in Alba Iulia a three star tourist boarding house, a two star classic restaurant, and a two star restaurant registered as a cellar, the website of the property reveals that this unit features, in fact, only a classic restaurant dedicated to hosting private events (weddings and baptisms) and does not provide any wine tasting services, specific to wine cellars [65]. Similarly, the second registered cellar from Alba Iulia, operated by SC Narcis Cont SRL as four star boarding house, Select, and as three star cellar, is in fact another classic restaurant dedicated to hosting private and business events in two rooms (with capacities of 70 and 300 persons, respectively) [66]. Some facilities seem to discretely link the services they provide to the wine businesses in Alba County:

- The four boarding house La Vie (translated as In the Vineyard) operated by SC Man President SRL (from Izvoarele village, in the area of Blaj); the same enterprise also runs a three star rooms-to-let type of business in Blaj, offering 5 rooms and 10 beds, a two star classic restaurant with 100 seats, and a three star bar with 50 places; although there is no officially ranked restaurant, the owners promote it online; overall, except for its location, within the premises of No 8 Farm from Izvoarele, according to its website, the business does not have anything whatsoever to do with winegrowing, winemaking, and winetasting [62,63,67];
- The three daisy boarding house Casa dintre Vii (translated as The House between the Wines) from Jidvei is operated by SC Casa dintre Vii SRL, offers 23 beds in 11 rooms and does not provide any officially registered and ranked foodservices; despite its name, except for the fact

that it provides accommodation services in Jidvei village, the unit does not provide any other wine-related services [62,63,68].

Relying on relevant online sources [2,31,36–41], 27 players in the winemaking sector were identified (see Table 1 above); of these 15 are registered as enterprises (being operated by limited liability companies) and 12 as self-employed entrepreneurs. They are, in fact, the main providers of wine in Alba County [31]. The local wine market is dominated by Jidvei, the largest player in the region. The much younger company, Domeniile Boieru, a medium-sized enterprise, is the second most important winemaker of Alba County. Most of the identified enterprises cultivate rather small surfaces (of 2 to 3 ha) and produce around 1000–3000 liters of wine per year. Obviously, the exceptions must be noted:

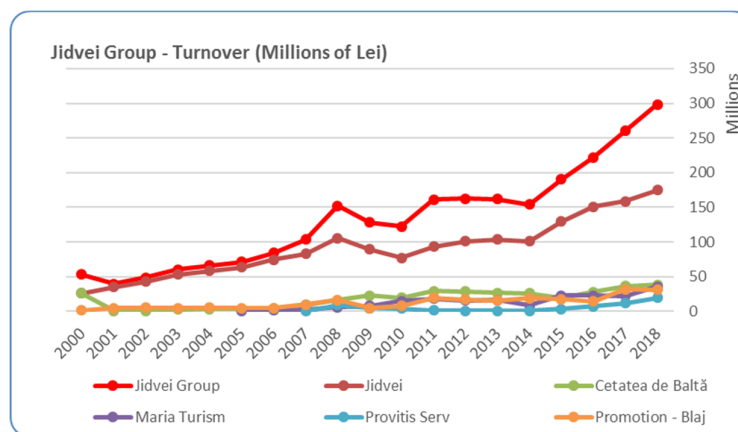
- Pivnița Takács Borpince/Takács Cellar (cultivates 17 ha and produces around 30,000 l of wine per year) [41],
- Domeniile Boieru (operates in an area with a tradition of winemaking that dates back to 1220, as mentioned by the Saxons; it exploits around 130 ha of wines and it has reached a wine production of about 50,000 l per year) [37],
- Crama Țelna (is established in Terra Vinorum [69], a destination with a winegrowing tradition that goes back to the early centuries of the second millennium, being mentioned around 1173 and 1293; the local wine has enjoyed royal popularity, being served at the wedding of Matei Corvin, the Romanian King of Hungary in 1489; the wine cellar, one of the oldest in Romania, functions in a brick cellar built in 1784 and also capitalizes on the architectural heritage of an 18th century mansion, with wine crops spread on 43 ha) [39], or
- Jidvei (a key player at national level, cultivates more than 2,400 ha in an area first mentioned by Herodot (484–425 BC) and has reached a yearly production of more than 8,000,000 l) [36].
- Stațiunea de Cercetare și Dezvoltare pentru Viticultură și Vinificație Blaj/Stațiunea de Cercetare și Producție Vitivinicolă Blaj/Crama Blaj (SCDVV Blaj) is a scientific viticultural state-owned and operated research center with significant contributions to the development of species and crops; SCDVV exploits today only nearly a quarter of the surfaces it used to crop before 1989 (some 1800 ha), operating on approximately 447 ha of vineyards; the wines produced and sold provide financial support for the station's research and development activities, particularly as exported products (the main international target markets of wines, vine cuttings, vine graftings, and parent vine graftings of pomiculture products are: Germany, Italy, Austria, and Hungary, respectively); the cellars host collections of wines from the 1940's; the center focuses on implementing ecological practices and the managers prefer to work with people instead of developing mechanized techniques; thus, the 30–40 regular employees are supported by up to 300 seasonal day-workers; a special attention and research interest is dedicated to the fight by natural means, and less with pesticides, against the Filoxera of the 21st Century [38,70].

The region is particularly renowned for its white wines. A great variety of breeds are cultivated in the area. By far, the breeds preferred by the owners are: Fetească Regală, Muscat Ottonel, Pinot Gris, Riesling Italian, and Sauvignon Blanc, closely followed by Traminer and Fetească Albă and Rhein Riesling. The list continues with: Amurg, Cabernet Sauvignon, Fetească Neagră, Gewürztraminer, Hercule, Iordană, Merlot, Neuburger, Syrah, and Traminer Roz. Wines are sold by most cellars either as plain or cuvée products; many of the wineries have developed renowned local brands: Pivnița Takács, Plebanos, Papp Peter, Vin de Ciumbrud—Domeniile Boieru (Vinul Boierului, Domeniile Boieru, Episcopal, Cardinal, Peratic-Orange Wine), Pivnița Savu, Pivnița Sallai, Jidvei (Tradițional, Premiat, Clasic, Grigorescu, Nec Plus Ultra, Tezaur, Castel, Mysterium, Owner Choice Ana, Owner Choice Maria, Vinars, and Spumant—Mărgăritar, Jidvei, and Romantine), Crama Țelna (Vinul Corvinilor and Vinul Baronului al Muzeului National Brukenthal). The area is also popular for gross distribution of wines.

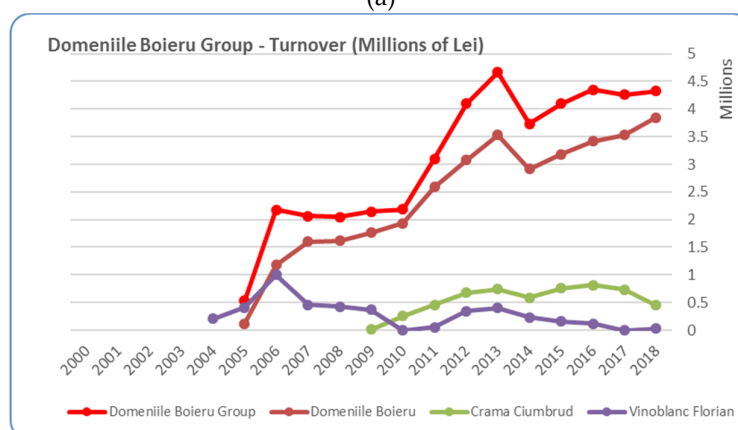
4.2.1. The Economic Performance of the Analyzed Vineyards

The main conclusions of the economic analysis of the investigated wineries are presented by enterprise size. Thus, Jidvei Group and Domeniile Boieru Group are discussed separately, while all other enterprises are regarded comparatively. The first part of this analysis consists of a brief presentation of the main indicators reported publicly by the enterprises: Turnover, net profit, gross profit (where available), liabilities, assets (fixed, current, and total assets), equities, and average number of employees. Depending on the availability of financial data, only profitability indicators can be calculated. All indicators are discussed in terms of the entire analysis period, depending on the available data.

Turnover was the first analyzed indicator (Figure 1a–c). Overall, except for Crama Plebanos, all other wineries registered an increasing trend of their business volumes. Jidvei is the leading business of the homonymous group, determining the trend of the turnover of the entire business group (Figure 1a). The growth rate of the group's turnover, calculated for the entire analysis period was +5.6, while that of Jidvei was +6.7. Maria Turism, the company that manages the Jidvei Castle from Cetatea de Baltă, and Promotion Blaj registered the most significant growth rates of their turnovers (+28.2 for Maria Turism and +30.9 for Promotion Blaj). The second business group, Domeniile Boieru, has also registered a significant growth rate between 2005 and 2018 (+8.2), the group's trend setter being the homonymous business (Figure 1b), while both of the other businesses, Crama Ciumbrud and Vinoblan Florian, registered both ups and downs in terms of sales. While Jidvei seemed to have been somewhat affected by the economic crisis of 2008–2010, Domeniile Boieru enjoyed a continuous growth, even starting a new business in 2009 (Crama Ciumbrud). Among the small players, Crama Plebanos was the most visible business, with significant variations in terms of turnover over the first decade and with a somewhat more stable activity during the most recent period. Two wineries (Crama Riviera and Crama Țelna) seem to have had somewhat larger business volumes, while the other three players kept a lower profile (Figure 1c).



(a)



(b)

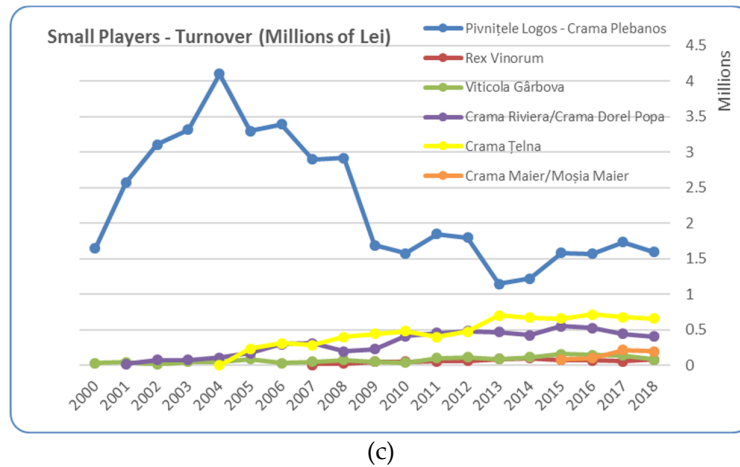
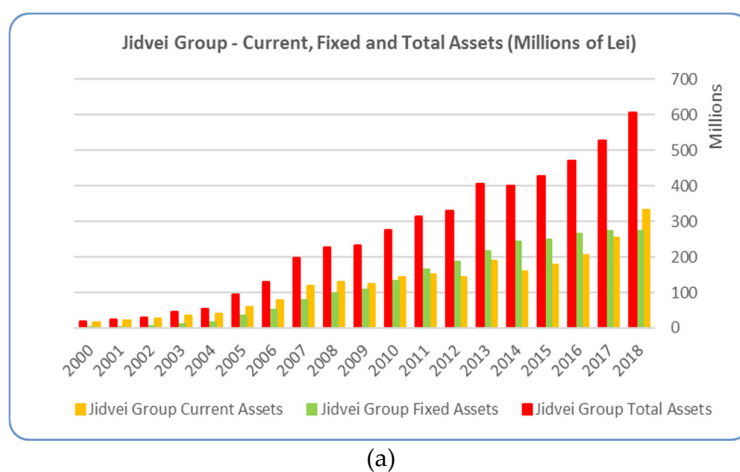
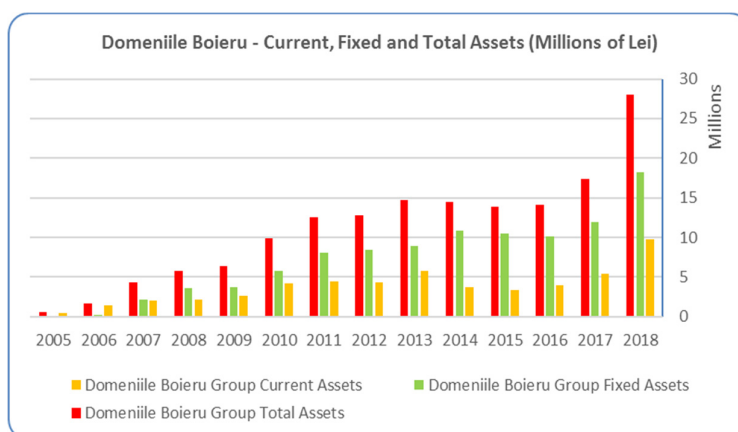


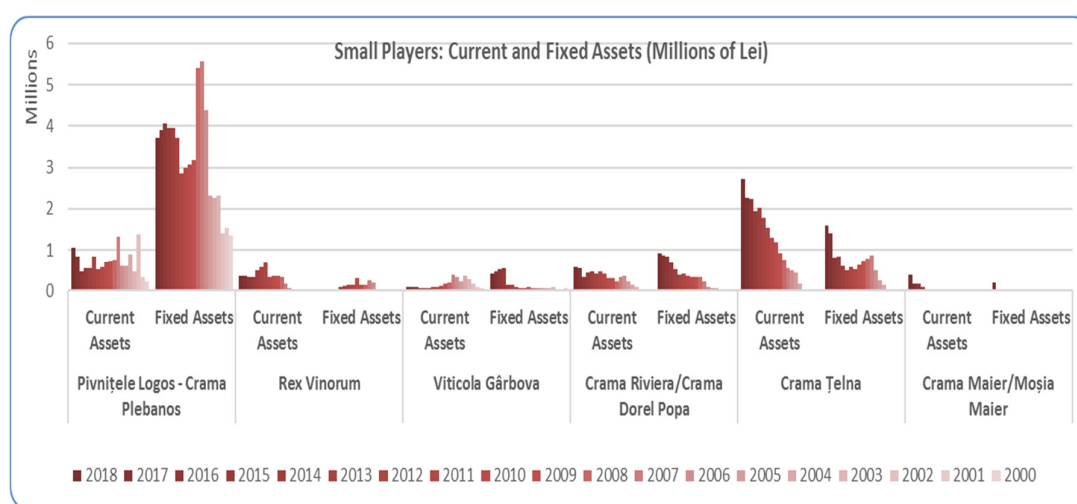
Figure 1. a–c. Turnover: (a) Jidvei group, (b) Domeniile Boieru group, (c) Small players. Source: Own determination based on the public financial reports [32,46] (1 euro = 4.72 Lei)

The analyses continue with a brief discussion of the development of the wineries' fixed, current, and total assets (Figure 2a–c). As expected, the larger the enterprise and the larger its cultivated surfaces, the higher were the values of the fixed assets—which in the case of wineries are closely related to the viticulture areas and crops, respective to the processing machines and mechanisms. In the cases of the two business groups (Jidvei and Domeniile Boieru), similar to the development of their turnovers, fixed, current, and total assets registered an ascending trend over the entire investigated timespan. While in the case of Domeniile Boieru (Figure 2b), fixed assets seemed to be higher than current ones in most years, in the case of Jidvei, the two indicators appeared in a relative balance (Figure 2a). Overall, in both cases their rising trend was consistent with the continuous extension of the cultivated surfaces. In the case of Jidvei, the growth rates of the fixed assets by 2018 compared to the initial years were significant: +201.8 for the group's fixed assets, +117.8 for Jidvei, and +250.3 for Maria Turism, while those of the current assets were +20.8 for the group's current assets, +18.8 for Jidvei, of +40.6 for Maria Turism, and +38.4 for Provitis Serv. Consequently, the growth rate of the group's total assets is +35.0, while that of Jidvei's total assets is +27.5 and +92.9 in the case of Maria Turism. Domeniile Boieru registered similar situations. Since 2005 until 2018 the group's fixed assets registered a growth rate of +337.3; Domeniile Boieru's fixed assets increased by +117.6, while Vinoblanc Florian's fixed assets grew by +426.2. The growth rates of Domeniile Boieru group's current assets were much lower: +19.8 for the group, +23.4 for Domeniile Boieru, +31.5 for Crama Ciumbrud, and only +3.7 for Vinoblanc Florian. Overall, the group's total assets have increased by +51.1, while Domeniile Boieru had a growth rate of +77.9 and Crama Ciumbrud of +28.7.





(b)



(c)

Figure 2. a–c. Current, fixed, and total assets: (a) Jidvei group, (b) Domeniile Boieru group, (c) Small players: Current and fixed assets. Source: Own determination based on the public financial reports [32,46]. (1 euro = 4.72 Lei)

In the case of Pivnițele Logos—Crama Plebanos, by correlating the decrease of its turnover with the situation of its assets, one may conclude that the winery's assets also contain significant stocks of unsold wines and not mainly the planted vines; moreover, their growth rates were +1.6 for total assets, +4.5 for current assets, and of +2.8 for fixed assets. In the cases of the other small players, the illustration of their assets was consistent with the developments of their turnovers (Figures 1c and 2c).

A brief analysis of the dynamics of the wineries' liabilities, entitles one to point out that their growth rates were consistent with the developments of their fixed assets and that they reflected the evolution of their turnovers (Figure 3a–c). In the case of Jidvei Group, the growth index of its liabilities was +9.8, while Maria Turism increased by +53.3 as opposed to Jidvei which had a growth index of +13.2 (Figure 3a). More visible growth indices appeared in the case of the second group, Domeniile Boieru, with +40.4 for the group's overall liabilities, +45.3 for Domeniile Boieru, and +65.7 for Crama Ciurbrud. Obviously, these values were related to the investments made, both in new crops and in new facilities (Figure 3b). The dynamics registered in the cases of the smaller players were like those of the previous indicators (Figure 3c).

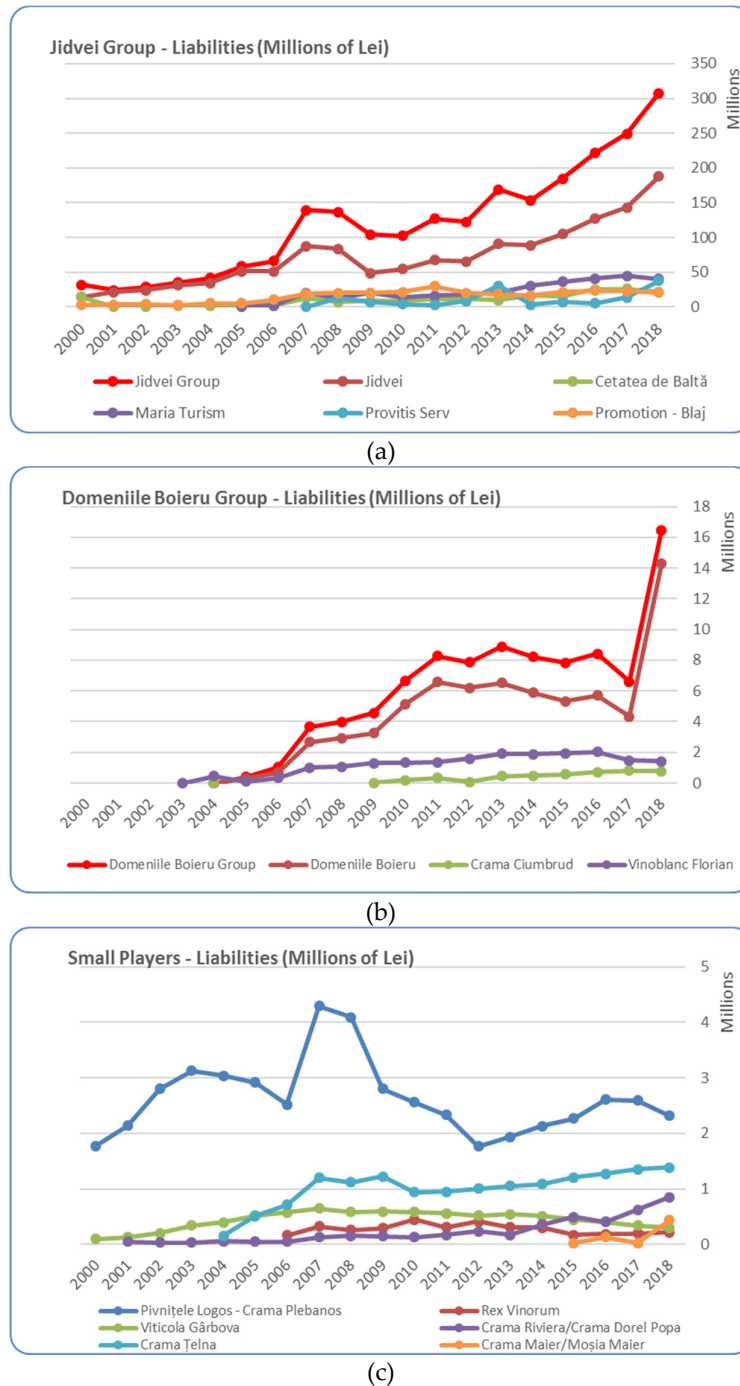


Figure 3. a–c. Liabilities: (a) Jidvei group, (b) Domeniile Boieru group, (c) Small players. Source: Own determination based on the public financial reports [32,46]. (1 euro = 4.72 Lei)

The evolution of the wineries' equities was consistent with that of their assets and of their turnovers, assets, and liabilities (Figure 4a–c). Logically, equities registered similar growth rates as the other indicators. Thus, the overall increase pace of Jidvei Group's equities was of +6.3, while the equities of Jidvei increased by +10.4 (Figure 4a). Further, in the case of Domeniile Boieru group, the equities' growth rate was of +51.3, while that of Domeniile Boieru was of +29.6 (Figure 4b). The equities of Crama Plebanos followed the same oscillating trend as all previous indices. The developments of the equities of the other small players were consistent with those of their previous

indices. The situation observed in the case of Viticola Gârbova can be better understood in the context of its profitability. (Figure 4c).

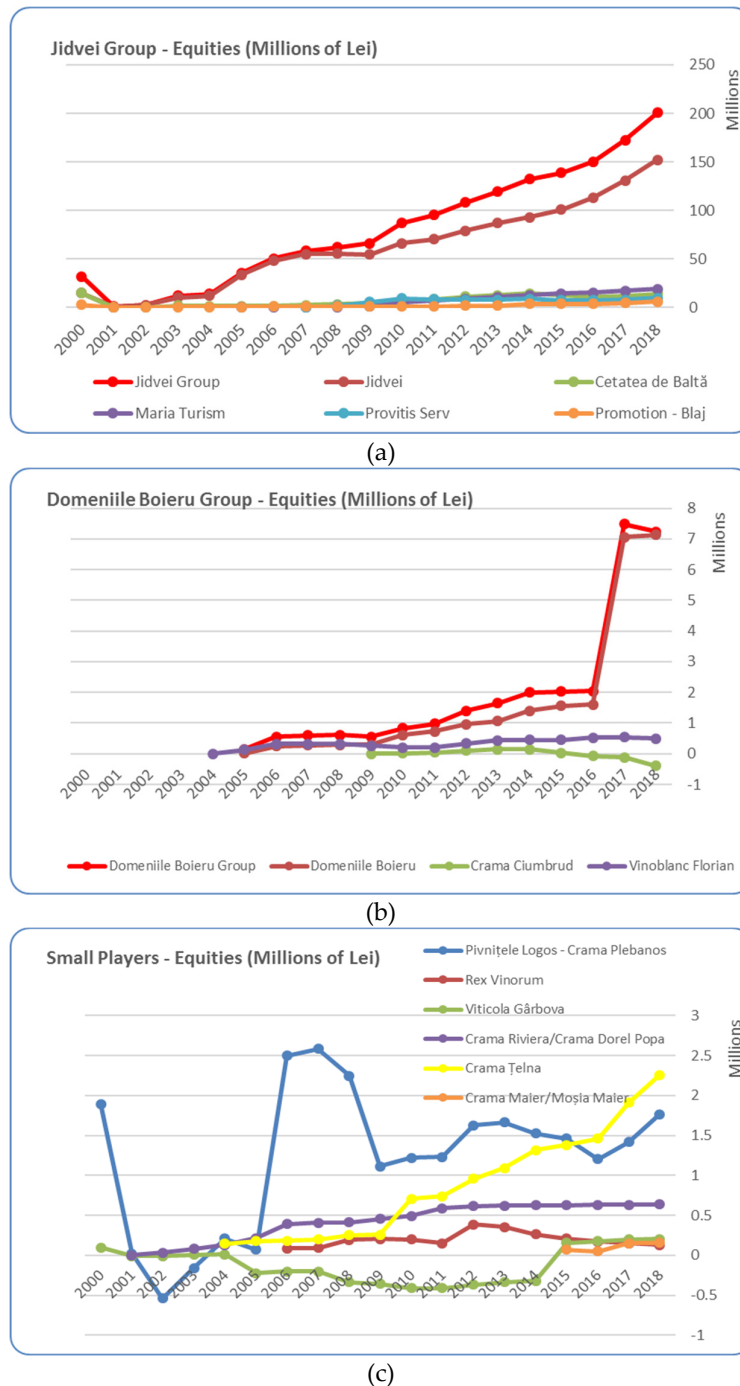


Figure 4. a-c. Equities: (a) Jidvei group, (b) Domeniile Boieru group, (c) Small players. Source: Own determination based on the public financial reports [32,46]. (1 euro = 4.72 Lei).

Consistent with the investments made in technology and mechanized viticulture, in the cases of the larger players who have started off via a privatization process, the number of employees has dropped significantly (Figure 5a–c); it is particularly the situation of Jidvei Group, due to the developments of Jidvei company (Figure 5a). Still, Jidvei was the most important employer in the area; practically each family from Jidvei commune has at least one member who is employed by the

winemaking business; moreover, the Necşulescu family was highly appreciated by the locals, as this family also implemented many charity activities in the area [71]. The second group, Domeniile Boieru, started off from grass roots with a higher number of agricultural workers, directly involved in viticulture, who were eventually replaced by the adoption of mechanization, as the development of assets, liabilities, and equities reveal for 2008–2010 (Figures 2–5b), this idea was also supported by the increase in the overall business volume (Figure 1b). The dramatic decrease of the overall business volume and its oscillations over the entire timespan was directly reflected in the developments of all the indicators of Pivnițele Logos—Crama Plebanos (Figures 1–5c).

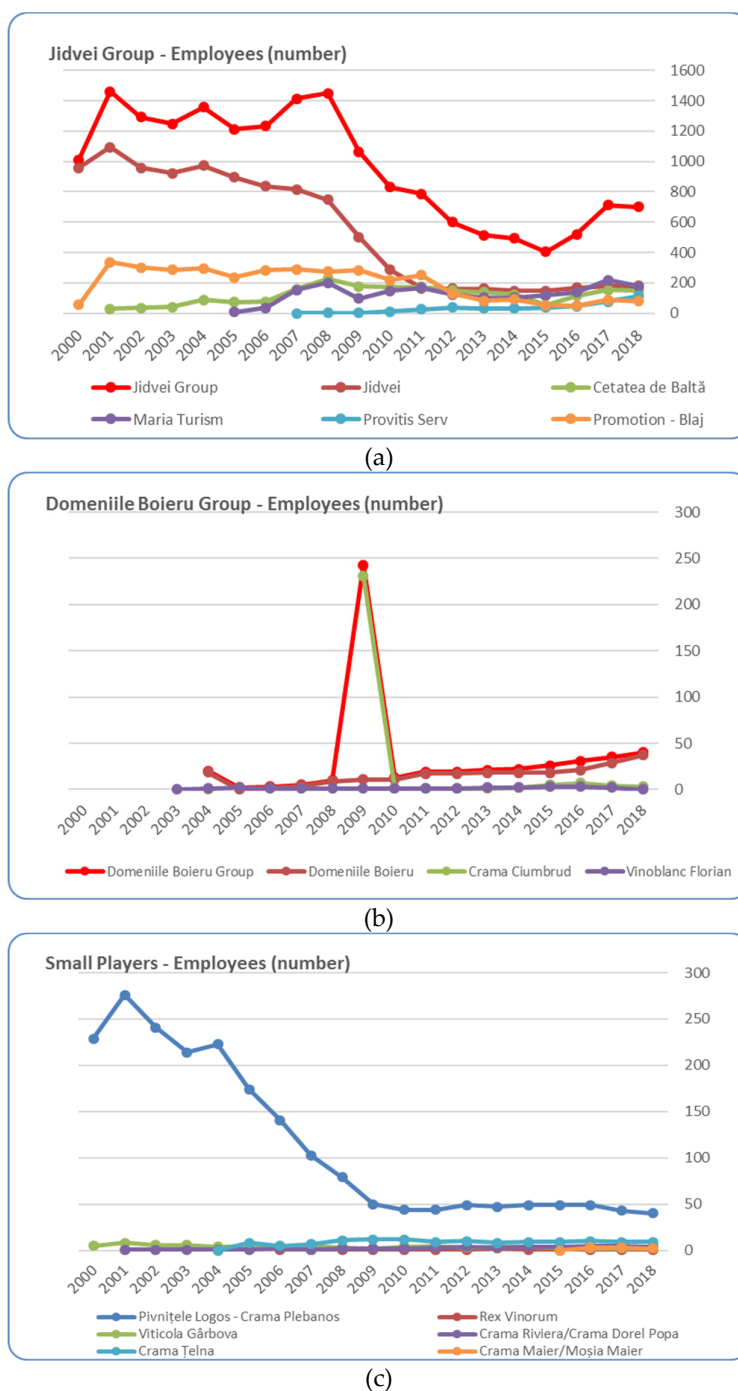


Figure 5. a-c. Number of employees: (a) Jidvei group, (b) Domeniile Boieru group, (c) Small players. Source: Own determination based on the public financial reports [32,46].

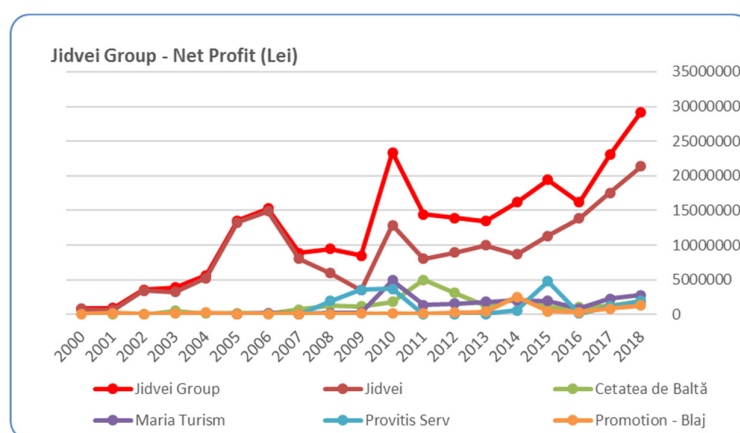
Jidvei Group was the only wine business in Alba County that registered profits over the entire analyzed period (Figure 6a). Obviously, after the privatization process of 1999, the business group benefited from healthy management decisions, including personnel cut-offs doubled by technology renewal, and by crop renewal and expansions. The winemaker had the advantage of being the first state-owned enterprise to be privatized. The private entrepreneur and manager, Claudiu Necşulescu, carefully selected the company's distributors and diminished the losses of the formerly state-owned company associated with the poor management of the distribution channels. Strict policies and control methods led to the development of a successful distribution system, where Jidvei cashes back [72]. Perhaps the business had the chance to capitalize on the winemaker's previous experience and reputation, thus managing to build a healthy, renowned brand, recognized and appreciated both nationally and internationally. Jidvei capitalized on all EU funding opportunities, managing to absorb considerable amounts of money and to direct them towards their strategic areas (from replantation, renewal, and extension of cultivated wines, to (re)technologization of their wineries, etc.) [73]. The decision to penetrate international markets (e.g., from North America: The United States of America, Canada, and Mexico, to Europe: Spain, Italy, Germany, Belgium, The Netherlands, Poland, the United Kingdom, and France), was a smart one and proved to be a winning one [74]. At the same time, the group's management perfectly understood that Jidvei's core market is the national one, thus, investments continued to be made in this sense [72]. In fact, the owners of the business group consider a 10% quota of exports in the business portfolio to be reasonable [75,76]. Moreover, Jidvei also targets the Romanians established abroad, especially their communities in Italy and Spain [74]. The success of Jidvei group is clearly linked to its healthy investment strategy, thus the managers regularly redirect significant chunks of the group's profits towards technological development; for example the 6 million euros invested in 2018 generated over 21 million liters of wine, as more than 1000 workers and 13 machines were involved in the harvesting of the crops (300 million kg of grapes) spread on 2500 hectares [77,78]; the vineyards of Jidvei are the largest ones in Europe to be owned by a single entrepreneur, in this case the Necşulescu Family [71]. The company's plans do not include any further extension of the wine crops, as the management team considers the 2500 ha as optimal [79]. Aiming at being even more environmentally friendly, the management of Jidvei invested 1.5 million euros in modern water-conditioning equipment for the vines' direct treatment. Furthermore, for 2019 the company plans to invest significantly in communication, aiming at educating particularly native consumers towards the consumption of local wines and for a better acknowledgement of winemaking traditions and culture. In this respect, the company encourages people (both small cellar owners and private individuals) to produce craft wine by selling freshly squeezed grape juice and by providing advice in order to help people produce quality table wines. Furthermore, a competition for homemade wine is hosted each spring at the Bethlen-Haller castle from Cetatea de Baltă [77,80]. Current plans include international expansion and the development of new brands targeting younger consumers, as well as the revitalization of forgotten breeds, such as the Neuburger. After the modernization of Jidvei winery, the cellar from Bălcaci is scheduled for renewal [77]. Jidvei has managed to develop an offer that targets and addresses various customer segments; thus, the winemaker has a rich portfolio, from HoReCa wines (bag-in-box), to budget, mid-scale, premium and super-premium/exquisite, and collection wines, to sparkling wines and brandy [81]. Furthermore, Jidvei has proven to be capable of staying in trend with the developments of the market—the winemaker has adapted and implemented new and modern solutions, such as the launching of an online store dedicated to its premium and super-premium brands (Owner's Choice and Mysterium) [82]. Claudiu Necşulescu, the representative of the owner family, explains how Jidvei has grown slowly but steadily, taking calculated risks, relying on the company's winemaker, Ioan Buia, to nowadays become an empire [83]. Strategic thinking has led to the development of the winemaker's own vine nursery, the so-called "Şcoală de Viţă" (translated "Wine-School"), where Jidvei produces yearly over 500,000 cuttings and seedlings of exclusively noble breeds (native: Fetească Regală and Fetească Albă, and international: Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Grigio, Riesling, Syrah, etc.) [81]; the nursery is, in fact, the first such private project in Romania [36]. More than 80 million euro have been invested in Jidvei ever since the company's privatization; hard work and strategic thinking have

contributed to the transformation of the business into a super-brand, with more than 200 top-international awards as recognition for its quality wines. Highly adaptive and open towards innovation, Jidvei is the first Romanian producer with a gravitational winery, the largest in Europe. Also, the company uses the first GPS controlled seeding machine and it has also implemented the first fully computer-controlled winemaking technological line [84]. An ambitious, though achievable, plan of the group's management is that of transforming Jidvei into the first wine producer with zero energy consumption; this is, in fact, a very valuable sustainability target for the winemaker [79].

The relatively young player on the wine market of Alba County, the Group Domeniile Boieru presents itself differently compared to Jidvei in terms of net profits (Figure 6b). Obviously, with a business history of less than 15 years, the second analyzed business group registered oscillating results, with low profits and losses as well. These results are not surprising at all, as due to its investments, all other indicators are on a rising trend; equities, fixed, current and total assets, liabilities, and even employees registered growths similar to that of the turnover. One could assume that profits were carefully reinvested, providing the needed support for further development. This assumption was confirmed by the fact that the year 2017 brought the first associate, a friend of Dănoaie family, namely Mr Raul Ciurtin, the former owner of Albalact, who after the sale of his first business, decided to invest in his friend's wine business. He bought 50% of the shares and he also announced his intention to credit the enterprise [85]. The group Domeniile Boieru initiated significant changes in 2018, rebranding as Vin de Ciumbrud and focusing on extending its cultivated areas, with 220 ha of planted wines, of which 180 ha are already productive, with a processing capacity of 30,000 hl, the winemaker seems ready to move forward, putting a lot of effort in its steady growth [86].

Regarding the small players, one could note that except for Pivnițele Logos—Crama Plebanos, all others seemed to have an even development, and a relatively constant one. As already mentioned, Crama Plebanos did not seem prepared enough to face the challenges of the business environment (Figure 6c).

Due to the fact that the authors had limited access to the financial statements of the investigated enterprises, only three indicators were calculated for a six-year timespan: Financial profitability (%), sales' economic profitability (%), and assets' economic profitability (%), the three of them offering us an overview on the financial situation, but not the complete information. The values obtained are going to be briefly discussed.



(a)

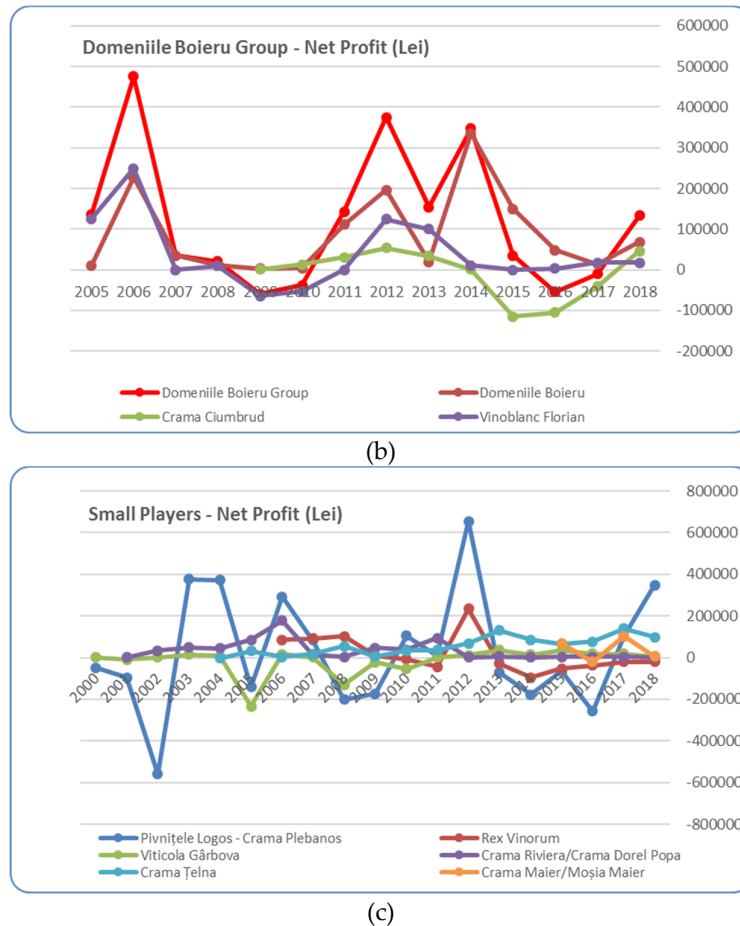


Figure 6. a–c. Net profits: (a) Jidvei group, (b) Domeniile Boieru group, (c) Small players. Source: Own determination based on the public financial reports [32,46]. (1 euro = 4.72 Lei)

The first indicator (Table 2), financial profitability (%), generally measures a company's efficiency. In the case of the selected wineries, it revealed a dynamic environment, typical for this industry, with each company having its own periods of growth and decline, some of them abruptly changing from one year to another, and others having a smoother transition. As one may notice, Jidvei Group presented the most visible stability when it comes to financial profitability, perhaps a reflection of its clear strategic thinking and planning, and an advantage of the company's large size in an environment dominated by this business group.

Table 2. Financial profitability (%) (2013–2018).

Enterprise Enterprise	Year					
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Jidvei Group	11.3	12.2	14.0	10.8	13.4	14.6
Jidvei	11.5	9.3	11.2	12.3	13.4	14.0
Cetatea de Baltă	10.3	16.3	8.2	9.5	10.1	13.5
Maria Turism	17.3	16.0	13.3	5.5	13.2	14.4
Provitis Serv	0.3	6.7	64.4	2.0	14.8	20.2
Promotion - Blaj	19.2	70.3	12.1	8.4	18.8	22.1
Domeniile Boieru Group	9.3	17.4	1.7	-2.6	-0.1	1.8
Domeniile Boieru	1.8	23.8	9.6	3.0	0.2	1.0
Crama Ciumbrud	24.5	0.7	-449.9	132.2	33.8	-11.7
Vinoblan Florian	23.0	2.5	0.0	0.5	3.1	3.6
Pivnițele Logos - Crama Plebanos	-4.3	-11.7	-4.4	-21.4	7.2	19.8
Rex Vinorum	-8.4	-36.1	-24.8	-22.4	-13.3	-14.6
Viticola Gârbova	-10.5	-4.4	23.4	10.9	9.6	3.2
Crama Riviera/Crama Dorel Popa	1.0	0.2	0.7	0.4	0.4	0.4
Crama Țelna	12.0	6.5	4.7	5.3	7.3	4.4
Crama Maier/Moșia Maier	-	-	99.7	-43.7	68.4	3.0

Source: Own determination based on public financial data [33,46].

The second indicator (Table 3), sales' economic profitability (%), revealed a less dramatic evolution of the companies' financial situations compared to the previous situation, and still placed Jidvei Group in first place for its stability and efficiency. Logically following the trends revealed by the general financial profitability, the sales' economic profitability shows that the customer-marketing relationship is not the one to blame for the unprofitable periods, but instead it may be the (poor) management strategies, or perhaps the lack thereof, and the (sometimes overenthusiastic) spending.

Table 3. Sales' economic profitability (%) (2013–2018).

Enterprise Enterprise	Year					
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Jidvei Group	10.40	12.85	12.87	8.61	10.46	11.39
Jidvei	11.88	10.70	10.75	10.85	12.95	14.18
Cetatea de Baltă	6.04	11.30	7.36	4.13	4.31	5.85
Maria Turism	14.73	29.50	10.40	4.62	12.01	9.40
Provitis Serv	15.44	92.17	215.00	2.61	12.45	10.71
Promotion - Blaj	3.06	16.25	2.90	2.83	3.28	5.09
Domeniile Boieru Group	4.24	11.47	2.01	-0.44	0.50	3.48
Domeniile Boieru	1.01	14.09	6.04	2.32	1.06	2.06
Crama Ciumbrud	5.82	0.70	-15.21	-12.90	-4.63	11.51
Vinoblan Florian	29.76	5.76	3.11	5.55	-	71.72
Pivnițele Logos - Crama Plebanos	-6.29	-14.56	-4.09	-16.41	7.81	23.29
Rex Vinorum	34.64	30.12	4.99	3.27	-45.67	34.74
Viticola Gârbova	43.50	16.32	27.48	14.49	15.23	9.43
Crama Riviera/Crama Dorel Popa	2.83	0.62	1.03	0.64	1.53	1.48
Crama Țelna	22.52	15.35	11.92	13.07	21.60	15.98
Crama Maier/Moșia Maier	-	-	84.93	-19.43	49.00	3.42

Source: Own determination based on public financial data [33,46].

The values calculated under the third indicator (Table 4), assets' economic profitability (%), showed a modest efficiency. It should be no surprise by now that Jidvei Group was, once again, the leader when it came to the assets' profitability, of course, due to its planning and implementing of carefully elaborated long-term strategies.

Table 4. Assets' economic profitability (%) (2013–2018).

Enterprise Enterprise	Year					
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Jidvei Group	4.15	4.92	5.74	4.06	5.16	5.61
Jidvei	5.20	5.09	5.15	5.47	6.08	6.21
Cetatea de Baltă	2.68	4.01	1.87	1.46	1.90	2.83
Maria Turism	7.52	5.80	6.02	2.26	5.59	7.52
Provitis Serv	0.18	2.59	20.86	0.51	4.28	6.28
Promotion - Blaj	0.92	6.10	3.47	3.12	4.06	3.08
Domeniile Boieru Group	1.35	2.95	0.59	-0.14	0.12	0.54
Domeniile Boieru	0.30	3.55	1.77	0.72	0.25	0.31
Crama Ciumbrud	7.38	0.67	-19.24	-16.78	-5.00	13.64
Vinoblan Florian	5.07	0.56	0.20	0.26	0.88	1.00
Pivnițele Logos - Crama Plebanos	-1.58	-3.95	-1.44	-5.70	2.85	7.82
Rex Vinorum	4.52	5.37	0.95	0.60	-7.31	7.72
Viticola Gârbova	18.18	9.57	6.99	3.59	3.81	1.58
Crama Riviera/Crama Dorel Popa	1.68	0.27	0.50	0.28	0.48	0.40
Crama Țelna	6.95	3.92	2.81	3.05	3.99	2.45
Crama Maier/Moșia Maier	-	-	77.09	-11.04	59.45	1.13

Source: Own determination based on public financial data [33,46].

4.2.2. The Online Presence of the Analyzed Vineyards

Overall, the main conclusion regarding the wineries' online presence was that the small players were rather absent. Basically, the smaller the business size, the more discreet was their online presence. Thus, eight websites were identified for the investigated enterprises but three of them were not functional, while those that work belonged to: Jidvei (the biggest player), Domeniile Boieru (the largest member of the Alba Wine Association, a medium-sized SME), and Stațiunea de Cercetare și Dezvoltare pentru Viticultură și Vinificație Blaj/Stațiunea de Cercetare și Producție Vitivinicolă Blaj/Crama Blaj (the state-owned and operated research center from Blaj); while only two reflect the online presence of small players: Pivnița Takács Borpince and Crama Țelna. Some of the entrepreneurs opted for social media profiles, with Facebook being the preferred option. Still, while the same enterprises as above seemed to have more developed social media profiles and proved to be more skilled in terms of online communication (Jidvei, Domeniile Boieru, Stațiunea de Cercetare și Dezvoltare pentru Viticultură și Vinificație Blaj/Stațiunea de Cercetare și Producție Vitivinicolă Blaj/Crama Blaj, Pivnița Takács Borpince, and Crama Țelna), smaller players seemed less capable to capitalize on free online communication tools. Some cellars relied exclusively on Facebook as a new-media marketing communication tool: Crama Riviera–Dorel Popa and Crama Maier/Moșia Maier. Tamás András, the self-employed entrepreneur of Crama Tamás Pince, who is a winemaker and also a journalist put a lot of effort into properly promoting his family's wine business, initially established in 1933; this cellar is promoted online via Facebook and LinkedIn business profiles, and via Foursquare. Youtube and Instagram were also used by Jidvei and Pivnița Takács Borpince; the owner–manager of the latter also had a blog.

The analyses of the vineyards' online presence revealed interesting findings related to their activity. In this respect, one of the most significant results was that many of the small local producers

had taken a step forward, moving from the gross sale of unbottled house wines at the door of the cellar or at the gate of the vineyard, to the development of their own labeled bottled wines [87]. All local and regional associations supported and encouraged small producers in this direction. Yearly local, regional, and national wine tastings and wine competitions award and promote small producers. For example, the most important association of Alba County—Țara Vinului Alba, established in 2007, has reached the 7th edition of the Alba Wines' Gala, dedicated to the small craft-wine producers [2,88]. The members of the association are granted access to scientific trainings and to specialized literature; moreover, they are helped to take part in international visiting trips and tours dedicated to know-how exchanges. Furthermore, a specialized research center has been opened for them in Aiud [88]. Consumers, particularly wine tourism practitioners, seem to have become more educated and trust more those wines that are bottled and labeled by the local producers who have joined the association, and who also use the association's logo on their labels [88]. According to the information available, all vineyard-owners, and their winemakers are Romanian, in some cases of Hungarian ethnicity.

When it comes to the information presented online, in most cases, the content was limited. It was surprising to discover that despite the fact that the identified businesses are listed as wineries and cellars online, more than half of them do not provide any information concerning their cellar/cellars' activity. Moreover, only five players (Cramele Jidvei—Cetatea de Baltă-Jidvei, Blaj, Bălcaci, and Tăuni, Pivnița Takács Borpince, Crama Vin de Ciumbud—Domeniile Boieru, Pivnițele Logos—Crama Plebanos—via the Association's website, and SCDVV Blaj) provided details related to the winetasting packages/services they offer: Types of tasted wines, tariffs, included foodservices, etc. Furthermore, only three cellars also provide accommodation services (Jidvei, Domeniile Boieru and Crama Plebanos). In terms of quality of expression, all of the functioning websites, as well as the active Facebook and LinkedIn profiles use did not seem to have any problems. Two of the smaller players did not communicate in Romanian but only in Hungarian (pivnița Takács Borpince and Crama Tamás Pince). None of the wineries provided information in English, German, Italian, French, or any other foreign language. An interesting marketing approach could be noticed in the case of three wineries from Aiud: Crama Takács Borpince, Crama Papp Peter, and Crama Tamás Pince which were present in the most recent editions of a renowned travel guide, Rough Guides [89,90].

Two of the wineries were part of other businesses. The owners of Pivnița Takács Borpince also have a lavender crop and produce derivate products. PFA Popa Ioan Marius also produced sheep and goat's milk and cheese, pork meat, and also sheep wool, sheep, lamb, goat, and beef; the winemaker also produce wine from the Gârbova de Sebeș vineyard. None of the investigated wineries seem to valorize any of the raw materials after the production of their wines, sparkling wines, or brandies.

An example of good practices came from the winemakers located in Ighiu, a commune of Terra Vinorum; the five villages of this commune, Bucerdea Vinoasă, Ighiel, Ighiu, Șard, and Țelna, were included in the wine route and provided an excellent example of successful association processes among local producers; thus, winemakers have managed to associate with produce and sell bottled wines. Moreover, in Bucerdea Vinoasă the local community managed to open a small but highly valuable and well documented ethnographic museum, established with the donations received from the local population. At the same time, the community opened a folk school where local traditions and crafts, namely weaving and knitting, are rediscovered by both children and tourists. Even the local school gets involved in similar activities, supporting and teaching religious glass painting techniques. Furthermore, Casa Apoulon was opened in Bucerdea Vinoasă as a center dedicated to wine and vine exhibits; the center functions in a renovated cellar, which was transformed into exhibition space and which also plays the role of wine-library. The old bottles and bilingual bottle tags prove the region's multicultural features [69].

4.3. Wineries in Alba County: The Perspective of the Entrepreneurs, of the Public Administration, and of the Local Population

In order to sketch a more complex picture of the wine businesses in Alba County, the next undertaken step was that of interviewing certain persons considered to be relevant for the current research study, as described in the methodological section. Some of the most relevant findings are going to be presented in the following paragraphs.

A first issue of concern was related to how the interviewed persons perceive the areas where they carry out their specific activities. Thus, the representative of Domeniile Boieru (DB) pointed out the importance of the land and terroir rather than that of the place itself; in their opinion the cellar can be moved to any destination, but it is essential to have good places for the wines and vineyards. A similar perspective was expressed by the representative of Jidvei (JV), too. In the view of ST (the representative of Stațiunea de Cercetare și Dezvoltare pentru Viticultură și Vinificație Blaj) the municipality of Blaj and its surrounding areas have a zero-unemployment rate due to the massive investments of Bosch, thus, workers are sought further away, in remote villages. Both local entrepreneurs (ND and VF) perceived the area to be on a developing trend from the perspective of their wine businesses. The representatives of the two larger players, JV and DB, both pointed out that the local public administrations have not done much to motivate them; in both cases the terroir is the triggering factor associated to the location of the business.

The interviews proceeded with the identification of the major weaknesses of the destinations from an administrative point of view. Given the reduced dimensions of Jidvei commune and of its villages, JV emphasized the challenge to find workers during the wine-picking season, when the company has to address people from remote localities. For DB, the main drawback was the fact that the enterprise was established in an urban area, Ciurbrud being subordinated to the municipality of Aiud and, consequently, being treated as an urban locality when it comes to European or other financing opportunities; in fact, although the nature of the activity is a rural one, the winemaker is not eligible for funding opportunities designated for rural areas. ST considered that SCDVV is less affected by the local administration and that its problems are related to the state ownership of the research center and the associated funding issues and challenges. Both local entrepreneurs (ND and FV) emphasized the lack of labor-force. In fact, the poor availability of the workers was the most important challenge for most winemakers, a fact pointed out in an interview by Claudiu Necșulescu, too: "To present the low unemployment rate as a virtue is highly dangerous for the business environment. It is perhaps the best moment to undertake the restructuring of the administrative apparatus. Given this deficit of labor-force, the restructured employees will be immediately integrated and absorbed by the private business environment. Both the Government and the entrepreneurial and employers' associations must struggle to increase wages in order attract back Romanians who work abroad. [79]".

The research continued with the identification of the future perspectives of wine businesses. JV considered the business environment to be extremely dynamic and emphasized the importance of adaptiveness and quick adoption of new technologies. Thus, the Research and Development department of Jidvei works on creating a line of bio product; for example, due to the implementation of new concentration methods of the crop, the winemaker has eliminated added sugar and unnatural compounds. JV states: "On the long-run, development is useful for productivity as it diminishes the costs". DB had a special point of view considering that the company's success depends directly on its attractiveness among potential consumers. ST saw Blaj on a development trend from the perspective of its industry, "the city flourishes". ND saw only limited development opportunities, while VF considered that in the area of Aiud, agriculture, viticulture, and pomiculture are attractive and promising business areas.

Further, the researchers aimed at identifying any social responsibility actions and to assess the involvement of entrepreneurs in this area. JV showed that Jidvei is a key employer in the area, the local population having access to workplaces; almost each family has at least one family member who is employed by the winemaker. Moreover, Jidvei supports the local community, as the company is actively involved in the community life, it finances schools, churches, it has contributed to the building of public kindergartens and schools, where the enterprise provides financial support for all other activities, except for teaching; the company supports renovations and refurbishments of public

facilities. Together with the authorities, Jidvei contributes to the development of the infrastructure (e.g., the road from Jidvei to Valea Lungă) and of telecommunication services. The representative of Domeniile Boieru brought up the problem of the labor-force, as even the wine workers need certain skills (for planting, cutting, fixing, picking wines etc.). DB explained that in Aiud there used to exist an agriculture vocational school with classes for viticulture, but these ceased to function 20 years ago. The company has initiated a memorandum for the reestablishing of viticulture education, offering to host educational and practical activities, but the central authorities seem not to be capable of understanding their need. The enterprise faces the same challenge as Jidvei, working with locals but also having to seek employees all over the county. ST explained that the research center contributes less to the local community due to its financial weaknesses; it is, in fact, Jidvei who are involved directly in the life of the locals. Both small local entrepreneurs saw the local community only as a source of labor-force they can employ and use. Neither of the two mentioned anything in terms of social involvement but emphasized the opportunities generated by winegrowing and winemaking.

Another topic of interest was to establish what sort of products and derivatives are offered by the winemakers. JV explained that Jidvei only produces and sells wine; relatively recently (in 2015), the company also began to sell freshly squeezed grape juice for small craft winemakers and for table winemakers (household users), which turned into a new, separate business of Jidvei without affecting the sales of their bottled wines. JV further explained that Jidvei sells both on the native and on foreign markets, working with specialized distributors, with specialized liquor-stores, with retailers, and with key super- and hypermarkets, and the company participates at fairs and competitions. For the international markets, Jidvei has a department dedicated to market testing and participation at fairs, exhibitions, and competitions. Similarly, DB revealed that Domeniile Boieru also focus on grape-processing for winemaking and being present both on the Romanian and international markets. ST explained that in order to raise money (for their employees' wages!), the research center must sell wines and also various viticulture products, such as cuttings and seedlings from their viticulture farm; the center also operates a pomiculture farm where they develop and sell various fruit trees. They only carry out local trading activities. Both local entrepreneurs explained that they only sell grapes and make wine. Thus, in the case of ND part of the grapes are sold to other producers, while the produced wine is sold mainly locally (60–70%) and in other localities (~30%). Similarly, VF explained that the grapes are sold by breed and the remainder are used for winemaking; the wine is sold locally and in some neighboring counties. One may notice that none of the producers valorize any of the remainders of their grapes. It is peculiar to notice that the big players have not sensed the opportunities provided by the valorization of the left-over raw materials; for example, seeds can be further processed and transformed into grape oil, flour, and bread. Moreover, in other countries (e.g., France) the vinegar and mustard industries are commonly associated with that of wines.

The interviews continued with the topic of internationalization. Of course, JV pointed out that Jidvei has internationalized successfully due to the quality and development of its wines. Likewise, Domeniile Boieru has also penetrated some international markets, having distribution contracts in the Czech Republic and in Hungary. DB pointed out that if small players chose to exist in the grey economy and test their wines' quality periodically, they could also capitalize on the potential of the international markets. Given the lack of financial support, ST explained that the research center lost its international contracts; before 1989, SCDVV Blaj used to export in Germany, France, Japan, and in the USA, while nowadays the center is present only on the local market (more at county level than regionally and nationally). ND considered that given the (very) small size of the business, the effort of internationalizing is nonsense. On the other hand, VF believed that having access to the international markets would be beneficial even for small players and that it would eventually lead to the further development of the market.

Communication and promotion are key factors of success in the case of almost all businesses. Thus, the interview continued in this direction, discussing the importance of the online presence of winemakers. JV considered that being present online is compulsory today, thus, Jidvei sells premium and super-premium wines online via a dedicated online shop. Still, most of the winemakers' products are sold physically, as not all breeds are listed. DB illustrated the situation at Domeniile Boieru: "It is

compulsory to be present online. We sell online via our own online shop. The oeno-tourism component of our business, the wine, the tourist destination and the winemaking activity are promoted online.”. ST explained that the research center is present online without online sales; SCDVV Blaj only uses the website for marketing activities. Neither of the two entrepreneurs has invested in a website for their business. ND considered a website and an associated online shop would be good but for the moment, the website of the association ensures the winemaker’s online presence, while sales are made only at the wine cellar. Similarly, VF stated: “I’m not online but I sell based on personal advertising and word-of-mouth. For the time-being this method works well enough.”.

When asked about the potential of the Road of Wine in Alba County and its ancillary services, the interviewed persons provided interesting responses. JV explained that the development of the Road of Wine would be beneficial for the winemaker and for the area. Further JV described the offer of Jidvei in this respect: “we have a restaurant and accommodation spaces (but only for protocol/internal use). In order to attend wine tastings at Jidvei, reservations need to be made in advance. The cellar provides wine tasting services with snack but also with meals. Currently [at the time of the interview], joint efforts are made with the local public administration of Alba Iulia, aiming at retaining and keeping tourists busy, for longer stays”. DB pointed out that: “The Route of Wine only shows the cellars, not mentioning tourist landmarks. It would be useful to develop the Wine Road because oeno-tourism is on a great rising trend and people are curious to find out what wine-tourism is about. Thus, it would be useful to develop ancillary services. By opening more locations in the county, the Road of Wine would eventually develop, providing clients with both wine tasting locations and accommodation services. I don’t see any near future developments in this respect. We have some development ideas that we only implement within our own business.” ST agreed that developing the Road of Wine would be a good idea and that it would be possible but also explains again the drawbacks of being state-owned and operated: “We had [this] in plan, we have rooms, but being a public institution it is less viable to implement this.”. ND showed that the development of the Road of Wine would be necessary for wine businesses and that the infrastructure needs to be developed but as a business-owner, ND does not have development plans related to investments in ancillary services. VF also considered that the development of the Road of Wine would be a positive aspect. Moreover, VF explained: “For the moment, I don’t have any expansion plans, but in the future, I wish to extend my business with accommodation and foodservices.”.

The final discussion topic of the interviews was dedicated to the estimated impact of the development of the Road of Wine in Alba County upon the interviewees’ businesses. JV considered that small producers have a limited capacity, thus, the organization of regular guided wine tasting tours would leave them without wine. Another challenge of small players is related to their capacity of ensuring proper winemaking and wine-keeping conditions. Furthermore, small cellars also have limited possibilities of providing accommodation and foodservices. In the view of DB, the positive impact of the development of the wine road upon a business does not really depend on a single factor; “Perhaps, being integrated in a project that also involves potential investors who would be interested to develop attractions and sites, further promoted by the local authorities and by the Wine Road Association and linked to the wineries. Otherwise, in theory, the Road of Wine exists but there is nothing to promote along it.”. ST simply agreed once again with the opportunity of such a development. ND was a bit skeptical: “For sure, it would be very important. I am curious to find out when this is going to eventually happen.” VF concluded in a positive tone: “Yes, it would be beneficial to develop the Road of Wine. All wine-cellars and other businesses would have something to gain.”

The perspective of the representatives of the public administration and that of the local population were reflected by the interviews taken in Aiud and in Blaj with a total of five subjects. The two municipalities were selected because they are gravitational centers for the wineries in Alba County, concentrating the most significant players. The following acronyms are used for the five interviewees: MR—the Mayor’s representative from Aiud; IT—an employee of an IT department;

CA—a representative of the local chamber of agriculture; CT—an employee of an accounting office, and a local inhabitant—GP.

Both respondents from Aiud (MR and IT) considered that the municipality is on a positive development trend but that at the same time important industry is lack nowadays. Likewise, the three respondents from Blaj (CA, CT and GP) all agreed that Blaj is one of the most developed small towns of Romania, enjoying a good economic but also social evolution generated by the industrial players. Similarly, Alba Iulia and Sebeş also enjoy a fast growth due to the presence of important industrial investors, respectively of tourism development in the county's residency city, too. Further, the respondents explained the key economic areas of the towns. Thus, MR pointed out that agriculture and services are the two development areas of this small town. IT completed the idea, further explaining that agriculture develops due to the viticulture and pomiculture farms that also produce vines and wines, seedlings and cuttings, and planting material—fruit trees and roses; some corn and granary crops are also exploited in the area. The three respondents considered that Blaj develops primarily in the industrial area. According to MR and IT, Aiud faces two problems related to the population; firstly, due to the lack of industry, the town cannot provide enough workplaces, thus, except for those employed by the public administration, by the prison, or as educators and craftsmen, many other locals end up commuting to nearby towns. In the view of all respondents (CA, CT, and GB)), Blaj enjoys a very high employment rate, which on the other hand raises the problem of skilled labor force availability. Both towns face the issue of an ageing population and of the migration of youngsters towards larger cities. Related to the economic development and to employees' availability, the same challenges were also mentioned by the players in the winemaking sector.

Regarding the contribution of the wine sector to the development of the towns, opinions were somewhat different. Thus, while for Aiud, viticulture and viniculture are key activity sectors (MR), contributing to the town's development (IT), in the case of Blaj some consider the sector marginal but on an ascending trend due to the small entrepreneurs (CA and GP), while CT considered that SCDVV Blaj is a major player. Overall, the three respondents from Blaj (CA, CT, and GP) tended to agree that the further development of the wine road will contribute to the development of their community. There already are 20 small winemakers who have a loyal clientele and who can positively contribute to the increase of this activity sector in Blaj. In both towns, there are important winemakers, some with a national or even international reputation, while others only of local or regional interest, and some who produce only for their households. Further, the respondents confirmed the information already provided by the entrepreneurs regarding the fact that no derivate products are made of the grape-leftovers. Basically, to their knowledge vineyards either make wine or sell the grapes. IT explained that every somewhat important public event or festival organized in Aiud also involves a wine tasting and vineyard and cellar visiting activities. By size, the producers from Aiud are medium and small (MR), while in Blaj, SCDVV is considered a large player; small ones are also involved (CA, CT and GP). Given the importance of the involvement of the public administration in the development of tourism and wine tourism in any destination, this was the next discussed topic. Aiud is on an ascending trend, as the municipality encourages this type of tourism (MR), the opening of new cellars is also encouraged (IT). At the same time, lodging facilities are necessary, with the town not having the possibility of accommodating all of its guests who seek such services in the nearby areas. Interviewees agree that tourism and wine tourism could contribute to the development of Blaj, too. Furthermore, CA, mentioning Casa dintre Vii, believed that opening new accommodation units in vineyards or other places can be beneficial for Blaj. Unlike Aiud, Blaj has many accommodation facilities, which provide diverse services, thus, opening new lodgings would not be compulsory, as GB and CT considered, but the municipality of Blaj salutes the opening of new cellars. All respondents agreed that the Road of Wine has contributed positively to the development of the two towns. A more visible connection between the two types of businesses appears in Aiud, where winemakers have also opened accommodation facilities in the vineyards, but basically only existing businesses have developed, no new entries have been registered (IT). In Blaj, the administration senses a certain causality effect between wine tourism and tourism development but not exclusively. The development of wine tourism, and of tourism in general, is encouraged by the town hall of Aiud,

as many landmarks (e.g., the Citadel and the monument dedicated to the victims of political imprisonment) underwent renovations and the road infrastructure has been modernized, providing access to the natural Gorges of Aiud. The town does not yet have a tourist information center, but initial steps have been taken in this respect. While accommodation services and food services seem to be good, still developing but insufficient (MR and IT), leisure services are missing (IT). The recently rehabilitated Bánffy Castle from Sâncraiu and a mansion are popular facilities among locals and visitors from Transylvania (IT). The respondents from Blaj agreed that the municipality plans to further develop tourism, but they are not aware if wine tourism is considered a priority sector. Blaj has a functional tourist information center but accommodation services should improve, food services can also continue their development, while the municipality works on the development of leisure facilities (sports' hall, swimming pool, sport-grounds, etc.) (CA, CT and GP).

The picture of the supply side is completed with the opinions expressed by three residents: Two from Blaj (MI—local woman and MM—master student, employed at SCDVV Blaj) and one from Ighiu commune (ST—student). When asked about how they perceive their hometown, both MI and MM described Blaj as a small, calm town; MI further said that Blaj is: “developed, a community of hardworking people; it has a good financial situation since Bosch has begun investments; with many young people who have arrived to work for the local industry”. ST described the village of Țelna, in Ighiu commune as “a settlement from Alba County, renown for viticulture, because this area gave birth to the best wine, preferred even by Matei Corvin, who ordered it for his wedding”. When it came to negative aspects, Blaj lacks parking lots and has become a crowded town; moreover, existing private residences are not enough, due to the increasing number of people who establish in the town, working for the local industry (MI); there is a lack of tourism promotion (MM). Țelna faces other challenges: “the lack of financial resources and a poor public management” (ST). Both locals from Blaj (MI and MM) emphasized their intent to remain in Blaj. MI explained why the wine businesses of SCDVV Blaj have decreased: Due to the lawsuits related to the viticulture and agricultural pieces of land those who currently possess the land cannot work the vines because they do not own them, while the entitled owners have not yet received their properties back (after the nationalization process of 1948–1963. In the long run, wines are going to be exploited at their potential and wine tourism will recover; currently SCDVV Blaj only organizes wine tastings for Romanian and international visitors without meals (because of increased associated costs); three, five, or seven wines are served (MI). MM considered there are enough opportunities in Blaj. Ighiu enjoys both the advantages of viticulture and those of small industry (FS). All respondents described the above-mentioned vinicultural activities, mentioning that currently none of the winemakers use the grape leftovers to produce derivate products. MI mentions that a few years ago, in Blaj, used to function a producer of grapeseed oil who moved away. Nowadays, local winemakers focus on making wine or on selling the grapes and only use grape leftovers as natural fertilizers (MI). Wine businesses are considered to have positive contributions upon the localities' wellbeing; moreover, the respondents considered the further development of a wine road to be an opportunity for their places, where tourism is supported by local authorities in both cases (MI, MM and FS).

4.4. Wineries in Alba County: A Profile of the Consumer

Wine tourism is still relatively young in Romania. Although the Wine Route Program was initiated by the Romanian Government in 2001, this market has become more visible only during the more recent years. Consequently, its consumer is not yet very well understood. Aiming at getting a clearer image of the consumer side, the researchers carried out survey-based research in 2018 among the existing and potential wine tourism consumers. Some of the main findings regarding the expectations and requirements of this type of tourist were discussed in a previous research study [61] and will be briefly reiterated here along with the conclusions of a study implemented last year and repeated this year by ReVino.ro [91]. The ReVino.ro study emphasized that education, wine tourism, and the more recent developments have led to an improvement (perhaps a bit of sophistication, too) in the consumption of wine among Romanians [91]. According to the studies of the National Authority for Tourism/Ministry of Tourism, wine tourism is among the top 10 preferred activities of

both Romanian and foreign visitors (enjoying a higher interest among German, Italian, British, and American tourists) [61,92]. The respondents indicated their preferences in terms of destination choice for holidays (more than one answer was allowed): mountain (66%), seaside (58%), city-breaks (50%), cultural (both urban and rural) (32%), and rural (29%). Obviously, given Romania's geography, most of them are compatible with wine tourism.

Some of the main findings of the research in 2018 enable the characterization of the 489 Romanian respondents. A very high percent of the respondents (close to 97%) consumed occasionally or regularly one or more types of alcoholic drinks; 16 respondents (3%) were eliminated from the study as non-consumers of any type of alcoholic drink. Most of the sample members turned out to be wine consumers (~88%), most of them (75%) being occasional/special occasion consumers, and relatively few, regular consumers: Weekly consumers (~23%) and daily consumers (~2%). Beer is the second preferred alcoholic drink (~55%), followed by cocktails (~36%), spirits (~31%), and short & long drinks (26%). The respondents were asked to mention their preferred wines. Only 60% of the respondents mentioned at least one Romanian or one foreign brand. The following Romanian brands appear to be among the top spontaneous preferences: Jidvei, Receaș, Ceptura, Domeniile Sâmburești, Murfatlar, Dealu Mare, Domeniile Boieru, Tohani, Beciul Domnesc, Miniș, Lacrima lui Ovidiu, Sânge de Taur, Petro Vaselo, Zarea, Casa Isărescu, Panciu, Liliac, and Zestrea. Few respondents tend to prefer international brands: Purcari, Cricova, Vila de Corlo, Porto, Tokaj, Lafage, Australian, French, Italian, and Spanish wines. Most of the respondents were rare and occasional consumers of local wines (47%), followed by frequent consumers (29%). Percentages changed for Romanian wines; thus, 26% are rare and occasional consumers, relatively frequent, and very frequent consumers (47%). International wines are seldomly preferred (71%), obviously these ones being less known and accessible. Respondents were further asked to be more specific regarding their preferences of Romanian wines and to mention three of their favorite vineyards. Transylvanian wines enjoyed a pretty high popularity (nearly 30% of the respondents mentioning them): Jidvei was the leader (13%), followed by the wines produced in the Târnavă area and in Alba County (10%), Ciurbrud (4%), and Salina Turda (1%); other popular Romanian vineyards were: Banat (9%), Moldova (9%), and Murfatlar (7%). A significant quota of the sample (17%) indicated other smaller winemakers, while 63% did not mention any vineyard.

Regarding the consumption of certain types of wines, respondents confirm their occasional consumption habits, picking white, red, and rosé wines as well, without a specific preference for dry, demi-dry, demi-sweet, or sweet wines (Table 5). In fact, demand seems to be balanced among the classic types of wine, with a somewhat lower preference for sweet wines. This is consistent with the Romanian cuisine, and with the habit of associating sweet and demi-sweet wines with desserts.

Table 5. Consumption frequency by type of wine (%).

Frequency Type of Wine Enterprise	Very Often	Often	Occasionally	Seldom	Rarely	Never
White	8	17	19	26	19	11
Red	12	19	18	29	15	7
Rosé	9	17	19	29	18	8
Brandy (<i>vinars</i>)	1	7	8	12	22	50
Sparkling	6	10	13	32	29	10
Dry	8	16	18	22	24	12
Demi-dry	9	12	11	15	29	24
Demi-sweet	8	17	17	24	21	13
Sweet	7	10	12	21	24	26

Source: Own determination based on the results of the survey-based research.

The very low interest towards brandy may be explained on behalf of the existence of other types of spirits, such as the national țuică, a strong alcoholic drink, commonly consumed as appetizer; it is commonly homemade with fruit, especially of plums but also of other fruits (apples, pears, apricots,

etc.). Perhaps, craft producers of țuica are more frequently found than craft-winemakers. Romanians still seemed to be somewhat conservative in tastes, and for many brandies may be perceived as too sophisticated, while whiskey drinkers are still few, compared to those who consume țuica. Likewise, in Romania, sparkling wines are still commonly associated with sophisticated desserts and special events, hence the relatively low demand for it, too.

Two questions were formulated aimed at establishing whether Romanian consumers are familiarized with, and would be interested in buying, products made of grape derivatives. It is highly interesting to note that 65% of the respondents were (somewhat) familiar with such products. Moreover, even some of those who were not aware of such products would be willing to buy one or more of them: Natural supplements (55%), vinegar (54%), cosmetics (37%), oil (29%), bread (27%), mustard (20%), and flour (16%).

Respondents were asked to express their categorical or relative agreement, or disagreement with six statements which were formulated by the researchers with the purpose of better understanding when, why, and how the subjects consume wine. Thus, for most people wine is a beverage consumed at mealtimes, as it highlights certain dishes and flavors (52% fully agree and 28% expressed a relative agreement). Furthermore, wine is a refined drink (34% fully agree and 50% partially agree). For most respondents, wine is the most natural drink (categorical agreement for 31% and partial agreement of 44%). In the perception of Romanian consumers, wine is a drink that enables socialization (30% total agreement and 52% partial agreement). Thus, wine tasting is an activity that can and should be introduced in the program of various business meetings, travels, and events, including field trips, conferences, or incentive trips for employees and managers, etc. Even though initially most respondents associated wine with meals, they did not consider it to be an important part of mealtimes (16% fully disagree, 46% rather disagree, while only 29% partially agree and 9% totally agree). Furthermore, very many of the respondents did not consider that wine contributes to digestion (10% fully agree, 36% partially agree, while 44% rather disagree and 11% fully disagree). These two opinions may be explained due to the lack of education and culture related to the consumption of alcoholic drinks, in general, and of wine, in particular. At the opposed pole, in French people regularly drink a glass of wine at lunch and are allowed to drive afterwards.

When asked about their previous wine tourism experiences, less than 13% confirmed having practiced tourism on a wine road in Romania or abroad. Moreover, 90% of those who have never visited a cellar, would be attracted to visit one in Romania and 70% would like to travel abroad as well; the somewhat lower interest towards international wine tourism may be due to various factors, including budget limitations.

The research continued with measuring the respondents' interest towards wine-tourism in Romania. Thus, nearly 48% of the respondents were familiarized and considered attractive the tourist offer associated to the Romanian Roads of Wine, while 17% of the interviewees were aware of this offer but did not consider it appropriate. Still, an important quota of the sample (35%) were not aware of the possibilities to practice wine tourism in Romania. A rather peculiar finding was that 63.4% of the interviewed persons declared they did not know exactly what wine tourism involves, while only 36.6% are truly familiar with this concept. Still, despite the low familiarization of the respondents with this type of tourism, most of them expressed their interest towards practicing it in Romania. Overall, most of them (83%) would find the development of wine tourism in Romania as very attractive. More than half of the respondents who would like to attend wine tastings would also seek accommodation services, opting for one or more types of public lodging facilities: Boarding houses (65%), lodging facilities at the wine cellar/in the vineyard (56%), hotels (34%), or villas (33%); nearly a quarter of the respondents would accommodate in the private homes of the locals (23%). More than a third of the interviewees (34%) mentioned they would be interested to participate in organized groups, while 12% would like to travel independently. If considering wine tourism, most of the respondents would opt for short trips involving two to three overnight stays (64%) or for two-day trips, with one overnight (28%); some 6% would spend more than three nights on such trips, while only 2% would not seek accommodation services. Obviously, most people seek solutions to avoid drinking and driving. This is a clear business opportunity for many providers of hospitality services

either to provide lodging and food services for wine tourists, or, for travel agencies to organize wine tasting day trips or more than one day tours. Even locals may capitalize on the desire of the potential tourists to accommodate in private residencies. An excellent example of sustainable valorization of market opportunities is provided by the community of Sâncraiu, Cluj County, where Mr Vincze, a local entrepreneur, managed to organize for people to register their homes as agritourist boarding houses and to cooperate in accommodating tourists [93] (pp. 7–23).

Perhaps influenced by the fact that vineyards are commonly associated with grape picking, nearly half of the respondents (48%) indicated autumn, followed by spring (21%) as preferred seasons for wine tasting trips, while the other split evenly between summer (16%) and winter (15%). This distribution reveals that respondents associate this type of activity with short breaks or even with business and corporate trips, and not necessarily with typical holidays. Wine cellar owners ought to consider this potential interest and capitalize on it. Of particular interest are several recreational activities that can be associated to wine tasting trips, some of them including the tourists' direct involvement in specific activities: Traditional local dishes (74%), nature walks (in the vineyards) and hill hiking (67%), winemaking (58%), guided tours of historical sites and monuments (56%), mountaineering (45%), wine picking and harvesting (38%), chariot rides (37%), bicycle riding (33%), outdoors relaxation and recreation (28%), birdwatching (12%), working in the vineyard, e.g., wine digging (7%), etc. In terms of potential destinations for wine tourism, the interviewees provided the following preferences. On a scale from 1 (rather unattractive) to 5 (very attractive), vineyards from Alba County seem to be quite attractive, enjoying relatively good average scores (Figure 7).

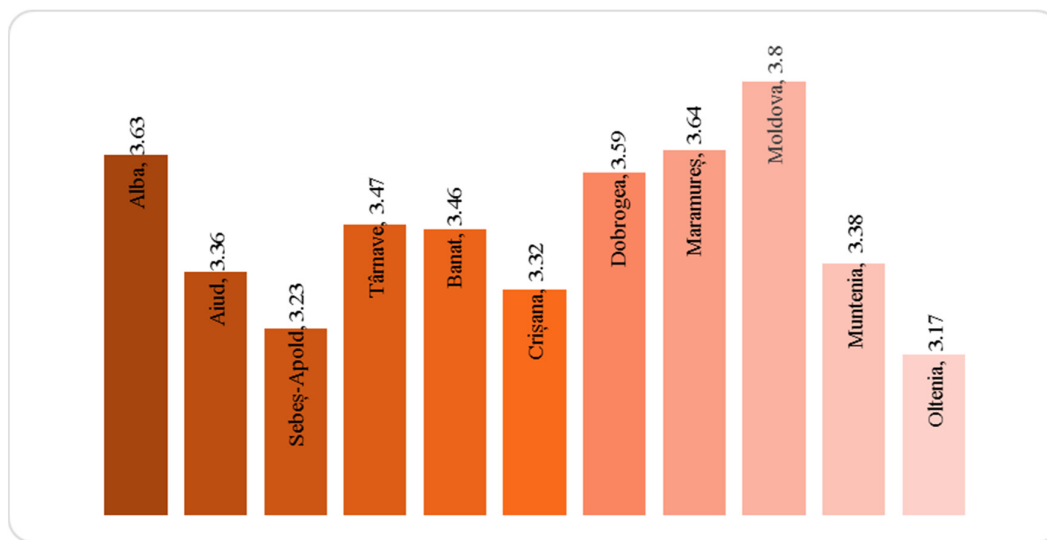


Figure 7. Average scores: The attractiveness of certain vineyards for wine tourism. Scale: 1 = rather unattractive, 5 = very attractive. Source: Own determination based on the survey-based research received responses.

When asked to be more specific about how they would expect wine tastings to take place, the respondents provided the following preferences:

- 3–4 types of wine plus snacks (29%),
- 3–4 types of wine plus starters (28%),
- 3–4 types of wine plus lunch (12%),
- 4–5 types of wine plus snacks (14%),
- 4–5 types of wine plus starters (8%),
- 4–5 types of wine plus lunch (9%).

Furthermore, in terms of spending, most of the respondents (65%) would be willing to spend at most 30 euro per person for a wine tasting session with meal included, while 31% would allot between 30 and 50 euro per person, and only 4% would spend more than 50 euro. On one hand, the

budget is consistent with the rather low income levels of Romanian citizens (and also of a consistent part of the sample members) and can be further explained in correlation with the respondents' lack of knowledge related to wine tourism, while, on the other hand, the allocated amounts match most of the wineries' offers for one wine tasting session with snacks or starters. Given the relatively high demand for 3–4 types of wine plus snacks and starters, it does not seem too difficult for winemakers to come up with an offer that can match the tourists' expectations and budgets.

The investigated sample presented the following structure. It was dominated by young respondents, mainly due to the massive online distribution of the survey: 18–25 years old (54%), 26–35 years old (23%), 35–55 years old (22%), and over 55 years old (1%). The gender distribution was almost relatively even: Female (58%) and male (42%). By occupation, most of the respondents (34%) were continuing their graduate studies, 22% were employed in the private environment, 17% worked for state institutions, 17% were entrepreneurs, 8% were still students but also work, 1% were retired and 1% were unemployed. In terms of income levels, given the age structure of the sample: 34% earn less than 300 euro (1500 Lei), 29% have incomes between 300 and 500 euro (1500–2500 Lei), while the remaining 37% earn more than 500 euro (2500 Lei). Most respondents had earned or will earn shortly graduate and/or post-graduate degrees, while 16% have only undergraduate studies. Most respondents resided in Transylvania (36% in region center and another 36% in the north-west region of development), all other regions were represented by relatively few respondents.

Various statistical bi-variate tests were run in order to verify the existence of significant relations among respondents' features and behaviors. Several conclusions may be drawn regarding the profile of the sample members as consumers:

- *The average income level of the respondents:*
 - Does not influence their habitual alcohol consumption ($p = 0.373$ and $r = -0.041$); in fact, most of them are occasional consumers;
 - Does not influence the attractiveness of wine tasting ($p = 0.139$ and $r = 0.067$);
 - determines a weak influence upon the wine tasting budget ($p = 0.023$ and $r = 0.31$), thus, an income increase may determine a higher spending;
 - Does not influence the consumption of beer ($p = 0.671$ and $r = 0.019$), nor that of spirits ($p = 0.068$ and $r = -0.083$), implying that the consumption of somewhat unsophisticated and cheaper drinks is not dependent on the level of the consumers' revenues;
 - Does not determine a significant influence on the demand for long and short drinks ($p = 0.007$ and $r = -0.123$), nor on that for cocktails ($p = 0.068$ and $r = -0.083$);
 - Determines a significant weak influence upon the consumption of wine ($p = 0.000$ and $r = 0.270$), meaning that higher revenues may contribute to the demand increase of wine;
 - Does not influence the respondents' destination choice; obviously, that may be determined by other triggering factors such as seasonality, trends, etc.; moreover, the income level does not seem to influence the wine tasting trips of the questioned subject (wine tasting trips in Romania ($p = 0.552$ and $r = 0.27$) and wine tasting trips abroad ($p = 0.808$ and $r = -0.011$)), as the decision of practicing this type of tourism may be influenced by the awareness of the tourists regarding such opportunities, respectively of the notoriety of such destinations.
- *The respondents' gender seems:*
 - To slightly determine the consumption of alcoholic drinks: in the case of beer ($p = 0.000$ and $r = -0.338$), spirits ($p = 0.000$ and $r = 0.332$), but not in that of wine ($p = 0.133$ and $r = -0.068$), cocktails ($p = 0.000$ and $r = 0.190$) or long and/or short drinks ($p = 0.792$ and $r = -0.012$);
 - To somewhat influence the consumption of brandy ($p = 0.000$ and $r = -0.269$), as men tend to be commonly associated with this type of alcoholic drink, but gender does not determine the preference for wine: White wine ($p = 0.004$, $r = -0.131$), red wine ($p = 0.334$ and $r = -0.044$), rosé wine ($p = 0.004$ and $r = 0.130$); dry wine ($p = 0.000$ and $r = -0.221$); demi-dry wine ($p = 0.000$ and $r = -0.201$); demi-sweet wine ($p = 0.007$ and $r = 0.122$); sweet wine ($p = 0.004$ and $r = -0.129$), and sparkling wine ($p = 0.141$ and $r = 0.067$);
 - Not to establish a significant correlation with the familiarization of the subjects with derivate products made of grape leftovers ($p = 0.006$ and $r = -0.124$);

- Neither to determine the acquisition of certain types of derivate products: Grape-based bread ($p = 0.000$ and $r = -0.202$), mustard ($p = 0.25$ and $r = -0.101$), cosmetics ($p = 0.000$ and $r = 0.358$), and natural supplements ($p = 0.013$ and $r = 0.112$), nor to be connected with the decision to buy products such as: Grape oil ($p = 0.191$ and $r = -0.059$), grape flour ($p = 0.059$ and $r = -0.085$), or grape vinegar ($p = 0.153$ and $r = -0.065$).

5. Conclusions

As Romania's wine tourism is still in its early stages, there is no better concluding remark than the lines of Gatti and Incerti (1997), who state: "It is not possible to improvise a wine route. Where they have been successful in Europe they have been based on the balanced development of entrepreneurial effort in wine producing and tourism which has been proved capable of exploiting the natural vocation of the area for tourism on the one hand and the excellence of the wine produced over centuries of tradition and/or the special genius of particular producers on the other" [9] (p. 223).

While in Western- and Southern-European states (such as France, Italy, Spain, or Portugal), many small and medium-sized winegrowers and winemakers were becoming aware of the benefits of making direct wine sales thus, diversifying their business portfolios and initiating tourist activities in the 1990s, more than 20 years later, this is still a lesson to be learned by the Romanian actors of the same sector. Furthermore, big players have to understand and implement what their more advanced European peers have done decades ago, namely they must acknowledge that large wine businesses and trading companies can, and should, make significant investments in the development of tourist and hospitality facilities, and infrastructure too [94] in [9] (p. 220).

After having thoroughly investigated the local market, the authors identified and selected the wineries which would be further analyzed in terms of their financial performance and online presence. Some final remarks can be made regarding the main findings of this research component. Overall, there was a clear connection between economic performance and marketing and communication efficiency; thus, the winemakers who perform best from the economic point of view, are also the ones who have invested more in their online presence and who have diversified their business portfolios. Remarkable in this sense is the small but well-developed winery Crama Țelna; other successful businesses are Tamas Pince and Takacs Borpince. Jidvei is by far the most important winemaker in the area. Over time, the enterprise has developed a clear strategic plan, adopting various consistent decisions, which eventually materialized into profits and returns on investments. The company has managed to diversify its business portfolio, addressing, and also creating, new markets and always being in line or even ahead of their customers' needs, desires, and expectations. Furthermore, Jidvei is the most important employer in the area, a player who has also adopted and implemented various social corporate responsibility projects contributing to the sustainable development of the region, both in terms of how wine is produced and also in terms of business and community development and progress. Overall, for the Tarnave Basin, Jidvei can become a genuine catalyst of the further sustainable development of the wine road. Similarly, but at a lower scale, the relatively young enterprise, compared to Jidvei, Domeniile Boieru, can turn into a catalyst for the Aiud winemaking area, having the capacity to coagulate small winegrowers and winemakers around its own businesses and to contribute to their sustainable development. A Destination Management Organization (DMO) is needed, as this is the only body, flexible enough but also legally empowered, capable of properly representing the interests of all local stakeholders. Such a DMO can be established starting from the Alba County Weinland association, involving public authorities, wine businesses, hospitality, cultural and leisure services providers, and educational, medical, and other professional structures. While Blaj and Alba Iulia have Tourist Information Centers (TIC), Aiud does not yet have one, although plans exist in this respect and initial steps have been undertaken. Furthermore, no one mentioned the outstanding presence and activity of a travel agency. To the best of our knowledge, travel agencies have not included the wine tourism offer of Alba County in their offers. Consequently, most of the promotion falls on the shoulders of the local Weinland Association. Bearing in mind the three-stage development model of wine tourism destinations suggested by Carmichael and Senese [30], it becomes obvious that the wineries in Alba County are at most in an incipient second stage.

Further development can only occur if players begin to truly cooperate. In this sense, both Jidvei and Domeniile Boieru, perhaps also smaller players like Crama Țelna, Cramele Plebanos, and Rex Vinorum, ought to take initiative and establish business clusters in order to ensure the premises for further development and sustainable growth.

The results of the qualitative research provided three interesting and useful perspectives. On one hand, the interviewed entrepreneurs made interesting points related to the opportunity for the further development of the wine road in Alba County. No matter their size, they all admit that the wine road can, and will, have a positive impact upon the activity of small and large winemakers. Some of the players also carry out other viticulture-related and agricultural activities, like pomiculture and the production of planting material, seedlings, cuttings, graftings, and parent stock. All investigated enterprises focus on winemaking and selling exclusively, except for two wineries: Crama Takács Borpince (whose owners also have a lavender crop) and PFA Popa Ioan Marius (who has another business (goat and sheep milk, cheese, and other derivatives etc.)). Except for wine growing and processing for wine production, none of the winemakers have considered the use of the leftover grape skin and seeds, in spite of the fact that the results of the quantitative demand side research revealed the potential tourists' interest and desire to consume grape derivate products such as: Natural supplements, vinegar, cosmetics, oil, bread, mustard, and flour, although not many are truly familiarized with them, and with their qualities and potential benefits. This is clearly an area with high potential for sustainable development either for the winemakers themselves via a correlated diversification strategy or for other entrepreneurs who can capitalize on such business opportunities and can initiate firms in this area of activity. According to our findings only three wineries are present in international tourist guides, namely in the renowned Rough Guides for Romania and Transylvania: Crama Takács Borpince, Crama Papp Peter, and Crama Tamás Pince. Wine tourism as part of a rural cultural gastronomic tourist product is on an ascending trend, as today's tourists, the millennials are experience and authenticity seekers, clearly associated to wine and food tourism [95]. Likewise, both authorities and residents welcome the development of wine routes in Alba County, counting on its success and on its further contribution to the development of the region, but things move forward at a rather slow pace. On the other hand, both entrepreneurs and locals expect the (central but also local) public administration to become aware of the serious issue of the lack of skilled labor force, and await the adoption of coherent policies that aim at the improvement of the wages but also of the education conditions. Another challenge for the local authorities is the rehabilitation of the road infrastructure.

The main conclusions that can be drawn, relying on the results of the quantitative research, are that there definitely is an increasing demand for wine consumption, and for tourist activities on the wine route. Another area that needs to be further developed by winegrowers and vine owners is that of providing support services (accommodation and food services, but also travel and transportation services) and ancillary services. Responses were dominated by those interested in spending two to three days in the area of the wine road; still, there also are tourists interested in day visits. Of course, given the tourists' demand for derivate products, this is another area that needs to be capitalized on.

Despite the fact that Romania enjoys a long, well-established winemaking tradition [96] (p. 27), a recent market study conducted by ReVino [31,91] dedicated to wine consumption, confirmed the findings of the same organization's previous study, and to a certain extent the current research, too, revealed a price-sensitive, rather educatable, and not very refined and sophisticated wine consumer, who mainly purchases cheap and affordable (25% spending 10–29 Lei/bottle and 44% spending 30–49 Lei/bottle) wine from supermarkets, depending on the winery (most of the times targeting large and well-known producers), the color of the wine, and the breed of the vine. Smaller producers prefer to commercialize their wines in specialized stores and via the HoReCa networks, where their wines are properly introduced to the customer and advised decisions are taken by the latter one. Most consumers drink wine over meals, preferring red ones (58%), followed by white ones (29%), rosé wines (11%), and sparkling (only 2%). Furthermore, the top preferences of breeds list first Fetească Neagră (23%), followed by Cabernet Sauvignon (20%), Merlot (11%), and Sauvignon Blanc (11%). Most respondents seek information in the online environment (21%). Other commonly used

information sources include wine tastings organized by specialized liquor stores, followed by the events dedicated to wine promotion, and to the popularization of the wine routes and wine tourism in Romania; particularly the ReVino Bucharest Wine Fair. Some 50% of the respondents have visited wineries. At the same time, 33% have not yet visited a cellar but would be interested to do so. The study confirms the present research and reveals consumption habits for other alcoholic drinks: Beer (37%), spirits (34%), and cocktails (8%); 15% of the respondents are only wine consumers. Returning to the results of the current research study, one may point out that the respondents indicated a high openness towards wine tourism. Furthermore, their available budgets (the amounts they declared they would be willing to spend for wine tasting activities) are relatively close to the tariffs already practiced by some of the winemakers for such services. Proper communication, leading to a more educated and better-informed customer, will easily cover the pricing gap. The motivational factors of wine tourists include curiosity, personal interest, educated interest, refined taste, pleasure to drink certain types of wine, etc.

Relying on their qualitative study, Alonso and Liu [27] (p. 1005) developed a model of sustainable wine tourism development in the Canary Island. Many of their principles may be adopted and considered in the case of the wine route of Alba County. Briefly, their model can be described as it follows. The management of tourism demand and supply always involves a fragile balance. In the case of Alba County, tourist demand is related to cultural, nature-based, rural, religious, some business, transit, and sightseeing tourism; gastronomy and wine tourism are on a developing trend. An advantage of the destination is the still low level of tourist flows. For the supply side to become able to properly capitalize on the interests of the potential visitors, cooperation is very much needed. Following the model of Sâncraiu, Cluj County [93], enjoying the support of the local population and with the direct involvement, contribution, and support of the local and regional public administrations, small and medium-sized entrepreneurs should develop innovative tourist products that will eventually contribute to the long term well-being of the communities via:

- Social sustainability as the source of community pride related to wine culture;
- Business and economic sustainability as the result of wine tourism;
- The protection and preservation of (small-scale) family businesses in the winemaking and wine tourism sectors;
- The rediscovery, preservation, and further development of the wine sector-related traditions;
- The insurance of environmental sustainability with the protection and preservation of rural landscapes.

To sum up, an international cross-country and cross-continental study [97] (pp. 36–38) briefly presented the benefits of wine tourism upon the small enterprises that operate cellars on wine roads. Thus, the profile of the investigated wine tourist at international level is quite similar to that of the Romanian subjects of the present research. Wine tourism is most of the times a form of proximity tourism (with locals as visitors, followed by visitors from nearby regions, respectively from the same country, and a lower quota of international tourists). The largest segment is that of 36 to 55-year-old men (nearly double compared to women). For Romania's case, it is still an emerging wine tourism destination, which means that today's millennials are in fact the future target market. Most cellar visits take place during vacations. Tourists are interested in the following activities: Wine tasting, cave/cellar guided tours, visiting more cellars on a trip (the need of further development is emphasized), accommodation services (in hotels, chalets, and cottages, while in Transylvania boarding houses and inns organized in old renovated mansions would be an appropriate and excellent solution), leisure activities (e.g., sports: Bicycle tours, hiking, and trailing in the vineyard, jogging tracks can also be organized, etc.), providing cultural activities (in Transylvania these can involve folk arts and crafts, regional/local cooking lessons, folkloric music, ethnography, traditions related to the Christian religious days and celebrations, etc.), hosting various types of exhibitions, organizing local wine museums and gastronomy museums, organizing food and drink events, developing cheese roads along the wine roads, providing therapies in the vineyards or nearby vinicultural farms, involving tourist in vine-working activities, etc. At an international level, nearly 80% of the winemakers' revenue are directly related to the sale of their wine, while the remaining

20% result from various other activities, such as wine tourism, along with the extra services provided: Lodging, food services, guided tours, souvenir shops, etc. The Wine Association of Alba intends to open a wine store for the local producers; this ought to happen soon. They could also integrate a souvenir shop in the wine store, or this can be associated with the local Tourist Information Centers and can become a source of revenue for them. The international lesson provides a list of commonly met benefits of wine tourism: Image improvement and notoriety; revenue and income increase; the winery and its associated wine farm enjoy higher notoriety and a better positioning on the tourism market; growth of visitors and tourists; job creation and employment growth, and social responsibility increase. All owners of wineries fully agree or agree to a large extent that wine tourism is a profitable activity. At the same time, owner–managers also expect states to get involved and take care of their specific support duties: Ensure good access infrastructure, increase the quality of provided services, and provide education and training facilities for the workers and other types of employees.

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