

VINE_ROUTE – The Cultural Path of Wine

Cross-Border Cooperation Programme Interreg VI-A Greece–Bulgaria 2021–2027

Short description of the project

VINE_ROUTE – The Cultural Path of Wine is a cross-border cooperation project between Greece and Bulgaria, co-funded by the European Union under the Interreg VI-A Greece–Bulgaria 2021–2027 Programme. Its specific objective is to strengthen the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation. The total approved budget of the project is EUR 1,129,676.12.

The project showcases the shared viticultural and winemaking heritage of Northern Greece and Southern Bulgaria, linking ancient traditions with contemporary wine tourism within a single cultural route. The route covers the entire cross-border region and traces the history of viticulture and winemaking – from the Neolithic period to the great ancient civilisations – connecting museums, archaeological sites, wineries and local communities into an integrated thematic tourism product.

The project builds on the rich natural and cultural heritage of the region and, in particular, on its deeply rooted traditions in viticulture and winemaking. Nevertheless, tourist flows in the region remain concentrated mainly on mass coastal destinations. VINE_ROUTE aims to develop a new, comprehensive thematic tourism product that brings together the cultural, historical and productive dimensions of wine across the whole cross-border region.

The history of winemaking is an integral part of this region – from the Neolithic settlement of Dikili Tash, through Homeric Ismaros and the cult of Dionysus in Macedonia and Thrace. Museums in Northern Greece and Southern Bulgaria preserve valuable archaeological finds – amphorae, coins and works of art – that bear witness to this heritage. The Bulgarian winemaking tradition, in turn, spans the period from the Thracian civilisation to the present-day export of wines to international markets.

The route starts from the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki and covers the entire cross-border region, presenting both the ancient evidence of winemaking and contemporary wine tourism enterprises. The Lead Beneficiary's participation in the Iter Vitis European Cultural Route provides valuable practical experience and expertise.

Through innovative solutions – a multilingual application based on artificial intelligence, interactive interpretation centres, augmented reality (AR) materials, educational Museum Boxes, interpretive signposts, and networking activities with stakeholders from the tourism and wine sectors – the project offers visitors a modern, immersive and attractive experience.

The project is structured into five work packages: WP1 – Project management and coordination; WP2 – Communication and dissemination of results; WP3 – Designing VINE ROUTE; WP4 – Creation of interpretation facilities and tools; WP5 – Integration with the tourism economy.

Objectives and main activities

The project aims to create a single cross-border cultural and tourism route that highlights the shared viticultural and winemaking heritage of Northern Greece and Southern Bulgaria. The route connects museums, archaeological sites, cultural heritage sites, wineries, local communities and contemporary wine tourism activities, forming an integrated thematic product with historical, educational and tourism value.

The leading methodology of the project is Heritage Interpretation, which combines physical and digital experiences in order to engage visitors more deeply. The project also fosters cooperation between museums and wineries and integrates the route into existing tourist flows.

The specific objectives of the project are:

- to present the cultural significance of wine across different historical periods;
- to engage civil society in promoting wine heritage;
- to build infrastructure for the interpretation of cultural heritage;
- to promote the values of the Iter Vitis European Cultural Route;
- to increase cross-border tourist mobility;
- to diversify tourism products and ensure their sustainability;
- to enhance the visitor experience and the promotion of the route through digital technologies.

The main project activities include:

- documentation and selection of cultural and historical data;
- development of the route and of a tourist signposting system;
- creation of multimedia tools based on artificial intelligence;
- establishment of an Interpretation Hub;
- development of educational materials, including Museum Boxes;
- training of specialised VINE_ROUTE interpreters;
- engagement with journalists, tour operators and festival organisers.

Project partners

The project is implemented by four partners:

- **Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki** (Lead Beneficiary), Greece;
- **Civil Association for the Promotion of the Vineyards of Northern Greece**, Greece;
- **Archaeological Museum of Sandanski**, Bulgaria;
- **Union for Recovery and Development (URD)**, Bulgaria.

Main results

The implementation of the project is expected to deliver:

- a single cross-border cultural and tourism route presenting the cultural significance of wine across different historical periods;
- infrastructure for the interpretation of cultural heritage, including an Interpretation Hub;

- digital tools – a multilingual application based on artificial intelligence and augmented reality materials – that enhance the visitor experience;
- educational materials and Museum Boxes, together with trained specialised interpreters along the route;
- a tourist signposting system with interpretive signposts;
- an engaged civil society and networks established with stakeholders from the tourism and wine sectors;
- the values of the Iter Vitis European Cultural Route promoted;
- increased cross-border tourist mobility and diversified, sustainable tourism products in the region.

By connecting cultural heritage with contemporary winemaking, VINE_ROUTE establishes the cross-border region as an authentic, dynamic and attractive destination for cultural, wine and gastronomic tourism at international level.

European co-financing

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