

# Contribution of wine tourism by the implementation of an urban vineyard in a Portuguese Historic Hotel: Challenges, perspectives, and impacts

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**Abstract.** Wine tourism is essentially tourism in rural areas linked to wine and vineyards. However, the dissemination of viticultural heritage and wine culture with the aim of contributing to a greater connection between tourists and wine sector, even in urban environments, is an option that has been increasing in some countries. In fact, wine tourism involves a wide ecosystem of actors, which can include the hotels located in the center of the cities. In addition, inside of some cities, it could be possible for some hotels to implement small-scales vineyards. These places could represent an agricultural, historical, and cultural heritage with enormous value which could also be used for tourist purposes. Thus, the main goal of this work is to present the experience and the technical challenges during the implementation of an urban vineyard in a Portuguese Historic Hotel located in the center of the city of Viseu. In addition, the activities related with wine tourism centered on the urban vineyard are shown. The strategy for the recovery of green spaces and the hotel's communication policy are also presented and discussed.

## 1 Introduction

Portugal is the most western country in Europe with a strong wine tradition demonstrated through a large viticultural activity, high diversity of terroirs and multiplicity of local grape varieties, most of them are exclusive to the Portuguese territory. In 2021, Portugal was the 11<sup>th</sup> in world with 6.5 mhl [1] of wine production, being wines one of the main products exported by the country. In addition, the tourism sector represents an important commercial activity in Portugal whose driving force is not limited to the economic dimension (9% of GDP) but extends to its repercussion in other economic activities. Thus, the tourism in Portugal has wine tourism as one of the fastest growing economic exponents and an enhancer of sustainable local development. Wine tourism also plays a significant role in the development of the Portuguese tourism industry and represents a new and valuable part of a winery's business [2].

The tourists need the gastronomy, wine tasting experiences and, of course, the hospitality sector have an important role through the existence of excellent hotels, which may also be directly or indirectly related to the wine production. Additionally, wine tourism is essentially tourism in rural areas linked to wine and vineyards. However, the dissemination of viticultural heritage and wine culture with the aim of contributing to a greater connection between tourists and wine sector, even in urban environments, is an option that is increasingly common in some countries.

In recent years some urban vineyards have appeared in several European cities (Paris, Milan, and Lyon) and even in the United States (New York City). These vineyards, unique crops within a metropolitan area, could represent an agricultural, historical, and cultural heritage with

enormous value, which can also be used for tourist purposes, representing a wine region or a country.

Thus, the main goal of this work is to present the experience and the technical challenges during the implementation and development of an urban vineyard in a Portuguese Historic Hotel (Pousada de Viseu Historic Hotel) located in the center of the city of Viseu (Portugal). At the same time, this work describes the activities (current and future) where the urban vineyard plays an important role in the tourist activities of this Historic Hotel. Finally, the strategy of the hotel's communication policy using the urban vineyard as an "instrument" are also presented and discussed in this work.

## 2 Urban vineyard: Conception, technical activities, and touristic role

### 2.1 General historic hotel characterization

The urban vineyard was implemented in a Portuguese Historic Hotel (Pousada Viseu Historic Hotel) located in the center of the city of Viseu, in the northern Portugal. This hotel is installed in a historic building, built on the site of the 19<sup>th</sup> century São Teotónio Hospital. This building, dating from 1842, was submitted to a total transformation and reconversion between 2005 and 2009 into a luxury hotel under the supervision of the Portuguese architect Gonçalo Byrne (Fig. 1). Today, this luxury hotel has 84 rooms, a restaurant, spa, indoor and outdoor swimming pools, meeting rooms, several lounge areas, and some green areas.

It is important to note that this Historic Hotel is in Viseu, which is in the center of one of the main Portuguese wine regions, the *Dão* wine region. On September 18, 1908, a Letter of Law formally established this as a wine

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region. However, the regulation for the production and marketing of wines produced there came on May 25, 1910, with the regulatory decree. Thus, *Dão* became the first Portuguese non-liqueur wine region to be demarcated and regulated.



**Figure 1.** Overview of the Hospital's conversion works (A and B) and final appearance of the entire building of the Historic Hotel in 2009 (C, D and E). Photos from Santos [3].

## 2.2 Implementation of the urban vineyard project

The implementation of the urban vineyard in this Historic Hotel began in 2019 through the planting of 80 vines. All vines (*Vitis vinifera* L.) were exclusively traditional Portuguese grape varieties (6 red and 5 white varieties) and representative from several national wine regions. Thus, for red grape cultivars the following vines were planted: Touriga Nacional, Alfrocheiro and Jaen from *Dão* Wine Region; Touriga Franca from *Douro* Wine Region; Aragonês and Trincadeira from *Alentejo* Wine Region. For the white grape varieties, the following vines were planted: Alvarinho from *Vinhos Verdes* Wine Region; Arinto from *Lisboa* Wine Region (Bucelas subregion); Fernão Pires from *Lisboa*, *Bairrada* and *Tejo* Wine Regions, Encruzado from *Dão* Wine Region; and Cercial from *Bairrada* Wine Region.

The urban vineyard was installed in two different zones of the Historic Hotel: in the car park and in front of the main entrance of the Hotel. Previously, these two hotel areas were occupied by a few different species of plants. However, in the car park, part of the land was not occupied by any specific plant species. Figure 2 shows the general view of the different hotel areas before the urban vineyard implantation in 2019.



**Figure 2.** General view of the Hotel's main entrance (A) and the car park (B) before the implementation of the urban vineyard. Photos from authors.

Therefore, there was a need to carry out an initial preparation of the land, specially by removing existing plant species, soil cleaning, and a previous specific fertilization process. In addition, a drip system irrigation was also installed in all parts of the urban vineyard. The different main phases of the work carried out during the urban vineyard implementation in the Historic Hotel are summarized in Figure 3.



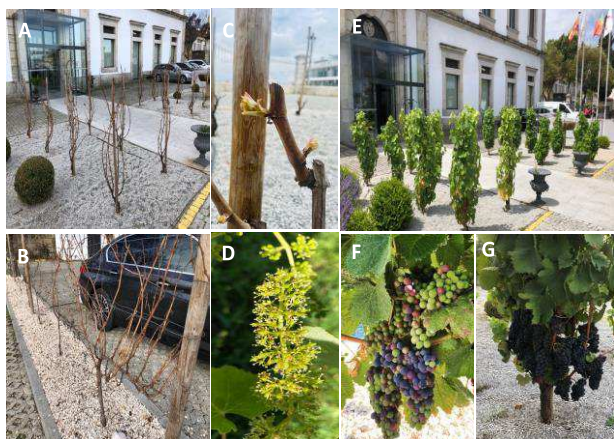
**Figure 3.** Main phases carry out during urban vineyard implementation in 2019 for car park (A to C) and in front of the main hotel entrance (D to G). Photos from authors.

There were 2 different types of implementations of the urban vineyard in the available spaces of the hotel. In front of the hotel's main entrance, the urban vineyard was installed in spaces that initially were not occupied by any vegetation and that exhibited minor attractiveness (Fig. 2A). As a result, it was created an attractive area, with easy visualization and free access to the different vines planted. This vineyard zone was of particular importance because this is the area of the urban vineyard through which tourists and other visitors have their first contact when arriving at the hotel (Fig. 3G). In the car park, a linear distribution was chosen, to take advantage of the original parking space separators (Fig. 2B). In this case, each car park separator corresponded to the planting of each of the chosen Portuguese grape varieties. Therefore, the vines were used as a natural separation (Fig. 3C), increasing the green area of the car park for at least 6 months (during the vine's vegetative cycle with greater visual impact).

## 2.3 Vineyard maintenance and interaction with the visitors

Throughout the year it is possible to observe in the urban vineyard all the typical stages of the vine's vegetative

cycle: winter dormancy, budburst, early shoot and leaf growth, flowering and fruit set, véraison and berry ripening (Fig. 4). Thus, throughout the entire cycle, the normal viticultural work associated with each of the stages is carried out, as is done in the vineyards of a wine company. A technical team monitored the effect of climate, vine diseases and pests, that might have affected the vines progression during all annual growth cycle, by using viticultural practices like canopy management, irrigation, vine training and the use of agrochemicals. However, the use of agrochemicals was reduced to a minimum, favoring the application of organic products.



**Figure 4.** Different stages of the vine's life cycle and visual appearance of the urban vineyard during the year. Vines latency stage (A and B); vines wake up from its lethargy and budding stage (C); flowering and fruit setting stage (D and E); véraison (F); maturation and harvest (G). Photos from authors.

All these stages of the vine cycle and cultural maintenance practices can be observed throughout the year by tourists who access the hotel. In this way, whenever possible, a simple explanation of the activities carried out were given to all tourists who showed interest. Thus, in this urban vineyard it is possible for visitors and all hotel customers to have a close perception of the various stages of the vine vegetative cycle, maintenance and cultural practices. These experiences contribute to a greater understanding of what goes on in the vineyard and which precedes to the production of wines and their tasting. In addition, it encourages tourists to carry out other activities related to wine tourism in the region where the hotel is located. In fact, considering the close link of this historic hotel with the region and local societies, it is also an excellent opportunity to involve local people and people related with wine production and consumption. According to Filopoulos and Frittella [4], it is important to design sustainable, educational, and responsible wine tourism experiences involving all local and regional actors associated to wine sector. The wine ecosystem expands and changes significantly if, in addition to its core actors, we also consider other actors of the wine value chain, such as hospitality business, authorities, and administration. Therefore, to this wealth of actors, the development of wine tourism activities will also gradually involve actors that traditionally belong to the tourism sector/system, further expanding the wine ecosystem.

### 3 Activities developed focused on urban vineyard

Foreign visitors consider Portuguese gastronomy and wines an attractive attribute of travel in the country [5]. Wine tourism is an important part in the national tourism plan of Turismo de Portugal (Plano Estratégico Nacional de Turismo (PENT)). In addition, Portugal is one of the countries with the largest number of grape varieties suitable for wine production (around 340 different varieties). Most of the grape varieties cultivated in Portugal are native with specific characteristics, producing wines with unique sensory profiles. Thus, the option of having grape varieties exclusively from Portuguese origin in this urban vineyard was a way of helping tourists, particularly those of foreign origin, to have, in some cases, the first contact with the names of Portuguese grape varieties. In this way, also increased their curiosity for an eventual deepening of the wines produced. The existence of information boards next to the different grape varieties, containing the name, region of origin and the main characteristics of the grapes and wines produced, was also an important way of disseminating general information about the vines and wines. Thus, a brief visit to the urban vineyard expands the reach of wine culture and its related attributes by the tourists and hotel guests. Future actions are also expected to enhance wine tourism and where the urban vineyard will be a central point of all actions, such as a harvest carried out by the hotel guests.

Figure 5 shows examples of interactions during the visit of tourists and hotel guests to the urban vineyard in front of the main hotel entrance during the Covid-19 pandemic situation (Fig. 5A-5C) and the landscape of the urban vineyard in the car park (Fig. 5D).



**Figure 5.** Visits to the urban vineyard and car park landscape. Hotel main entrance (A to C); urban vineyard zone in car park (D). Photos from authors.

It is well known that the internet has changed the way tourists search, find, evaluate, select, consume, and experience tourism offerings and destinations. According to several authors, internet and social media have been identified as the major factor influencing both wine consumers/tourists and wine (tourism) suppliers [6, 7]. The online wine landscape has shifted from traditional one-to-one broadcast of message to an interactive many-to-many conversations through blogs and social networks, giving customers the ability to gather information, publish content and buy more easily than using traditional channels. Of course, also the use of social media by hotels is not an exception either, being currently a tool for communication and dissemination of activities with great importance and impact. Thus, a strong presence within social networks allows hotels to constantly update their upcoming events, promotions, amenities, and services to a wide range of public.

In this context, the implemented urban vineyard has been used directly or indirectly in the hotel's communication policy. One of the options has been the use of social networks, such as Facebook and Instagram. Figure 6 shows several examples which exemplify this communication strategy. Therefore, the posting of photos with the development of the vines and grapes through illustrative pictures and short sentences has been a procedure of direct dissemination. In addition, to the obvious objectives of promoting the hotel's image, this also has an educational and informative nature for current and potential customers about the different stages of the vine's life cycle (Fig. 6A).

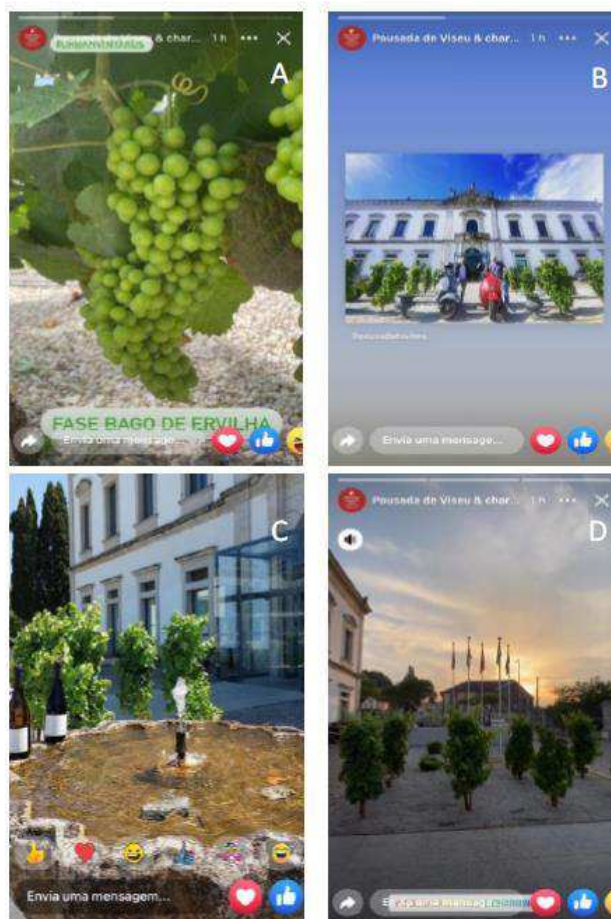
At the events held at the hotel, whether associated to the wine topic or not, the urban vineyard has also been used as a framing element in the dissemination of these events on social media. Figure 6B shows an event unrelated to the wine topic, while Figure 6C shows the use of urban vineyard in the promotion of wines from a local producer who used the hotel's facilities to promote them. Finally, the use of the urban vineyard in different photographic perspectives that can be attractive in terms of communication by the hotel (namely at the visual level), has also been transmitted by social networks (Fig. 6D). All these examples allow us to evaluate the potential of implementation of an urban vineyard as a way of enhancing and promoting wine tourism and the communication strategies of hotel companies.

## 4 Final remarks

Wine tourism involves a wide ecosystem of actors. It is not only a source of revenue for wine regions, for the wine business value chain and for local societies, but it can also reveal and safeguard the cultural heritage of wine and support wine regions sustainability. In all these contexts, hotels, even if located in urban areas, can also help tourists acquire some knowledge about the wine sector, helping to stimulate local and regional wine tourism. Thus, one of the ways that can be used actively involves the installation of urban vineyards in hotel spaces. In this way, the tourist can be framed in a simple and general way in wine tourism. On the other hand, the hotel itself can use the urban vineyard

not only as a landscape element (including space recovery) but also use it in its communication policy using, for example, social networks, as well as holding events related to wine.

Therefore, this study and the experience related in this work provides relevant information about the implementation, challenges, and potential of an urban vineyard and at the same their role in the development of the wine tourism in urban regions.



**Figure 6.** Several examples of posts on social networks where the urban vineyard is used.

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