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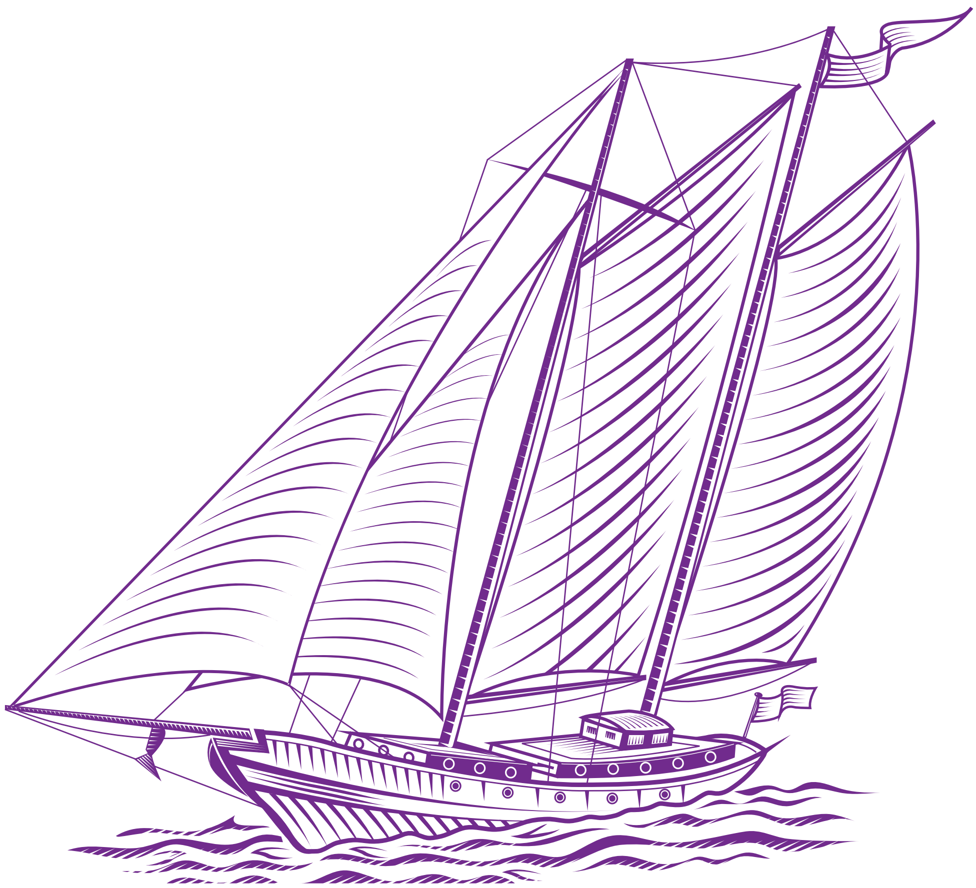

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WINE TOURISM AND SMALL TOWNS WITH (NO) DREAMS: THE CASE OF ROMANIA

Cornelia POP[1], Monica-Maria COROS[2], Valentin TOADER[3]

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ABSTRACT. The present paper investigates the point of intersection between wine tourism and urban tourism in 87 Romanian small towns. The presence of vineyards and wine-incentives represent distinctive features with the potential to become (niche) tourism attractions, therefore having the capacity to provide a competitive edge for these towns in a fierce and aggressive tourism market. For the current investigation, the research question is: do the wine-attractions related to these localities influence the tourist accommodation facilities and arrivals and therefore their position as wine tourism destinations? The research results show, with painful clarity, that the Romanian municipalities and towns related to wine-attractions do not use this differentiating feature in order to raise their profile as wine tourism destinations. Having wine-related attractions at their core, Romanian smaller urban localities could benefit from potential factors to regenerate their economic and social conditions through tourism. Most of them are presently ignoring this competitive advantage, seeming to have no dreams to become wine tourism destinations.

Keywords: wine tourism, small towns, Romania

JEL classification: L83, Z32

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Introduction

Small towns are 'understudied locales' as shown by Brown-Saracino (2020). Situated at the intersection between rural areas and urban settlements, the small towns used to play an important economic and administrative role (Steinfuehrer, 2022) which stagnated and/or declined over the past three decades due to various reasons (Powe *et al.*, 2022). The needed reorientation of small towns is a significant challenge based on the local resources (Horlings *et al.*, 2018). Considering the development of tourism is can be one option, taking into consideration the interconnections between tourism and the economic activities (Susila *et al.*, 2024). Moreover, the development of a niche tourism based on wine-related attractions can provide a competitive advantage and an increased visibility as a tourism destination (Ruggeri *et al.*, 2024). Wine tourism is versatile and can be attached to heritage tourism, cultural tourism, nature tourism just to mention a few tourism types. Attached to a small town, wine tourism can stop its economic decline and improve the perspectives for future development (Dossou *et al.*, 2023). Nonetheless, local communities need to understand the value of their available (wine-related) resources and to be willing to use them for tourism development. Also, a good strategy for tourism development at national level, integrating various niche tourism types, including wine tourism, is to be desired (Powe *et al.*, 2022; Horlings *et al.*, 2018).

The intersection between Romanian urban tourism in small towns and wine tourism does not take place under good auspices. More than three decades after December 1989, when Ceausescu's communist regime was overturned, Romania is still struggling to find an identity as a tourism destination. This uncertainty and absence of confidence comes from the fact that Romania is spoiled by very many options, from spa & health tourism to natural and cultural tourism (including World Heritage Sites like Danube Delta and the villages with fortified churches) and various niche tourism forms (Pop *et al.*, 2007; Turnock, 2006). To these many types and forms, one must add the obsolete, nostalgic, and persisting ideas – for about two decades after 1989 – that Romania should be presented as a seaside destination based on the country's past-time success (in the mid-1970s).

Three campaigns have had some reputation: a) *The eternal and fascinating Romania* of the early '90s (1995-1997/1998), followed by the short campaign dedicated to the total solar eclipse of 1999, which started to late and, therefore, was short and unsuccessful; b) *Romania simply surprising*, which was the tourism slogan between 2000/2001 and 2007/2008, and which, despite being criticized for its negative intimation, it had the merit to be honest, in tune with the country's realities; c) *Romania – explore the Carpathian garden* which was launched at the end of 2010 and remained the county's tourism slogan ever since; despite its longevity, this tagline does not resonate with Romanians (those who are aware of its existence) since Romania does not have any traditions in gardening and one can only pinpoint a handful of known (at national level) botanical gardens in urban areas. The best mirror of the lack of success of these campaigns is illustrated by the international tourism receipts of Romania (Figure 1), which represented in average billion 1.90 USD (annual average for 2000-2015), reaching billion 2.0 USD in 2016 and registering a growth trend, to reach billion 5.80 USD in 2024, despite the COVID-19 generated gap in 2020 (1.4 billion USD) and 2021 (3.3 billion USD) (World Bank, 2025; UNWTO Tourism Dashboard, 2025). On average, from 1995 to 2024, the international tourism receipts represented less than 4% of the total exports (annual average for 1995-2024) based on World Bank data and the UNWTO Dashboard data. For the most recent year, 2024, Romania's international tourism receipts are low given its potential; they are higher than Bulgaria's (4.3 billion USD) and Slovenia's (3.6 billion USD) but they are significantly lower compared to those of Hungary (8.1 billion USD) and Poland (15 billion USD) (UNWTO Tourism Dashboard, 2025).

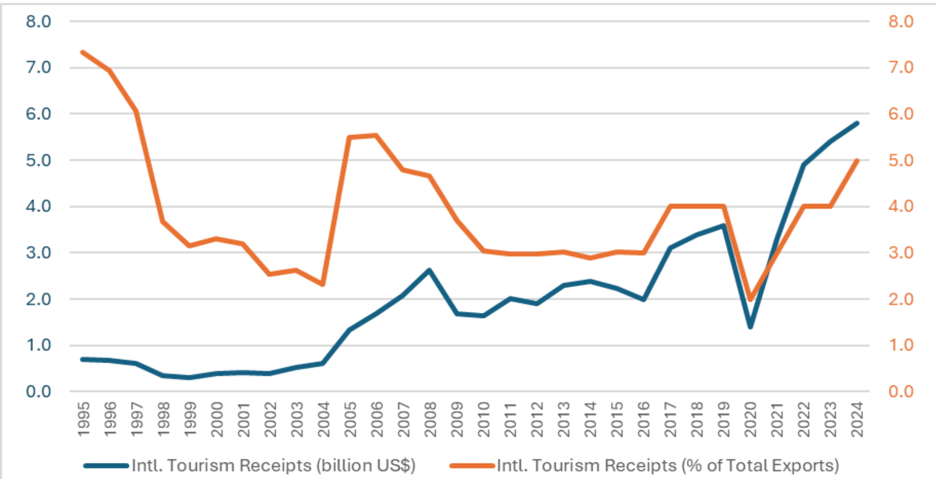

Figure No. 1. Romania's international tourism receipts

Sources: World Bank data were used for the 2000-2016 time span and UNWTO data for the 2016-2024 time frame; however, one ought to note that the World Bank data are provided by UNWTO as well.

A look at a potential development of wine tourism in Romania can be viewed as a natural occurrence since the country's average ranks 10th worldwide and 5th in the European Union (EU) in terms of cultivated vineyard surface, and 13th globally and 6th in the EU, from the production point of view (according to the OIV statistics for 2005-2024). The potential of wine tourism was considered as a form of alternative tourism only in 2002-2003, approximately a decade later, after the trend of wine tourism development had started around the world. In 2002-2003, the then existing Ministry of Tourism (MoT) launched the program **Romania – Land of Wine**, with the sub-program ***Wine Route/ Road*** (Pop & Coros, 2023). This program had a short life due to political changes at the governmental level, with the later integration of the MoT in the larger structure of another ministry (the Ministry of Transports, Constructions, and Tourism), and the departure of the person who initiated the program, the former minister of tourism, Dan Mihai Agathon. The potential for wine tourism development is briefly presented in the Master Plan 2007-2026 for Romanian Tourism Development, however no details are provided regarding the potential further development, as shown by Pop *et al.* (2023).

The results of the above-mentioned program (and sub-program) remain modest. Some skeletal structures for wine routes were identified by Pop *et al.* (2023). Some of these wine routes seem to be functional but they lack the sophistication required by such wine destinations, while others only have the potential to become wine routes, with a long development path ahead.

Similar to the phenomenon of urban tourism worldwide (Pasquinelli & Bellini, 2016; Powell *et al*., 2018), Romania also has a dominant urban tourism, in 2024 Bucharest and the county residencies concentrating 43.92% of all tourist arrivals and 77.69% of the international tourist arrivals and 36.39% of all overnight stays in the same destinations, with 78.81% of the international overnight stays. Moreover, similar values were registered in average between 1994 and 2024 (with average arrivals of 46.75% and 74.75% for international arrivals, respectively average overnight stays of 30.98%, respectively 65.88% for international overnight stays). To these, other localities and tourist routes ought to be added (with accounting for 16.87% in terms of overall arrivals and 12.02% of the overnight stays of 2024, respectively of 11.49% of the international arrivals and 11.34% of the foreigners' overnight stays). In terms of arrivals, Bucharest is leading by aggregating 13.76% of the tourist arrivals (having attracted over 2 million tourists in 2024), given its administrative position as Romania's capital, followed by an important business sector, and valuable cultural attractions. No other Romanian urban locality can compete with this standing. The remaining 318 urban localities (of which NIS collects data on arrivals and overnight stays only for 281) account for 65.35% of the tourist arrivals and 65.21% of the overnight stays. Of these towns, 87 are directly related to vineyards/wine-attractions, and they manage to draw in only about 14.8% of the tourist arrivals (although about 40.8% of these arrivals are concentrated in only two urban localities, one a large county residence and the other a seaside destination).

While the program **Romania – Land of Wine** and its sub-program ***Wine Road/Route*** were intended to target mainly rural areas and to enhance rural tourism, Romanian towns related to wine attractions ought to be linked to this program as the majority of them are small or very small localities (74 of these 87 towns have a population below 50,000 people) and administratively include rural areas. These small towns can be placed in the *country towns* category proposed by Hall (2005) and/or considered either as small towns in remote/rural/peripheral regions or small towns in intermediate regions (between metropolitan areas and rural/peripheral areas), two categories suggested by Atkinson (2019).

As the presence of vineyards and wine-incentives represents distinctive features with the potential to become (niche) tourism attractions, the present research investigates the case of the 87 urban localities with wine tourism potential. The research question is: do the wine attractions related to these localities influence tourist accommodation facilities and arrivals, and consequently their position as wine tourism destinations? To the best of the authors' knowledge, no other Romanian academic paper has either identified or discussed the situation of these 87 urban localities with wine tourism prospects.

Literature Review

Urban Tourism

Urban areas around the world have been and continue to represent significant tourism destinations as they have the needed attributes (developed tourism attractions, diverse accommodation facilities, being transportation and communication hubs) and provide assorted, flexible, and convenient tourism products required by tourism industry (Edwards *et al.*, 2008; Ashworth & Page, 2011; Morrison, 2020). Nonetheless, the competition for attracting tourism is led by those cities that are large and multifunctional entities since the global (and sub-global) cities, as defined by Hall (2005), and that enjoy the best position to benefit from their various tourism assets (Ashworth & Page, 2011; Henderson, 2017).

Cities are considered the most important tourism product of Europe (Powell *et al.*, 2018), mainly as cultural and heritage destinations (Wickens, 2017). Also, cities are seen as the most dynamic segment of European tourism (Pasquinelli & Bellini, 2016). Nonetheless, Europe has an important number of small (sometimes very small) and medium-sized towns given its old settlement system (Zdanowska *et al.*, 2020), and therefore European urban destinations range from small towns to world (global) cities such as Paris (Maxim, 2019). The tourism potential of these small and medium-sized towns has been highlighted for a decade already by ECM (2014), with a special mention of Eastern European towns, which were expected to increase their standing as urban tourism destinations. However, as underlined by Smith & Klicek (2020), the international tourism development of these former communist towns was limited before 1989 and they had to adapt to the new conditions (political, social) of the post-communist era, combined with the pressure of economic restructuring triggered by the de-industrialization, followed by the loss of investments and talented people (Richards & Duif, 2018).

As tourist destinations, Eastern European cities and towns have very diverse trajectories: some attracted tourism at an earlier stage (e.g. Hungarian urban localities); others benefited from the nomination as a European Capital of Culture (e.g., Sibiu, Romania in 2007, which raised its profile as a tourism destination); while many remained relatively undiscovered, Romanian towns being listed under this category (Smith & Klicek, 2020). Furthermore, it should be stressed that for most Eastern European countries, foreign tourists are more familiar with the respective countries' (administrative) capitals and this situation can be related to the early stages of the global networks diffusion in these countries, reaching mainly the capitals and a few larger towns (Zdanowska *et al.*, 2020).

For the Eastern European undiscovered towns, including the Romanian ones, urban tourism can be considered a leverage for urban regeneration, demonstrating the respective town's capacity to transfer its tangible and intangible assets into distinctive tourism offers that might attract (sustainable) types of tourism (Della Lucia *et al.*, 2016). One argument in favor of the small towns' orientation towards (sustainable) tourism development is their probably higher capacity to act more quickly and flexibly for such a transformation (Richards & Duif, 2018), provided that the needed structures exist and are functional. Furthermore, small cities are viewed as friendlier and as having a greater sense of local community, therefore more sociable (Richards & Duif, 2018), all these features being important (intangible) assets for becoming inviting tourism destinations. As shown by Light *et al.* (2020), Central and Eastern European (CEE) small towns benefited from the growth of heritage tourism, attracting an increasing number of visitors. Given the close relationship between gastronomy and (local) heritage (Light *et al.*, 2020; Lin *et al.*, 2021), culinary tourism became a rapidly growing form of special interest tourism for small CEE towns because it can emphasize place identity and distinctiveness as a tourism destination (Salvado & Kastenholz, 2017; Rachao *et al.*, 2019). Regarded as a sub-type of culinary tourism (Turnock, 2006; Bonarou *et al.*, 2019; Garcia Revilla & Martinez Moure, 2021), wine tourism, based on related wine resources, has the potential to elevate the unique profile of a tourism destination.

Wine Tourism

Nowadays, wine tourism is regarded as one of the most burgeoning branches of (global) tourism, registering a rapid growth at the global level (UNWTO, 2018; Santos *et al.*, 2021; Ruggeri *et al.*, 2024).

The occurrence of wine tourism (also called enotourism or œnotourism) was identified by academic research in the mid-1980s through Becker's (1984) paper on *Wine Tourism on the Moselle* (Duran-Sanchez *et al.*, 2016). As announced by its name, the core motivations and activities of wine tourism are wine tasting (and buying) at cellar doors or in the wineries and the visiting of the related vineyards (Getz & Brown, 2006; Santos *et al.*, 2021; Sidorkiewicz, 2023). Nonetheless, over the past three decades, wine tourism developed into a more diversified, multi-faceted, and sophisticated form of tourism (Kim *et al.*, 2019; Bonarou *et al.*, 2019). Wine tourism expanded its products and services to include (along with the core activities) wine shows and wine festivals, wine-related gastronomy, various other leisure activities in the wine-producing region (e.g., wine museums), heritage and cultural features like wine architecture embedded in wine-related accommodations (Ferreira & Hunter, 2017; Bruwer & Rueger-Muck, 2018). Through these developments, wine tourism is currently identified as 'terroir tourism' (Caldeira *et al.*, 2021), where the mixing between the natural and cultural factors is essential (Liberato *et al.*, 2023).

The growth of wine tourism, as niche tourism (Montella, 2017; Ruggeri *et al.*, 2024), can be related to the increasing interest in offbeat tourism destinations and the visitors' desire to explore the unique features of wine destinations, like vineyard landscapes and/or wine-related heritage and traditions (Andrade-Suarez & Caamao-Franco, 2020; Karamehmedovic & Raspudic, 2024). Therefore, wine tourism, as a type of special interest (alternative) tourism (Montella, 2017; Ruggeri *et al.*, 2024) influences and is influenced by the neo-localism (tourism) movement, as an alternative to intensely criticized mass tourism (Liberato *et al.*, 2023; Cunha *et al.*, 2021), enriching local tourism with alternative leisure activities (Depetris Chauvin, 2025).

The following 3 main aspects justify the development of wine tourism in wine-producing regions:

a) *from a socio-economic perspective:* for vine-growing and wine-producing regions, the core activity of processing grapes into wine represents the center of the socio-economic status of the respective regions; hence, the wine can become the main thematic pivot which can be surrounded by a broad mix of tourism-related activities (Chiodo *et al.*, 2020). The position of wine tourism as an engine for local/regional economic and social sustainable development – including environmental conservation (Garcia Revilla & Martinez Moure, 2021; McGregor & Robinson, 2019; Cunha *et al*., 2021) is based on the capacity of wine tourism to create positive synergies (interactions and integrations) between agriculture (vine cultivation) as a primary sector, the secondary sector of the wine industry (production and bottling), the tertiary sector, tourism, enabling the emergence of a wine-related tourism destination (Salvado & Kastenholz, 2017; Andrade-Suarez & Caamao-Franco, 2020). Furthermore, wine tourism-related activities (e.g., visits to wineries and museums, accommodation and food services) provide diversification to the existing primary and secondary sectors, generating extra-revenue streams, stimulating job creation, and potential local business growth, contributing to the well-being of the locals (Karamehmedovic & Raspudic, 2024; Martinez-Falco *et al*., 2024; Tafel & Szolnoki, 2020; Martinez-Navarro & Sellers-Rubio, 2024). At the same time, wine tourism can support further innovation, keeping the wine-related regions alive (Montella, 2017; Bonarou *et al.,* 2019).

b) *from the point of view of the preservation capacity*: vine-cultivation, wine creation and production, and other wine-related activities are embedded in the lifestyle of the local residents (Bonarou *et al.*, 2019) and reflect the cultural heritage (traditions, arts and crafts, history, and architecture) of the wine-producing regions (Santos *et al.*, 2022; Roy *et al.*, 2019). Wine tourism is considered a significant tool for supporting and preserving the local/regional cultural heritage, having the potential to uncover and rediscover old traditions and customs, bringing into focus the regions' wine legacy and enhancing the local/regional identity (Santos *et al.*, 2021).

c) *from the viewpoint of being a distinctive feature*: each wine-producing region has specific, unique features related to the geographic location, the man-made winescapes, wine products, wine-related activities, all impacting the locals' way of living (Ferreira, 2020; Bonarou *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, wine and wine-attractions are at the core elements of a wine area's/region's identity, giving the respective area/region differentiating and distinctive (sometimes unique) features capable of enhancing and elevating its position as a tourism destination (Dreyer, 2019; Andrade-Suarez & Caamano-Franco, 2020; Liberato *et al.*, 2023).

Hence, wine-producing regions can derive direct or indirect competitive advantages from positioning the wine at the core of their tourism offer (Vazquez Vicente *et al.*, 2021; Martinez-Falco *et al.*, 2024) that can generate an increase in tourist visits and can influence the image of wine regions as quality tourism destinations related to (if it exists) a wine brand (Karamehmedovic & Raspudic, 2024; Cunha *et al.*, 2021, Baird *et al.*, 2019). This process is further enhanced by the fact that wine can be offered either as a stand-alone attraction or in combination with (high-end) food products (Egresi & Buluc, 2016; Lin *et al.*, 2021), and further by the transformation of wine (and the related gastronomy) from a complementary to the main reason for visiting a destination, as research revealed over the past decade (Duran-Sanchez *et al.*, 2016; Santos *et al.*, 2021).

Kim *et al.* (2010) disseminate the concept of memorable tourism experiences which gradually became the 'raison d'être' of various types of tourism and tourism destinations (Kotur, 2023), including wine-related tourism. As the reviews of wine tourism of Bonn *et al.* (2018) and Martinez-Navarro & Sellers-Rubio (2024) show, the concept of wine tourism became broader and expanded in scope (Camara Malerba *et al.*, 2023; Ingrassia *et al.*, 2022). Provided that wine is not only a product but also a cultural symbol (Garcia Revilla & Martinez Moure, 2021) the gradual evolution of wine tourism towards offering a large variety of multi-faceted, immersive, and holistic experiences came as a natural adaptation to the tourist demands (Santos *et al.*, 2022; Santos *et al.*, 2021; Liberato *et al.*, 2023; Kotur, 2023). Furthermore, these experiences address the (enthusiast) wine tourists' desires to refine and elevate their knowledge of wine crafts and traditions, and of the locals' lifestyle (Kotur, 2023; Vecchio *et al.*, 2024). Several forms in which wine-related experiences manifest are wine festivals, wine-related events and cuisine, winery and vine walks, and museums (Kotur, 2023; Bruwer & Rueger-Muck, 2018). The quality of the experiences offered is essential for the current development of a wine tourism destination (Campos-Andaur *et al.*, 2022) since these experiences must satisfy the (œnological) curiosities of an increasingly sophisticated niche of tourists (Santos *et al.*, 2022; Bonarou *et al.*, 2019) and are more and more viewed as a guarantee for a pleasant way of spending their leisure time within the wine destinations (Bruwer & Rueger-Muck 2018; Del Chiappa *et al.*, 2019; Garcia Revilla & Martinez Moure, 2021).

Wine tourism is a multi-faceted activity (Haller *et al.*, 2020), and a successful wine tourism destination is based on the integration of enological, natural, and cultural elements (Campos-Andaur *et al.*, 2022) to enhance the destination's distinctive appeal (Camara Malerba *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, it depends on the ability of all involved stakeholders to co-create an offer which responds to the needs and expectations of (enthusiast) wine tourists (Ben Tahar *et al.*, 2021).

The Crossroad between Urban and Wine Tourism

Wine tourism is often associated with rural tourism (Cunha *et al.*, 2021; Figueroa & Rotarou, 2018); however, it can also be associated with small towns (Cevik & Sacilik, 2023) located either in remote/rural or peripheral regions or between metropolitan areas and peripheral regions (Atkinson, 2019) when surrounded by vine-growing areas. Grapevine growing, winemaking, and wine are central components for the identity of such a small town; these components provide specific characteristics for a potential tourism destination (Dreyer, 2019; Bonarou *et al.*, 2019).

Small towns can benefit from the neo-localism (tourism) movement (Cunha *et al.*, 2021) with tourists looking more and more for local, day-to-day experiences (Nientied, 2021) and seeking an increased connection with locals (Scherf, 2021). However, as Richards (2024) shows, Europe has a high number of well-preserved historic towns, and the competition for attracting tourists is fierce. Therefore, those small towns that are blessed with surrounding vine-growing areas and the related wine attractions have the possibility to capitalize on the unique heritage provided by wine cultivation and wine production. The meaning of a place and the related (tourist) experiences are enhanced when wine is present, as highlighted by the literature on wine tourism (Bonn *et al.*, 2018; Martinez-Navarro & Sellers-Rubio, 2024), making the respective small towns more attractive for (enthusiast) œnotourists. Still, the academic literature investigating peripheral small towns related to wine-attractions is scarce to non-existent, as underlined by Gomez *et al.* (2019), Martinez-Navarro & Sellers-Rubio (2024), and Stoica *et al.* (2020).

The Dedicated Academic Literature in Romania

The Romanian academic literature on urban tourism is rich and covers a variety of topics. However, this literature tends to concentrate on larger Romanian cities, which are prone to attract a higher number of (domestic and international) tourists. Among the most studied cities are Bucharest (Zamfir & Corbos, 2015; Buerkner & Totelecan, 2018), Brasov (Candrea et al., 2017; Jucu, 2020; Briciu *et al.*, 2020), Cluj-Napoca (Fleseriu *et al.*, 2018, Cianga, 2020), Timisoara (Popescu & Voiculescu, 2020; Vesalon & Cretan, 2020), given their size, economic standing, and tourism attractions. On the other hand, Romanian small towns are seldom under scrutiny, with or without tourism as a main theme, as shown by Stoica *et al.* (2020).

Nevertheless, the recent study of Stoica *et al.* (2020) points out that an important number of Romanian small towns, facing a decrease in population, show a decline in urban features and a re-emergence of rural characteristics (perhaps because until 2004 most of these small towns were rural localities).

From this position, those small towns related to vine-cultivation and wine-attraction could make use of the development of wine tourism as a solution to prevent further (economic and social) decline.

The academic literature related to wine tourism in Romania is relatively modest but it is on a growing path. This literature is also concentrated on various wine regions, depending on the authors' affiliation and/or interests, it describes extensively various cultural and natural attractions of the wine-producing regions and wine routes (as highlighted by Ungureanu (2015), and cites unverifiable sources for visitor numbers (Pop *et al.*, 2023). Most of the recent wine-related academic literature in Romania is concentrated on a trial to discover the wine tourist profile (Tanase *et al.*, 2022; Oltean & Gabor, 2022) and to discover the wine tourism product(s) offered by various wine regions (Sorcaru *et al.*, 2024; Vilcea *et al.*, 2024).

To the best of the authors' knowledge, no Romanian academic paper has until now investigated the potential relationship between wine tourism and the associated urban areas, except for a brief mention of some towns along the identified wine routes by Pop *et al.* (2023). Thus, by investigating the Romanian towns with wine attractions and their wine tourism potential, the present paper fills an existing gap within (Romanian) academic literature and reveals the status of these differentiating features as a pull factor for tourism.

General Information, Data, and Methodology

For the present paper, the following general information is needed to understand the types of Romanian urban localities. Urban settlements are ranked (based on population size) in *municipalities* and *towns.* Municipalities can be split into two sub-categories: a) those that have the role of administrative capitals for the 41 Romanian counties, further referred to as *county residencies*, and b) other municipalities, in various counties. To the 40 county residencies, the municipality of Bucharest, Romania's capital and the largest urban locality, is added and stands alone; it is also the administrative seat of the 41st county, Ilfov County. Thus, Romania has 40 municipalities as county residencies, 62 other municipalities, and 216 towns; a total of 318 urban localities, Bucharest here excluded given its standalone position and high concentration of tourist arrivals (NIS, 2025).

However, the general structure presented above proved to be difficult to handle for the present paper. The classification by population size proposed by Dijkstra & Poelma (2012) was further used, ignoring the status of municipality or town. Given Romania's situation, to the categories of *large, medium,* and *small* localities proposed by Dijkstra & Poelma (2012), in this study, the categories of extra-small (*xs*) and extra-extra-small (*xxs*) were introduced for the towns that have a low and very low population, as shown in Table 1.

The data used within this study come from secondary sources: Romanian National Institute of Statistics (NIS) via Tempo Online for population, accommodation facilities, and tourist arrivals for 2001-2024; the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development for vineyards and Revino.ro website for wineries; the Ministry of Culture for the historic monuments; the World Heritage website for the Romanian WHS; the National Agency for Protected Natural Areas for natural protected areas. Rankings were created for a) the presence of vineyards based on the number of localities related to vine-cultivation, b) the existence of a wine route, as discussed by Pop *et al.* (2023), c) the other tourist attractions which include the presence of World Heritage Sites (WHSs), the status of tourist resort (of national or local interest) as announced by the Ministry of Tourism (MoT), the existence of ports and/or airports; d) the wine-attraction information included by the official websites of the 87 urban localities under scrutiny. The monuments and protected areas were used as a stand-alone series of data to allow the comparison with other studies.

To investigate the influence of wine-attractions on tourist accommodations and arrivals, PLS-SEM (partial least squares – structural equation modeling) was preferred given this method's capability to estimate more complex cause-effect relationship models (Cepeda-Carrion *et al.*, 2019; Nunez-Maldonado *et al.*, 2022). As recommended by Hair *et al.* (2019), PLS-SEM was also chosen given the use of several formative constructs and due to the concerns related to data distribution. The option for PLS-SEM is supported by Ali *et al.* (2018), who highlight that PLS-SEM is increasingly used in tourism-related academic research. The PLS-SEM uses the formative-reflective high-order components approach. The latent variables, 'lodgings' and 'arrivals', are the reflective constructs, while 'population & economic entities', 'tourist attractions', and 'wine attractions' are the formative ones.

To answer the research question: *Do wine-attractions related to these localities influence their tourist accommodation facilities and arrivals and, therefore, their position as wine tourism destinations?*, the conceptual model employed is presented in Figure 2, below. The model is based on PLS-SEM. The conceptual model is structured into 3 constructs that encapsulate the economic factors (through population and number of economic entities), the tourist attractions (through cultural and natural attractions), and the wine attractions. These 3 constructs are expected to influence the tourist activity at the destination level. The tourist activity is quantified through the construct of lodgings (available accommodation facilities at the destination) and that of the arrivals (tourist arrivals and the length of stay). The conceptual model is based on the factors suggested by Getz & Brown (2006), Campos-Andaur *et al.* (2022), Camara Malerba *et al.* (2023), Karamehmedovic & Raspudic (2024), and Martinez-Navarro & Sellers-Rubio (2024) for the websites and adapted to the realities and available data for Romania.

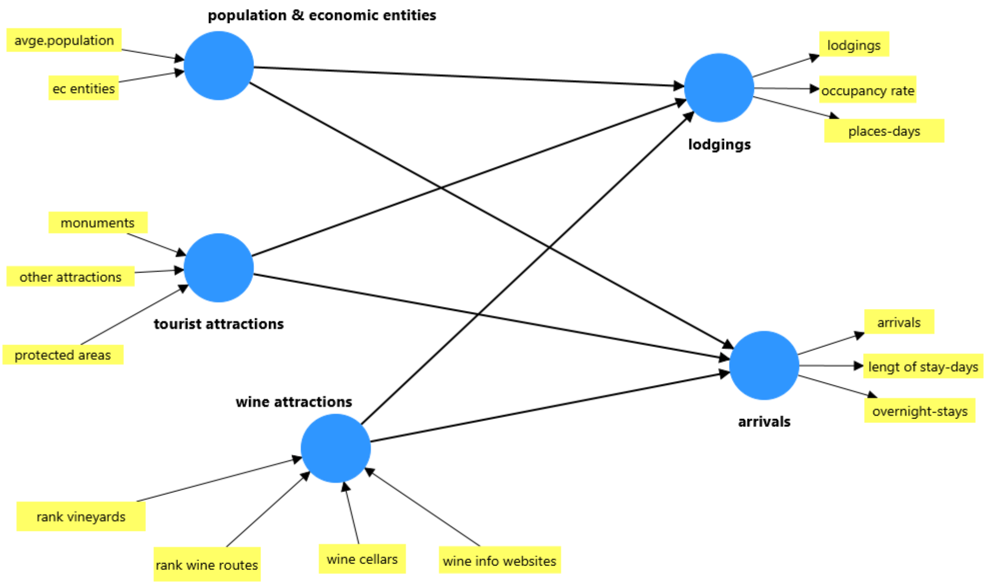

Figure No. 2. The conceptual model investigating the influence of wine-attraction over the tourist activity

Source: Authors' compilation

Urban Tourism and Wine-related Urban Localities (A Brief Discussion)

The 318 urban localities (Bucharest excluded) account on average for 70.16% of the total tourist arrivals and 55.52% of the total lodgings. Appendix 1 shows that urban tourism gravitates mainly around county residencies and resorts of national interest, which aggregate over 75% of the urban lodgings and around 86% of the urban arrivals. These two categories are led by a small number of localities (9 county residencies and 5 resorts of national interest) that account for over 100,000 urban tourist arrivals. From among the county residencies, 4 either include a locality declared resort (the cases of Constanta, Brasov, and Sibiu) or have the status of national resort (Oradea, for a part of its city center). Other 3 county residencies were or are related to the European Capital of Culture initiative (Sibiu, in 2007, and Timisoara, in 2023) or the European Capital of Youth initiative (Cluj-Napoca, in 2015). The pull power of these localities, beyond their status of county residencies that concentrate county and regional administrative institutions and host large numbers of economic entities, is generated by various cultural events (music, theatre, film festivals, etc.) and other cultural attractions (museums, historic monuments), by being important academic and medical centers, and by having international airports. In the case of the resorts of national importance, their main pull power originates in their location (Mangalia, Eforie, and Navodari, on the Romanian seaside, Sinaia, Busteni, Predeal, and Calimanesti, in mountain areas), several (mainly cultural) tourist attractions (e.g., Peles Castle in Sinaia, Cantacuzino Castle in Busteni), and curative features (Calimanesti).

One ought to mention that, concerning the size of the Romanian urban localities, the majority of the municipalities and towns (295 of the 318 or 92.77%) are small to very small; for the urban localities related to wine-attractions, the proportion is higher (83 of the 87 or 95.40%). This situation places them within the category of *country towns*, as proposed by Hall (2005), or in the categories proposed by Atkinson (2019): either *small towns in intermediate regions* or *small towns in remote/rural or peripheral regions*. This information, combined with the recent findings of Stoica *et al.* (2020) regarding the degradation of urban features for an important number of Romanian towns, points towards a tourism profile with rather rural features, including wine tourism. Thus, these circumstances should be taken into consideration when tourism development is researched.

Of the 14 localities that cumulate over 100,000 tourist arrivals, only 2 (Iași and Mangalia) are related to wine attractions.

Romanian urban tourism gravitates around several county residencies and resorts of national importance (as further confirmed by Table 1), the 87 urban localities related to wine attractions (dominant small, *xs*, and *xxs* localities, see Table 1) would have the position to claim and use this distinctive (wine related) feature to enhance their attractiveness for tourists. Of these 87 localities, 25 are related to 20 independent wine-producing centers (in 18 cases, the name of the urban locality is similar to the wine-producing center), while the remaining 62 are affiliated with 26 vineyards. The status of PDO (protected designation of origin) is available for only one independent wine-producing center (Segarcea) and for 7 of the vineyards (Panciu, Odobesti, Sarica-Niculitel, Iasi, Dealu Bujorului, Murfatlar, and Minis for Minis-Maderat). In several cases, the name of the urban locality is similar to the name of the vineyard or wine-producing center and is known (or well-known) at least at the regional level: Aiud, Murfatlar, Segarcea, Recas, Dragasani, Odobesti, and Panciu. While wine-related tourism remains a niche tourism, it can generate a flow of tourists attracted to wine, who can further discover the other attractions within or around each of these urban localities. The above-mentioned program, **Romania – Land of Wine,** and the sub-program ***Wine Road/Route*** could have also been beneficial for these 87 urban localities. However, the abandonment of the program and the constant lack of well-structured information seem to have induced a feeling of insignificance related to the resources represented by vineyards and wine production as pull factors for tourists.

Findings and Discussions

The general structure of the Romanian urban localities and the structure of the cluster of localities related to wine attractions are presented in Table 1. The last column of Table 1 highlights the sub-cluster of the 26 urban localities identified to be on wine routes, either functional or potential, as observed by Pop *et al.* (2023). As Table 1 reveals, more than a quarter (27%) of the Romanian urban localities are related to wine attractions, with a structure similar to the general one. However, in the case of the localities related to wine attractions, the percentage of smaller urban sites is approximately 95%, compared to 93% of the general structure. It is interesting to mention that the urban localities related to wine attractions concentrate 31% of the urban sites without lodgings, of which about a third are in the sub-cluster related to wine routes. Also, the wine-related localities comprise 40% of the localities with lodgings and no tourist arrivals, of which half are located in the wine route sub-cluster. The information in Table 1 suggests that wine attractions seem to be of little importance, at least as a factor for tourist lodgings' development.

Appendix 1 provides more detailed information regarding the concentration of lodgings and tourist arrivals by type of urban localities. So, urban localities related to wine attractions represent a niche accounting for 20% of the urban lodgings and 20% of the urban arrivals. The case of urban localities related to wine attractions replicates the general situation of urban localities. Thus, county residencies, and national resorts account for about 69% of the lodgings and for about 79% of the tourist arrivals. Localities with more than 100,000 arrivals are dominant, even though their position is more likely generated by their status as county residencies (Iasi) or resorts of national interest on the Romanian littoral (Mangalia), rather than by wine attractions.

Table No. 1. The structure of urban localities: general and identified in relation to wine attractions

Type of Urban Locality	Total Urban Localities in Romania	Urban Localities With/Related to Vineyards	Of Which Urban Localities on Wine Routes
Large (250,000 to 500,000 people)	7 all county residencies; >300,000 people	3 (Craiova, Galati, Iasi)	1 (Craiova)
Medium (100,000 to 249,999 people)	16 all county residencies; 4 with >200,000 people	1 (Baia Mare)	0
Small (50,000 to 99,999 people)	22 (16 county residencies; 6 other municipalities)	9 (7 county residencies; 2 other municipalities)	1 (Alba Iulia)
Extra small (10,000 to 49,999 people)	157 (1 county residency; 56 other municipalities)	42 (18 other municipalities)	16 (6 other municipalities)
Extra extra small (< 10,000 people)	116 all towns; 19 with < 5,000 people	32 all towns; 3 with < 5,000 people	8 all towns; 1 with < 5,000 people
Total	**318**	**87**	**26**
Selected information			
Urban localities with/related to WHSs	17	2	0
Urban localities declared resorts	82 (38 national resorts)	11 (4 national resorts)	2
Urban localities with no accommodation facilities	35 (all towns)	11	4
Urban localities with NO arrivals but with lodgings	5 (all towns)	2	1

Source: Authors' compilation based on NIS and research data and the classification proposed by Dijkstra & Poelma (2012)

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the common indicators considered for the present research. In the case of the population, economic entities, and protected areas, there are no significant variations between all urban localities and those related to wine attractions. Some exceptions occur in the case of urban localities related to wine routes, which are smaller and host fewer economic entities. Differences appear in the case of the historic monuments that are more numerous for wine-related localities, while other tourist attractions decrease in the cases of these localities, becoming almost negligible for the localities on wine routes.

When lodgings and tourist flows are taken into consideration, Table 2 indicates that the urban localities related to wine attractions have a lower lodging capacity, an inferior occupancy rate, fewer tourist arrivals, and a shorter length of stay (of less than 2 days). The data for the localities on wine routes indicate an even poorer situation, suggesting that the wine itineraries, in general, cannot attract tourists towards those localities. This finding is in line with the findings of Pop & Coros (2023), which point towards the lack of visibility of Romanian wine routes.

Table No. 2. Comparative descriptive statistics for the urban localities based on 2001-2024 and 2005-2024 (for economic entities) averages

Indicators	Total Urban Romania	Urban Localities With/Related to Vineyards	Urban Localities on Wine Routes
Lodgings			
Mean	11	8	4
Median	3	2	1
Q1	1	1	1
Q3	9	6	3
Minim	0	0	0
Maxim	275	223	29
Places-days			
Mean	153,386	117,128	48,198
Median	25,706	20,049	11,178
Q1	7,757	4,394	2,812
Q3	112,237	64,985	30,145
Minim	0	0	0
Maxim	3,811,000	3,635,000	540,048
Occupancy Rate (%)			
Mean	17.90	16.90	16.30
Median	17.30	17.00	16.80

Indicators	Total Urban Romania	Urban Localities With/Related to Vineyards	Urban Localities on Wine Routes
Q1	10.60	9.30	10.10
Q3	24.40	24.20	23.60
Minimum	0.00	0.00	0.00
Maximum	57.90	52.50	41.20
Arrivals			
Mean	17,907	13,195	5,710
Median	2,305	1,614	1,323
Q1	506	225	247
Q3	10,550	5,427	3,465
Minimum	0	0	0
Maximum	437,816	290,869	58,326
Length of Stay (days)			
Mean	2.18	1.79	1.58
Median	1.82	1.71	1.74
Q1	1.49	1.39	1.09
Q3	2.41	2.02	1.95
Minimum	0	0	0
Maximum	11.79	9.54	3.91
Population			
Mean	33,367	33,500	28,777
Median	12,809	12,353	11,805
Q1	8,225	8,583	9,103
Q3	29,222	30,617	21,944
Minimum	1,807	3,745	4,413
Maximum	345,279	345,279	309,195
Economic Entities			
Mean	1,222	1,119	988
Median	282	244	256
Q1	153	152	164
Q3	746	778	613
Minimum	0	40	40
Maximum	24,914	14,228	12,987
Monuments			
Mean	26	30	25
Median	9	10	10
Q1	4	5	5
Q3	22	24	16
Minimum	0	0	0
Maximum	498	498	299

Indicators	Total Urban Romania	Urban Localities With/Related to Vineyards	Urban Localities on Wine Routes
Protected Areas			
Mean	2	2	2
Median	1	2	2
Q1	0	1	1
Q3	3	4	3
Minimum	0	0	0
Maximum	15	9	7
Other Tourist Attractions (points)			
Mean	0.557	0.414	0.308
Median	0	0	0
Q1	0	0	0
Q3	1	1	1
Minimum	0	0	0
Maximum	4	3	1

Source: Authors' compilation based on NIS and research data based on www.listafirme.ro; https://patrimoniu.ro/en/articles/lista-monumentelor-istorice; (+ monuments + protected areas); https://www.mmediu.ro/app/webroot/uploads/files/Anexa_nr_1.pdf

The results of the PLS-SEM method are presented in Figures 3 and 4 and in Appendices 2, 3, and 4.

Figure 3 (for all urban localities) shows that the combination of the selected indicators explains 35.7% of the lodgings construct's variance and 65.8% of the arrivals construct's variance. The most important construct influencing both lodgings and arrivals is ***tourist attractions***, with the indicator *other attractions* (including WHSs, the status of resort, the accessibility via airports and ports) being the most important, followed by (historic) *monuments*, while the *protected areas* are completely ignored. Further, the economic power of a locality (quantified through the number of active *economic entities*) plays an important role in the existence of lodgings and attracting tourist arrivals. The construct, ***wine attractions***, is the one that has a weaker influence, as the data in Appendix 2 indicate. Within the ***wine attractions*** construct, the most important indicator is the *presence of vineyards*, while the other 3 indicators have a negative influence.

Based on these results, the attractiveness of the Romanian urban destinations seems to be influenced by the economic entities, the position of county residence, and accessibility (business tourism), the status of resorts and location (among the most visited urban sites are those located at Black Seaside, in mountain areas and/or those hosting a renown spa resort) hinting towards wellbeing tourism and monuments (cultural tourism). Therefore, if wine attractions happen to be related to the above-mentioned factors, they appear to be either overlooked or integrated into the other attractions without distinction. This situation might be due to the scarce information regarding wine attractions and also to the fact that these wine attractions occur mainly related to small, extra small, and extra-extra small urban sites, which are less likely to be visited by niche (foreign) tourists interested in and/or attracted by wine, while Romanian wine consumers represent a relatively small segment. Furthermore, informal discussions revealed that in some county residencies, while wine cellars (or more exactly wine shops) exist, often, urban wine shops tend to be rather dedicated to imported wines rather than to promoting the regional domestic wines (i.e., one case occurs in Timisoara where a well-known cellar/shop offers exclusively French wines, while the region hosts three independent wine-producing centers of which Recas (also a town) is well-known and hosts one of the top wine-producing entities of Romania.

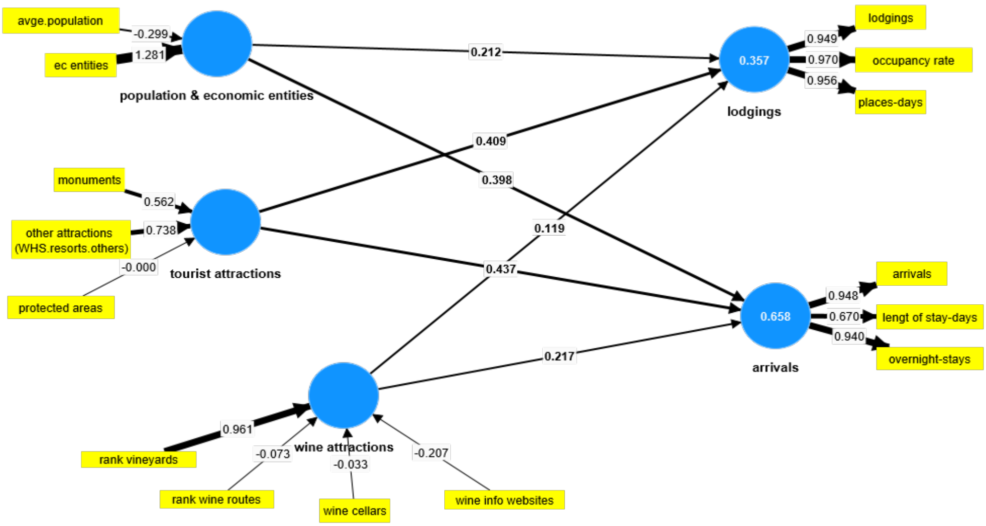

Figure No. 3. Factors influencing lodgings and arrivals in all urban localities

Source: Authors' calculations using SmartPLS4

Figure 4 only focuses on the 87 urban localities that are directly related to vineyards. The considered indicators explain 42.4% of the lodgings construct's variance, and 44.9% of the arrivals construct's variance. Therefore, in this cluster, the relationship between the constructs and the lodgings increases, while their connection with arrivals decreases. In this case, **tourist attractions** is the single construct that has a significant influence on lodgings and arrivals, with the indicator *other attractions* being the most important. The **wine attractions** construct has no significant (negative) influence, suggesting that these 87 urban localities are visited for other reasons, most likely for their status as (spa) resorts and for some cultural attractions, and not due to the wine attractions. As above-mentioned, in the case of Figure 3, wine attractions are rather 'discovered' or encountered by chance and appear to be either ignored or just acknowledged without being truly appreciated. This situation is not surprising, as the information provided by the 87 urban localities' official websites related to wine attractions is scarce or nonexistent. Thus, the search for information on wine attractions on theses localities' official websites (townhall websites) indicates the following aspects: a) 70% of these urban localities do not offer any information about wine and/or vineyards; b) 15 localities have some hidden information related to wine/vineyards in their region; c) 3 localities offer some indirect information regarding wine attractions; d) only 8 localities (9.20%) have a clear references regarding their wine attractions. Their social media presence (especially via their Facebook pages) was not investigated as, most of the time, on social media, public authorities tend to reproduce the contents of webpages without creating adequate content. Furthermore, the results in Figure 4 suggest that the presence of vineyards and wine cellars seems to be an impediment to tourism rather than a development factor. This situation implies that neither the local authorities nor the wine producers perceive their vineyards as tourism development factors.

The results presented above are further enhanced by the importance performance maps (IPMs) in Appendices 3a, 3b, and 3c for all urban localities and Appendices 4a, 4b, and 4c for the urban localities with/related to vineyards.

As Appendix 3a shows, the performance of selected indicators for both **lodgings** (of 3.91) and **arrivals** (of 30.98) is from very low to modest, with performance ranges between 0 and 100. Further details are provided by Appendices 3b and 3c.

In the case of **lodgings** (Appendix 3c), the factors with the highest importance are: *other attractions, economic entities,* and *monuments. Vineyard ranks* is only the fourth most important factor, though with the highest performance, while the other 3 wine-related factors have negative scores. This finding suggests that the decision to open an accommodation facility might be influenced mainly by the aforementioned factors, the status as a resort, and the accessibility via airports and ports (included in *other attractions*) being dominant.

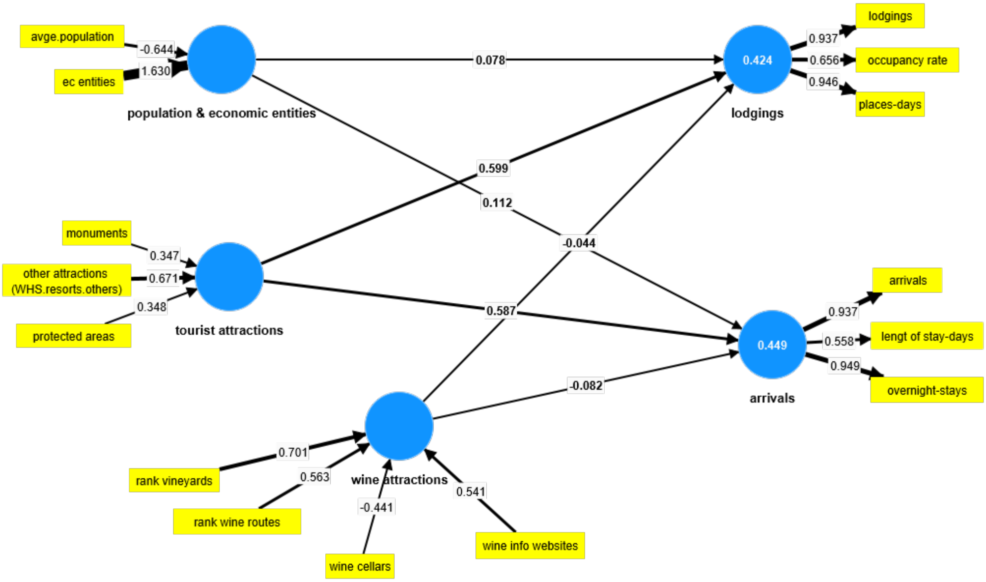

Figure No. 4. Factors influencing lodgings and arrivals in urban localities with/related to vineyards

Source: Authors' calculations using SmartPLS4

In the case of **arrivals** (Appendix 3b), *economic entities* become factors of the highest importance, followed by *other attractions* and *monuments*. *Vineyard ranks* is only the fourth most important factor, despite having the highest performance, while the other 3 wine-related factors gravitate towards 0 importance or register a negative score (*wine info websites*). This indicates that arrivals in urban localities can be mainly due to business tourism (also consistent with the low lengths of stay).

It is worth noting that all the factors (indicators) in Appendices 3b and 3c have a low performance (less than 20 out of 100).

In the case of urban localities with/related to vineyards (Appendix 4a), the performance of selected indicators is slightly higher than in the case of all urban localities, of 32.04 for **lodgings** and 18.76 for **arrivals**; however, it remains modest, similar to Appendix 3a. For **arrivals** and **lodgings**, Appendices 4b and 4c provide similar information; in both cases, *other attractions* is the most important factor, followed (at a distance) by *protected areas* and *monuments*, with almost the same importance. One small difference occurs in the case of **arrivals**, the economic entities have a slightly higher importance than in the case of **lodgings**. In both cases, these 3 wine attractions indicators have a negative importance, while one (*wine cellars*) gravitates towards 0. Also, several of the considered indicators have a higher performance than in the case of all urban localities, even though this performance remains under 50. These findings advance the idea that in the case of the 87 urban localities with/related to vineyards, the existence of *other attractions*, mainly the status of spa resort, as most of these localities are small and very small (83), seems to be the triggering factor for opening lodgings and attracting tourists, followed by the presence of *protected areas* and *monuments*. These IPMs further underline the idea that wine attractions seem to be an impediment to tourism development.

For the 26 urban localities identified by Pop *et al.* (2023) to be situated on functional or potential wine routes, the results are not reported. The inner model collinearity is very high (VIF of 19). The short series of data is the main problem for this cluster of localities. However, as data in Table 2 indicate, these 26 municipalities and towns do not capitalize on the distinctive features provided by wine attractions.

Conclusions

The research results show with painful clarity that Romanian municipalities and towns related to wine attractions omit this differentiating feature and ignore developing their profile as wine tourism destinations. Furthermore, the results seem to indicate that the presence of wine attractions are rather hindering factors in tourism development. The findings are in line with the recent conclusions of Pop & Coros (2023) for wine attractions in rural areas. One main drawback appears to be the lack of information (with 61 websites of the 87 that do not offer any information related to wine; only 8 of the 87 websites present their wine attractions clearly). This situation has led to an absent relation between wine attractions and tourist arrivals, suggesting that tourists tend to find wine attractions by chance while visiting the destinations for other reasons.

The research results are also in line with the findings of Lupu & Ganusceac (2023) on Romanian tourists that show that the visits at wine destinations are rather day trips, influenced by the proximity of the destination, a situation indirectly confirmed by the results of Tanase *et al.* (2022), indicating that the visits at a wine destination are rather made with groups of friends. Neither study mentions the intention to revisit a wine destination, confirmed by the low level of tourist arrivals computed in the present analysis, which points towards a modest level of revisiting of these destinations. This is also in line with the findings of Tanase *et al.* (2022), according to which the Romanian wine destinations offer a limited number of services (wine tasting, wine purchasing, winery visits), with no or few incentives to extend and/or repeat the visits. This situation is not uncommon, as shown by previous studies of Davidescu *et al.* (2018) and Pop & Georgescu (2019), mainly for rural areas, findings which can be easily extended to small towns.

The results also point towards the local authorities' lack of interest and/or knowledge regarding the potential of wine attractions as a core factor for the development of unique wine tourism destinations. The absence of information regarding wine attractions on 70% of the official websites speaks volumes. The relative lack of success of the other 9% that promote their wine attractions is also relevant. Both extremes indicate that the level of sophistication needed to develop either a stand-alone or a related wine route tourism destination is either ignored or not understood at all. This situation can be related to the quasi-absence of Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) as highlighted by Chasovschi (2019). Currently, 27 DMOs are registered in Romania by the MoT (2025), and, in the context of an absent digital presence, none can be linked to wine tourism destinations. Furthermore, the concept of community-based tourism, which can represent an even better option for wine tourism destinations' development, is barely understood and scarcely applied in Romania (Havadi Nagy & Espinosa Segui, 2020). Last, but not least, the absence of an integrated vision regarding wine tourism at the national level implies the lack of coordination and support for local and regional initiatives, when and where they exist.

Despite the wine tourism potential, Romania remains an emerging (wine) destination in this field as shown by Tanase *et al.* (2022), Oltean & Gabor (2022), and Pop & Coros (2023). This emerging state has been ongoing for more than two decades, while the increasing competition among wine regions (Getz & Brown, 2006), intensifies, with new emerging destinations that are ready to include wine in their offer appearing in Central and South-Eastern Europe, like Bosnia-Herzegovina (Bodiroga *et al.*, 2024), Bulgaria (Dimitrova, 2020), or Poland (Sidorkiewicz, 2023). In the context of this competitive climate, Romania's potential as a wine tourism destinations lose ground, as local stakeholders seem to ignore and not to embrace wine attractions as a competitive advantage, as suggested by Vazquez Vicente *et al.* (2021) and Martinez-Falco *et al.* (2024). While the current developments favor smaller urban localities to compete in becoming attractive and distinctive tourism destinations (Richards & Duif, 2018), Romanian small towns related to wine seem to have no dreams of becoming wine tourism destinations. While in some cases, entrepreneurial initiatives seem to exist, they are few and do not engage in the much-needed collaboration among the relevant stakeholders, as revealed by Chasovschi

(2019) and Havadi Nagy & Espinosa Segui (2020). The much-needed political actions (as suggested by Del Chiappa *et al.*, 2019, and Martinez-Falco *et al.*, 2024) are quasi-absent, rather declarative, with the initiative launched over 20 years ago being forgotten in a dusty drawer / (on a dusty shelf). The situation can be considered unsettling and not easy to resolve, as further investigations point towards asking uncomfortable questions to local and central authorities who, most of the time, are not willing to answer.

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APPENDICES

Appendix No. 1. Concentration of lodgings and arrivals by selected types of urban localities

Type of Urban Locality	Lodgings	Arrivals	Economic Entities	Monuments	Protected Areas
All localities	3,469	5,694,496	388,626	8,130	653
Total county residencies % of all localities	1,211 34.91%	3,221,564 56.57%	272,654 70.16%	4,580 56.33%	103 15.77%
Residencies with >100,000 arrivals % of all localities % of county residencies	683 19.69% 56.40%	2,071,723 36.38% 64.31%	129,336 33.28% 47.44%	2,024 24.90% 44.19%	30 4.59% 29.13%
Note: This category includes 9 localities, of which 5 large county residencies (2 national resorts, 1 wine-related), 4 medium county residencies (1 national resort, 1 local resort)					
National resorts (without county residencies) % of all localities	1,407 40.56%	1,649,748 28.97%	13,814 3.55%	432 5.31%	110 16.85%
National resorts with >100,000 arrivals % of all localities % of national resorts	742 21.39% 52.74%	917,815 16.12% 55.63%	3,503 0.90% 25.36%	122 1.50% 28.24%	20 3.06% 18.18%
Note: This category includes 5 localities, of which 2 *xs* (Mangalia, wine-related, and Sinaia); 3 *xxs* (Eforie, Predeal, and Călimănești)					
Local resorts (without county residencies) % of all localities	260 7.49%	178,738 3.14%	20,547 5.29%	678 8.34%	103 15.77%
Note: No local resorts attracted over 100,000 arrivals.					
Type of Urban Locality	**Lodgings**	**Arrivals**	**Economic Entities**	**Monuments**	**Protected Areas**
Wine-related all localities % of all localities	692 19.95%	1,147,981 20.16%	97,310 25.04%	2,574 31.66%	192 29.40%
Wine related county residencies % of all localities % of wine-related localities 1 with >100,000 arrivals (Iasi)	222 6.40% 32.08% 43	570,628 10.02% 49.71% 184,502	66,062 17.00% 67.89% 14,228	1,456 17.01% 56.57% 498	32 4.90% 16.66% 5
Note: This category includes 11 localities, of which 3 large county residencies (Iasi, Galati, Craiova)					

Type of Urban Locality	**Lodgings**	**Arrivals**	**Economic Entities**	**Monuments**	**Protected Areas**
Wine related national resorts	249	339,690	2,054	25	13
% of all localities % of wine related localities	7.18% 35.98%	5.97% 29.59%	0.53% 2.11%	0.31% 0.97%	1.99% 6.77%
1 with >100,000 arrivals (Mangalia)	223	290,869	1,619	8	9
Note: This category includes 4 localities of which *2xs* and *2xxs*					
Wine related local resorts	41	36,246	5,765	157	22
% of all localities % of wine related localities	1.18% 5.92%	0.64% 3.16%	1.48% 5.92%	1.93% 0.61%	3.37% 11.46%
Note: This category includes 7 localities of which 1 small, 5xs and 1xxs					

Source: Author's calculations based on NIS data and www.listafirme.ro

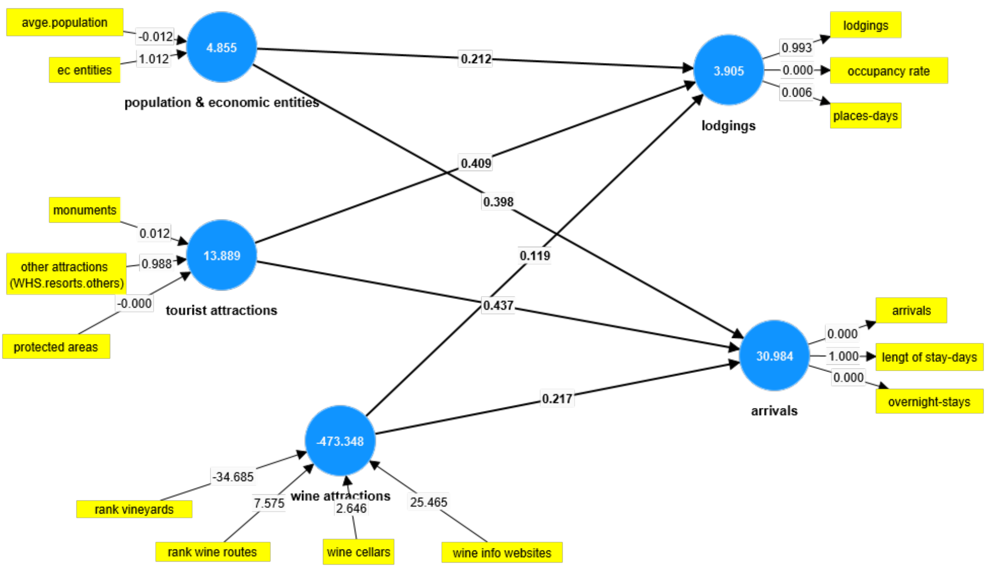
Appendix No. 2. Construct reliability and validity, collinearity statistic (VIF), and path coefficients

All Urban Localities		
Construct reliability and validity		
	Arrivals	Lodgings
Cronbach's Alpha	0.815	0.956
Composite reliability (rho_a)	0.846	0.986
Composite reliability (rho_c)	0.895	0.971
Average variance extracted (AVE)	0.743	0.919
Collinearity statistic – inner model (VIF)		
	Arrivals	Lodgings
population & economic entities	1.620	1.620
tourist attractions	1.788	1.788
wine attractions	1.173	1.173
Path coefficients		
	T statistic	p-values
population & economic entities → arrivals	5.243	0.000
population & economic entities → lodgings	1.850	0.064
tourist attractions → arrivals	7.769	0.000
tourist attractions → lodgings	6.582	0.000
wine attractions → arrivals	3.713	0.000
wine attractions → lodgings	2.821	0.005
Urban Localities With/Related to Vineyards		
Construct reliability and validity		
	Arrivals	Lodgings
Cronbach's alpha	0.760	0.803
Composite reliability (rho_a)	0.853	0.820
Composite reliability (rho_c)	0.868	0.890

All Urban Localities		
Average variance extracted (AVE)	0.697	0.734
Collinearity statistic – inner model (VIF)		
	Arrivals	Lodgings
population & economic entities	1.314	1.314
tourist attractions	1.383	1.383
wine attractions	1.061	1.061
Path coefficients		
	T statistic	p-values
population & economic entities → arrivals	0.570	0.569
population & economic entities → lodgings	0.332	0.740
tourist attractions → arrivals	3.903	0.000
tourist attractions → lodgings	3.207	0.001
wine attractions → arrivals	1.243	0.214
wine attractions → lodgings	0.753	0.451

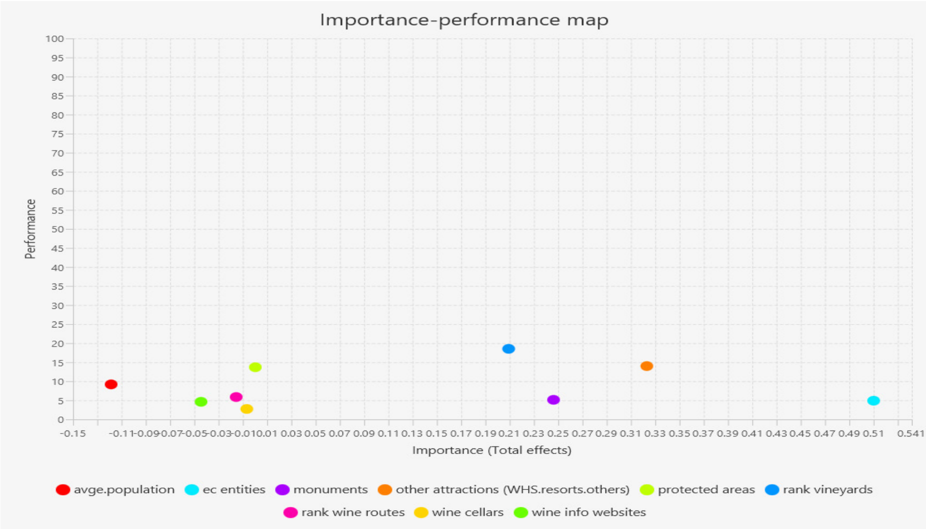
Source: Authors' calculations using SmartPLS4

Appendix No. 3a: All urban localities – Importance-Performance Map analysis



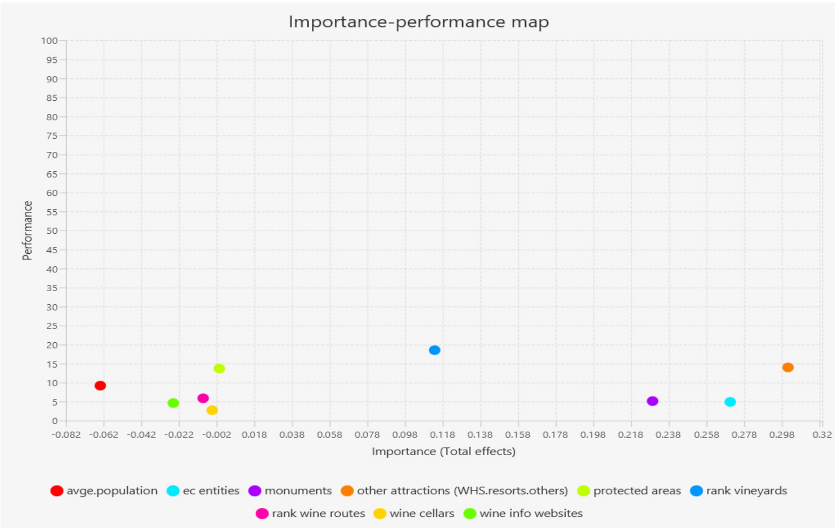
Source: Authors' calculations using SmartPLS4

Appendix No. 3b. All urban localities – Importance-Performance Map indicators for arrivals



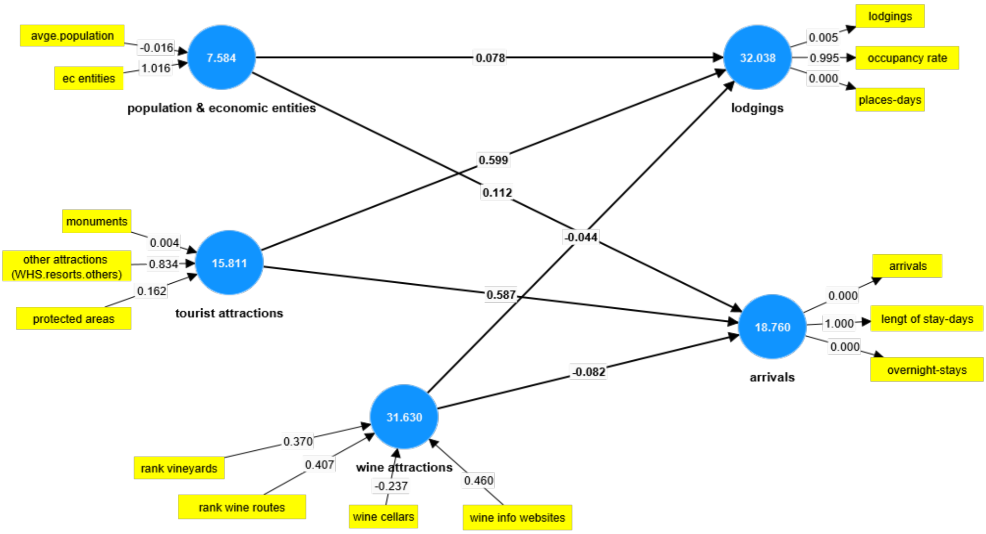
Source: Authors' calculations using SmartPLS4

Appendix No. 3c: All urban localities – Importance-Performance Map indicators for lodgings



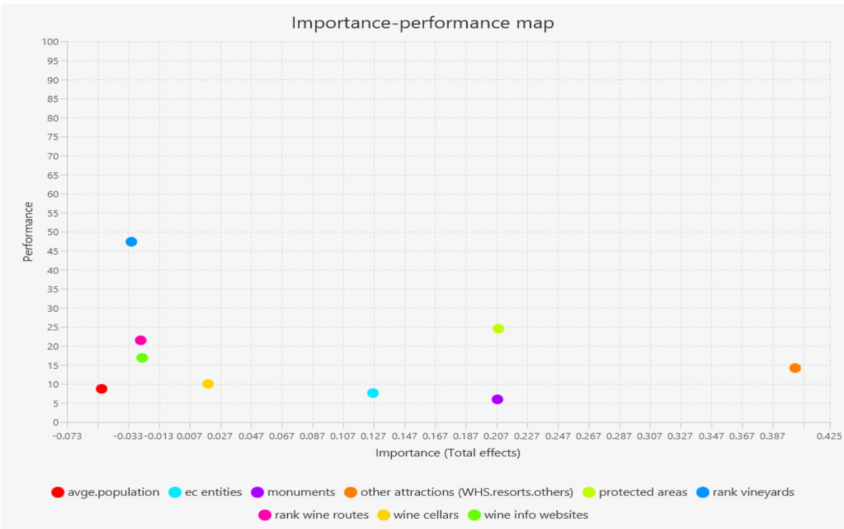
Source: Authors' calculations using SmartPLS4

Appendix No. 4a. Urban localities with/related to vineyards – Importance-Performance Map analysis



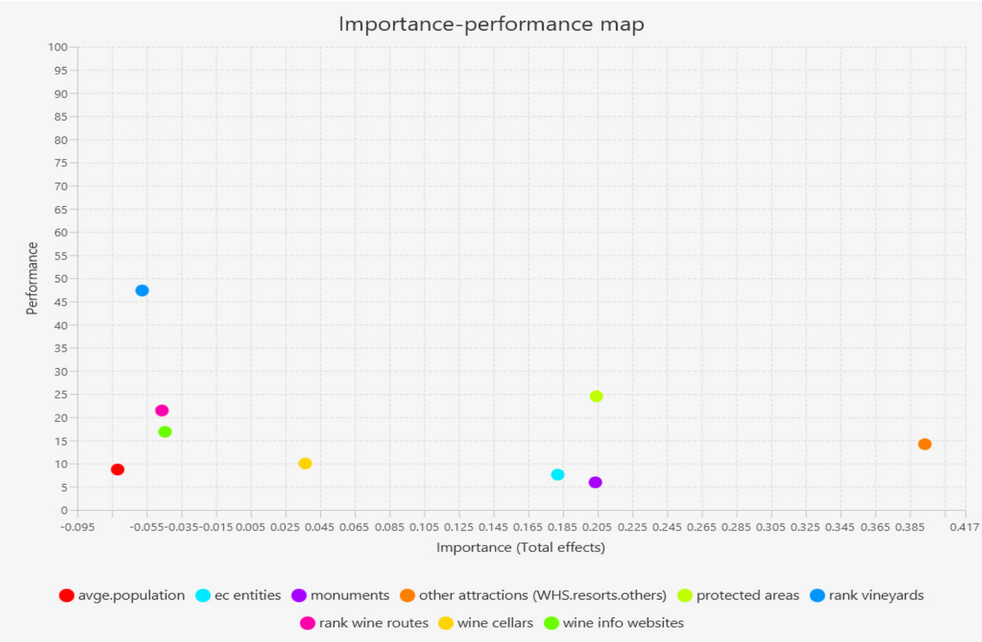
Source: Authors' calculations using SmartPLS4

Appendix No. 4b. Urban localities with/related to vineyards – Importance-Performance Map indicators for arrivals



Source: Authors' calculations using SmartPLS4

Appendix No. 4c. Urban localities with/related to vineyards – Importance-Performance Map indicators for lodgings



Source: Authors' calculations using SmartPLS4

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MIGRATION AND DEMOGRAPHIC AGEING NEXUS: A BIBLIOMETRIC APPROACH

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ABSTRACT. International migration and demographic ageing represent two of the most significant social transformations of the 21st century. The interdisciplinary interest shown in these topics reflects the major role of these phenomena in the remodeling of societies, with an emphasis on demographic reconfiguration, structural adaptation, social diversification, recalibration of public strategies and policies, and socio-economic sustainability. The present study performs a bibliometric analysis among a set of 615 articles identified after setting a series of filters in the OpenAlex platform, in order to determine the diversity of fields that have shown interest in the analyzed phenomena, the institutions and sources that have shown proximity in the conceptual approach, the degree of co-authorship between countries, and the identification of scientific communities affiliated with the same schools of thought. The phenomena of migration and demographic transition overcome the barrier of economic and social interest and are found in the concerns of separate fields, such as medicine, urban planning, legislative framework, public policies, production reconfiguration, the healthcare system, the education system, public finances, etc.

Keywords: migration; population; demographic ageing; VOSviewer; bibliometric analysis

JEL classification: J10, J11, J14, J15, O15

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Introduction

In the last century, many countries have experienced two major demographic phenomena: strong migration and demographic ageing, two manifestations that have reshaped societies and economies. These two phenomena have proven their interdependence and multiple and diverse impact, through the numerous effects they have generated. Thus, migration changes the age composition of the country of departure, through the predominantly young incidence of the phenomenon. The effects of the transformation of the population pyramid are felt in different areas and are perpetuated over time, amplifying as generations change. A population that loses part of its young segment will register a lower future birth rate, a reduced labor force, a deteriorated ratio of the young generation to the elderly people. Already ageing countries will exert a phenomenon of attracting migrants, in order to alleviate the demographic crisis, to cover the labor shortage and stabilize social security systems. Thus, migration determines population ageing, just as population ageing attracts migration.

Migration specific to less developed countries is primarily of young people, which produces a "selective depopulation" (Ourednicek *et al.*, 2011; Carrasco-Cruz & Cruz-Souza, 2025; González Leonardo *et al.,* 2020), leaving behind an unbalanced age pyramid (Micó *et al.*, 2022; Wilson, 2016).

In terms of birth rates, the emigration of young women produces a decrease in fertility in the country of origin, because the incidence of the migratory phenomenon predominantly within young age groups causes the number of women in the fertile contingent in the country of origin to decrease. In destination countries, even if uniform behavioral patterns cannot be defined, many authors observe behavioral adaptation in the sense that migrants show fertility trends more similar to those of the natives from the destination country (García-Pereiro & Paterno, 2025; Lindström *et al.,* 2022; Mussino & Cantalini, 2024).

On the other hand, demographic ageing stimulates migration. Countries experiencing the phenomenon of population ageing require the supplementation of nationally scarce human resources with immigrants in labor-intensive sectors, in the health field, for elderly care, etc. In the financial field, countries with a high percentage of elderly people are experiencing a reduction in the number of contributors to the social security system, simultaneously with the pressure exerted on pension systems. Attracting workforce from immigrants helps to stabilize public finances in the long run (Fiorio *et al.,* 2023; Marinescu *et al.,* 2017; Christl *et al.,* 2022).

For countries of origin, migration is damaging the long-term perspective of the economies, because the low level of the participation rate on the labor market endangers the feasibility of the social, healthcare and pension system (Kurecic *et al.,* 2023)

Although migration may slow down population decline, there is no chance to reverse it (England & Azzopardi-Muscat, 2017; Mayrhuber *et al.,* 2025; Craveiro *et al.,* 2019).

Review of literature

The scientific literature is consistent in works that analyze the interdependence between the two phenomena, as well as the impact they cause in various areas of socio-economic life (Arltová & Langhamrová, 2010; Fihel *et al.,* 2018; Tønnessen & Syse, 2023). In the social sciences, the migration-demographic ageing link is discussed in relation to the impact on family structures and intergenerational relations (Knodel & Chayovan, 2012), cultural diversity, integration of migrant communities, orientation of migratory flows (Hugo & Morén-Alegret, 2008; Stockdale, 2005), development of supporting public policies (Kreager, 2006), modification of living standards (Parr & Guest, 2014).

In economic field, special attention is paid to the combined impact of the two phenomena on the labor market (Behar, 2006; Marois *et al.,* 2019; Ghio *et al.,* 2022; Fuchs, 2015). Filling the labor shortage generated by the ageing population through immigration, the sustainability of tax and pension systems (Nicolae & Amalia, 2020; Bogataj *et al.,* 2020; Mencinger, 2008; Boboc & Voineagu, 2008), changes in the structure of consumption and consequently production (Serhiienko *et al.,* 2025), the contribution of migrants to economic growth, are just a few of the current concerns (Heinz & Ward-Warmedinger, 2006; Bloom *et al.,* 2010; Beets, 2010).

Demographic literature studies the change in the structure of the population by age groups in the presence of migratory flows (Bernhardt, 2004), urbanization and depopulation (Cividino *et al.,* 2020; Nancu *et al.,* 2011; Majdzińska, 2024; Josipovič, 2024; Jelić *et al.,* 2019),and develops demographic projections regarding future population evolutions (Li *et al.,* 2009; Newsham & Rowe, 2019; Tsimbos, 2008).

In the field of public health, the transformation of societies as a result of ageing shifts attention to the problems of the third age, to the emergence of "active ageing" and "healthy ageing" as a solution to prolonging working life and alleviating the labor shortage. The role of migrants in the health system is considered in the context of the increasing need for health services related to the increase in the elderly population (Cela & Barbiano di Belgiojoso, 2019; Mujahid, 2007). The health sector must adapt the health infrastructure, treatment and care modalities to the specific needs, types of diseases and characteristics of a demographically ageing population (Moller, 2002; Tang & Xie, 2021).

Political science and European studies evaluate migration policies, regulations on international mobility, strategies for inclusion of migrants (Green, 2007), political tensions determined by demographic changes, climate change (Harper, 2103; Wang *et al.,* 2019), changes in the education system (Cortina, 2013). Studies in the field of law analyze the legal framework and protection of migrants' rights (Straubhaar, 2006; Schultz, 2018), or social protection of the elderly (Bloom & McKinnon, 2010; Parsons & Gilmour, 2018).

In engineering sciences, the transformation of society as a result of demographic changes is approached in various forms, from technical solutions for replacing the productive activity of the labor force with technology, to the creation of technologies to support the elderly in various fields (Pathak & Mehul, 2012).

Research methodology

In order to collect the necessary data for the analysis, the OpenAlex platform was used, which is a bibliographic catalogue of scientific works, starting operating in 2022 by OurResearch as a successor to the terminated Microsoft Academic Graph.

In the first stage, the approximately 272.6 million works in the OpenAlex database (at the time of platform query - November 2025) were sorted using the "migration" "population" "demographic" "ageing" filter in the title&abstract, returning a number of 1046 results.

The form "ageing" was preferred, not "aging", because the former is used predominantly in British English, more common in Europe, while the form "aging" is common in American English, and therefore used predominantly in the US. This paper proposes an analysis of the specialized literature mainly focused on the specific case of European states, which are simultaneously going through both massive migration and a pronounced stage of demographic ageing.

Subsequently, the sorting continued by applying the "article" type filter, thus waiving the inclusion in the bibliometric analysis of works such as: book, book chapter, preprint, dissertation, review, editorial, etc. Subsequently, 735 articles were returned.

Finally, the English content filter was applied, so that the results could be verified from the point of view of the subject overlap over the research topic, with 650 results being returned, and the last stage consisted in selecting a reasonable interval of a quarter of a century, the period 2000-2025. This period was applied after the scientific production of the years prior to 2000 was analyzed, and it was found that it did not exceed a maximum of 5 articles per year, while some years recorded zero production. The final number of results obtained after applying the 4 types of filters was 615 articles. Of these, 381 articles (representing 62%) were in open access.

Results and discussions

As stated before, searching and filtering in the OpenAlex database of article-type publications written in English, published in the period 2000 – 2025, using the keywords “migration” “population” “demographic” “ageing” returned a number of 615 scientific articles.

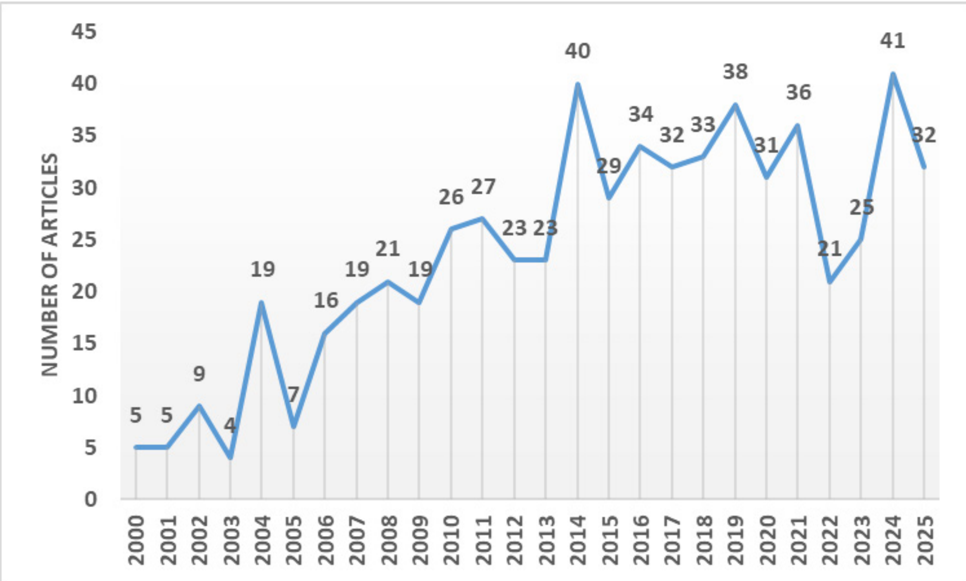

Figure 1. Evolution of the number of articles by year of publication

Source: Author' s elaboration

The evolution of the number of articles published in the analyzed interval is relevant for the intensification of concerns in the field of interdependence between the phenomena of migration and demographic ageing. Compared to the beginning of the period, the number of articles multiplies towards the end of the period by 7-8 times, annually (Figure 1).

A look at the most frequent primary topics in the analyzed list of articles also reflects an area of concern related to population ageing and migration. By their nature being demographic phenomena, which relate to the social side of a society, the developments recorded by these phenomena also had effects in areas partially or very little related to this field. Concerns arise related to the labor market, health care, health disparities, regional development, rural development, urbanization and city planning, environment, energy, climate adaptation, retirement and disability, mortality – insurance and risk management, family dynamics, economic growth, productivity, fiscal policy, global trade, tourism, land use, education systems, migration: refugees and integration, welfare studies, etc.

The figure below (Figure 2) reflects a synthesis of the most addressed primary topics, which exceeded the threshold of 10 articles per topic. In total, the number of primary topics associated with the analyzed sample of articles was 145, of which only 13 are shown in the figure below. The rest, although they had an incidence of 1 to a maximum of 9 articles, are interesting and relevant to the way in which the demographic and social transformation of a society has repercussions in extremely distant fields, such as: Military and Defense Studies, Aviation Industry Analysis and Trends, Agriculture Sustainability and Environmental Impact, Disaster Management and Resilience, Urban Transport and Accessibility, Assistive Technology in Communication and Mobility, Employment and Welfare Studies, Psychiatric Care and Mental Health Services, Youth Education and Societal Dynamics, Elder Abuse and Neglect, Urban Neighborhood and Segregation Studies, etc.

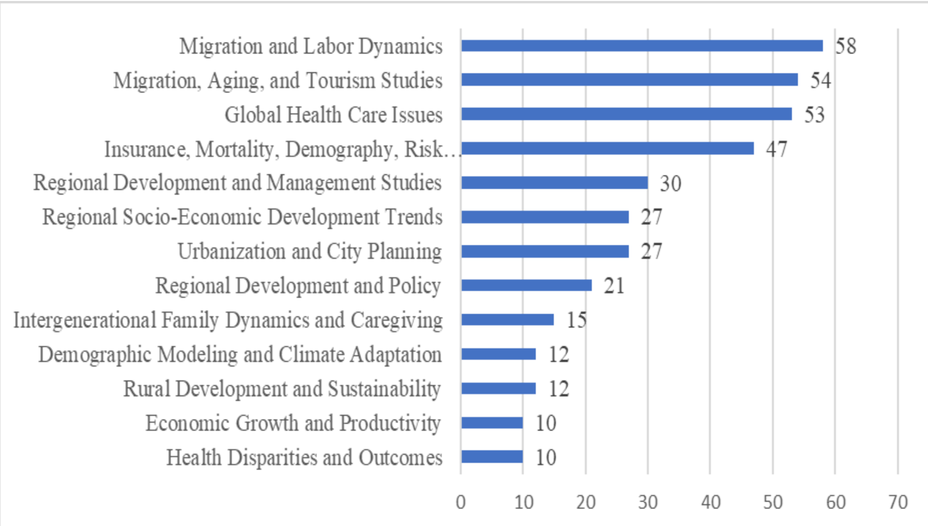

Figure 2. Number of articles by primary topic

Source: Author' s elaboration

Regarding authorships institutions, a total of 200 institutions were returned, none of which having a very high number of authors affiliated with the institution. The maximum of 8 was assigned to the University of Queensland, 7 authors affiliated to the Russian Academy of Sciences, and 7 to the University of Groningen, but over 70 institutions were listed with only one affiliated author.

After sorting articles by the number of citations recorded, the result of selecting the 10 most cited articles is presented in the table below. Even though the number of citations is often a temporal attribute, and it is natural for older publications to accumulate a higher number of citations, which disadvantages recent publications, recording a number of several hundred citations is an attribute that only a reference publication can possess.

The themes addressed by these highly cited articles were diverse, starting from the subject of urbanization, land use, generational interaction, health and healthcare system, given that all these themes had as a background the social transformation that current societies are going through, against the background of demographic ageing and in the presence of the international migratory phenomenon.

Table 1. Top 10 articles by number of citations

No.	Title	Authors	Publication year	Cited by count
1	Profile: Agincourt Health and Socio-demographic Surveillance System	Kathleen Kahn, Mark Collinson, F. Xavier Gómez-Olivé, Obed Mokoena, Rhian Twine, Paul Mee, Segun Afolabi, Burton D. Clark, Chodziwadziwa Kabudula, Audrey Khosa, Siyabonga Khoza, Mildred Shabangu, Bernard Silaule, Jeffrey Tibane, Ryan G. Wagner, Michel L. Garenne, Samuel J. Clark, Stephen Tollman	2012	520
2	Urban growth and decline: Europe’s shrinking cities in a comparative perspective 1990-2010	Manuel Wolff, Thorsten Wiechmann	2017	327
3	Health and health-care systems in southeast Asia: diversity and transitions	Virasakdi Chongsuvivatwong, Kai Hong Phua, Mui Teng Yap, Nicola S. Pocock, Jamal Hisham Hashim, Rethy K. Chhem, Siswanto Agus Wilopo, Alan D. López	2011	310

No.	Title	Authors	Publication year	Cited by count
4	Splintering Urban Populations: Emergent Landscapes of Reurbanisation in Four European Cities	Stefan Buzar, Philip E. Ogden, Ray Hall, Annegret Haase, Sigrun Kabisch, Annett Steinfiihrer	2007	291
5	The Myth of generational conflict: the family and state in ageing societies	Sara Arber, Claudine Attias-Donfut	2001	245
6	Grey matter: ageing in developing countries	Priya Shetty	2012	219
7	Why we don't have to believe without doubting in the "Second Demographic Transition" - some agnostic comments.	David Coleman	2004	147
8	Replacement migration, or why everyone is going to have to live in Korea: a fable for our times from the United Nations	D. A. Coleman	2002	100
9	Does demographic change affect land use patterns?	Franziska Kroll, Dagmar Haase	2009	97
10	Demographic trends and public health in Europe	Kathleen England, Natasha Azzopardi-Muscat	2017	95

Source: Author' s elaboration

Thus, adult health, ageing, migration and urbanization were main factors taken into account in the creation of a system (HDSS) for monitoring and investigating the causes and effects of complex health, population and social transition in rural northeast South Africa (Kahn *et al.,* 2012).

Against the backdrop of an increasingly ageing population and an internal migration from underdeveloped to more competitive locations, which has been strongly evident since the beginning of the 21st century, Wolff & Wiechmann (2017) investigate the influence of economic and demographic drivers on the non-linear evolution of shrinking cities in Europe, finding that the shrinkage of the European cities was 4 times more intense after 2010 than during the period 1990-2010.

Ageing population challenges are presented in a medical context, in the case of regions that are strongly disparate in terms of social, economic and political criteria, such as Southeast Asia (Chongsuvivatwong *et al.,* 2011). Socioeconomic development diversity has overlapped with differing rates of demographic transitions, health disparities, migration of the health workforce, posing health challenges for national health systems.

In the particular case of 4 European cities, Buzar *et al.,* (2007) investigated the demographic contingencies of this process-also known as reurbanisation, revealing that the analysed cities experienced multiple migration trends and new household structures connected to the second demographic transition (within which population ageing is a key indicator). However, this concept of "second demographic transition" is only partially relevant, as long as the behaviour regarding cohabitation, births outside marriage, number of children, remain highly heterogeneous between populations. However, except for the migration, population growth is considered to be over (Coleman, 2004).

Arber & Attias-Donfut (2001) addresses theoretical and policy issues connecting age and intergenerational relations, against the background of the transformations of Western societies, marked by the ageing population, the role of women in the family and in relation to older people, migration, urbanisation and welfare provision changes.

Shetty (2012) noted that the same economic progress that is leading to better life expectancies is also a factor in the intensification of migration and urbanization. Developing countries that are currently experiencing rapid ageing will need to learn from developed countries how to manage social systems for an elderly population for which the younger generation no longer represents care-providers, and they may not even live in the same country as their parents do.

Although future management of population decline and ageing will find a suitable response in international migration, it only prevents population ageing at unsustainable levels, without finding a "solution" to this problem, which is considered to be largely inevitable (Coleman, 2002).

Kroll & Haase (2010) found a correlation in most growing regions in the West of Germany between land use, natural population growth and net-migration. Regarding land use change in the shrinking regions in the East of Germany, economic variables proved to be highly important.

Integration of VOSviewer software results in the bibliometric analysis

The VOSviewer software was used to study the links between authors, concepts, works, sources, organizations and countries. VOSviewer is a software tool used in constructing and visualizing bibliometric networks, whose output consists of network and density maps that allow the graphic representation of connections that are otherwise difficult to interpret only from structuring data in tables. In the present study, the software was used to generate maps with the aim of identifying co-authorship (collaboration) between authors, organizations and countries; with the aim of identifying bibliographic coupling (documents/ sources/organizations/countries), as an indicator of the similarity between two items from the perspective of the number of references that both share; but especially, the co-occurrence of concepts map, which allows the identification of related domains by visualizing the frequency of occurrence of key concepts in them. VOSviewer automatically normalizes labels to lowercase, regardless of whether they refer to countries, institutions, titles, keywords, etc.

Starting from the initial keywords, the collection of the 615 articles constituting the object of the analysis and processing them in the VOSviewer software with the co-occurrence of the concepts option generated a map of words extracted from titles, abstracts or keywords, which reflect the favorite themes corresponding to the set of articles analyzed (Figure 3).

A threshold of 10 was used for the minimum number of occurrences of a keyword, so that the map reflects the most significant results. Thus, of the 900 keywords identified, 138 corresponded to this criterion. The map obtained groups the keywords into 6 clusters, which are detailed below. 5759 links between clusters were recorded, with a TLS indicator of 53683.

Each circle marked on the map is associated with a keyword, a concept that appeared in connection with the keywords defined in the collection of articles relevant to the field. The size of the node is relevant to the frequency of occurrence of the concept in the analyzed articles, and therefore to the connection that the concepts visible on the map present in relation to the theme of migration and demographic ageing. The links between the concepts, materialized in lines, are the result of the co-occurrence of the two concepts in the same article, the thickness of the lines indicating whether the degree of association is strong or weak.

Furthermore, the algorithm of the VOSviewer software (VOS mapping) allocates the nodes on the map in a closer position for the case of strong links, which are thematically related, or more peripheral for the weakly connected ones, belonging to different domains. Therefore, the central themes are the most connected ones.

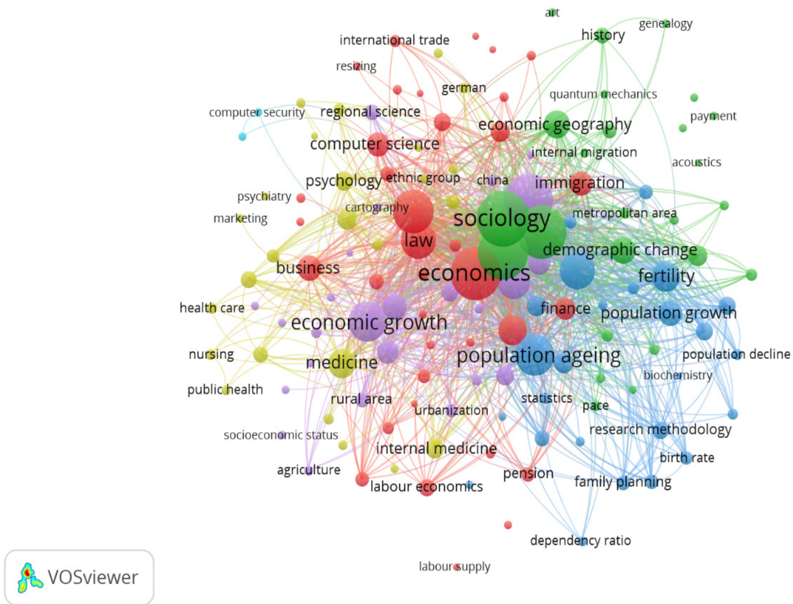

Figure 3. Co-occurrence of the concepts – network visualization

Source: Author' s elaboration using VOSviewer software

Since the minimum 10 occurrences of a keyword setting was used, keywords that have at least this frequency of occurrence (in the title, abstract or keywords list of the articles) appear on the map and in the detailed cluster table. The positive aspect of setting a higher occurrence is the generation of a more airy map, with more strongly connected concepts and better visibility of the links. For this reason, the table below presents the 6 clusters that were generated following the analysis of the co-occurrence of concepts with the VOSviewer software, each cluster grouping the concepts from the point of view of identifying their belonging to the same conceptual domain or theme in the analyzed literature.

Table 2. The main clusters, frequent keywords and occurrences

	Cluster (general domain)	Colour	Total items	Frequent keywords and occurrences
1.	ECONOMICS POLITICS	Red	36	economics (425), political science (294), law (211), development economics (143), computer science (92), business (103), immigration (90), finance (70), politics (67), European Union (52), labour economics (43), engineering (39), government (36), economic policy (35), pension (33), market economy (30)
2.	SOCIOLOGY DEMOGRAPHY	Green	25	sociology (466), population (436), demography (431), economic geography (120), demographic change (105), demographic transition (67), history (37), human/internal migration (23)
3.	DEMOGRAPHIC ECONOMICS	Blue	25	population ageing (264), demographic economics (211), fertility (136), population growth (96), ageing (67), population projection (67), mathematics (65), net migration rate (50), life expectancy (42), emigration (35), family planning (35), total fertility arte (33), birth rate (31), mathematical analysis (30)
4.	MEDICINE	Yellow	25	medicine (132), context (63), psychology (62), internal medicine (57), gerontology (48), environmental health (37), social science (34), workforce (27)
5.	ECONOMIC GROWTH	Purple	25	geography (405), economic growth (246), archaeology (194), philosophy (103), biology (88), linguistics (84), socioeconomics (58), ecology (54), regional science (37), rural area (33), urbanization (28)

Source: Author' s elaboration

The negative aspect of using high-frequency concepts is that concepts with a lower occurrence are ignored, but they reflect a wider thematic area of the articles. Their visualization outline a more complete picture of the concerns that the associated topic of migration and demographic ageing brings even in fields more distant from the one studied. Keywords such as: oceanography; theology; refugee; aesthetics; rural population; urban agglomeration; environmental resource management; aerospace engineering; democracy; epidemiological transition; consumption; climate change; cultural diversity; multiculturalism; public administration; accounting; chemistry; geometry; transport engineering, etc., are evidence of various research fields, delimited by that of migration or demographic ageing, but which have shown scientific interest in issues connected to them.

In the overlay visualization (Figure 4), the assignment of colors is no longer done according to the thematic cluster, as in the network visualization. The color is a numerical attribute that is assigned in relation to the Average Publication Year indicator. The terms in cold colors (blue) are the terms that appear earlier, at the beginning of the analyzed interval, the terms in green are in the middle of the interval, and those in yellow are new in the literature. The map thus obtained provides an image of the degree of well-known or, on the contrary, new approach in the topic of migration and demographic ageing. And, more than that, the way in which this topical theme has been addressed in various fields, reflecting the incidence that these economic and social phenomena have on aspects in extremely diverse fields. The color transition reflects the conceptual evolution of the field.

In the topic of consecrated fields there are keywords such as: fertility, demographic transition, population growth, family planning, total fertility rate, history, genealogy, immigration policy, economic policy, etc. In the area of novelty, the field of migration and demographic ageing was linked to topics such as: regional science; marketing; psychology; pathology; neuroscience; environmental planning; sustainable development; sustainability; regional science; public health; tourism; statistics; econometrics; acoustics; internal migration; mathematics, etc.

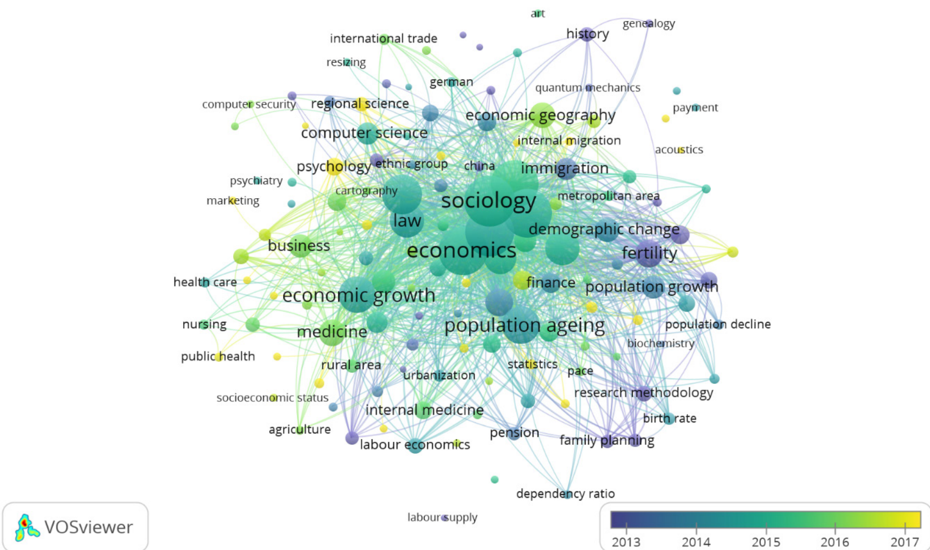

Figure 4. Co-occurrence of the concepts – overlay visualization

Source: Author' s elaboration using VOSviewer software

The co-authorship between countries map (Figure 5) shows how the scientific production of the analyzed topic is a result of the collaboration between researchers from different countries. The size of the nodes is proportional to the total number of publications of that country, also the thickness of the lines reflects intense or occasional collaboration. Centrally located countries are the most connected, while marginally located countries are less engaged in scientific collaboration.

The grouping of countries into clusters reflects the group of countries that have collaborated intensively with each other in that field.

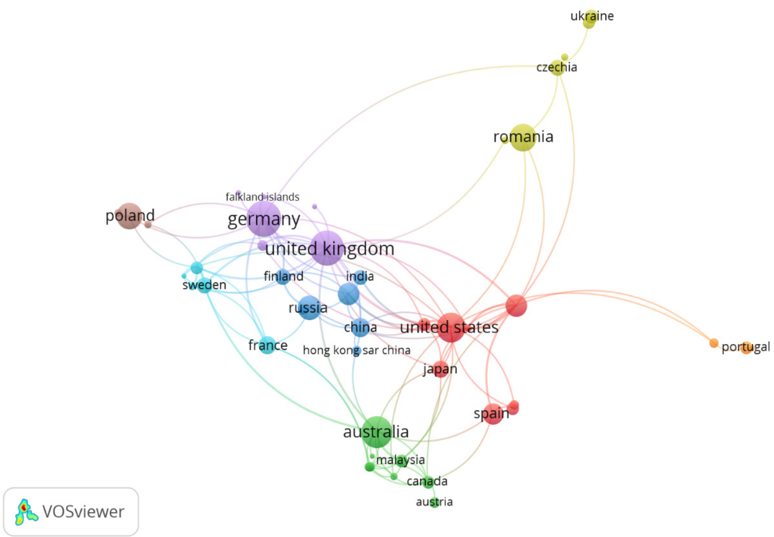

Figure 5. Co-authorship between countries

Source: Author' s elaboration using VOSviewer software

Generating the co-authorship – countries map returned 71 countries, of which 46 proved to be interconnected, these being the countries included in the final document. They were grouped into 8 clusters, as follows:

Cluster 1 (red): USA (with the highest number of documents: 28); Hungary; Italy; Japan; Latvia; Lithuania; New Zealand; Spain.

Cluster 2 (green): Australia (with the highest number of documents: 31); Austria; Canada; Greece; Indonesia; Malaysia; Singapore; Thailand.

Cluster 3 (blue): Russia (with the highest number of documents: 19); China; Finland; Hong Kong; India; Netherlands; Tajikistan.

Cluster 4 (yellow): Romania (with the highest number of documents: 23); Czechia; Moldova; Norway; Slovakia; Ukraine.

Cluster 5 (purple): Germany (with the highest number of documents: 39); United Kingdom (38); Belgium; Falkland Islands; Ireland; Israel.

Cluster 6 (light blue): France (with the highest number of documents: 11); Ghana; Sierra Leone; South Africa; Sweden.

Cluster 7 (orange): Portugal (with the highest number of documents: 5); Brazil; Switzerland.

Cluster 8 (brown): Poland (with the highest number of documents: 22); Denmark; Vietnam.

The map of bibliographic coupling of the documents (Figure 6) associates articles that share bibliographic sources. The stronger the connection between them, the greater the number of common references.

Documents symbolized by large nodes, centrally located, and connected with thick lines, are those that share the most common references. The grouping into differently colored clusters is done based on the criterion of the number of common references, delimiting groups of documents that fall into the same sub-theme within the field, or that of using the same theoretical framework, or that of being affiliated with the same scientific community.

The most pronounced nodes are the documents that have constituted major bibliographical landmarks for subsequent publications.

Figure 6 was generated after setting a minimum limit of 7 citations of a document. Of the 615 documents analyzed, 188 meet the threshold. The largest set of connected documents consisted of 140 items, grouped in 14 clusters.

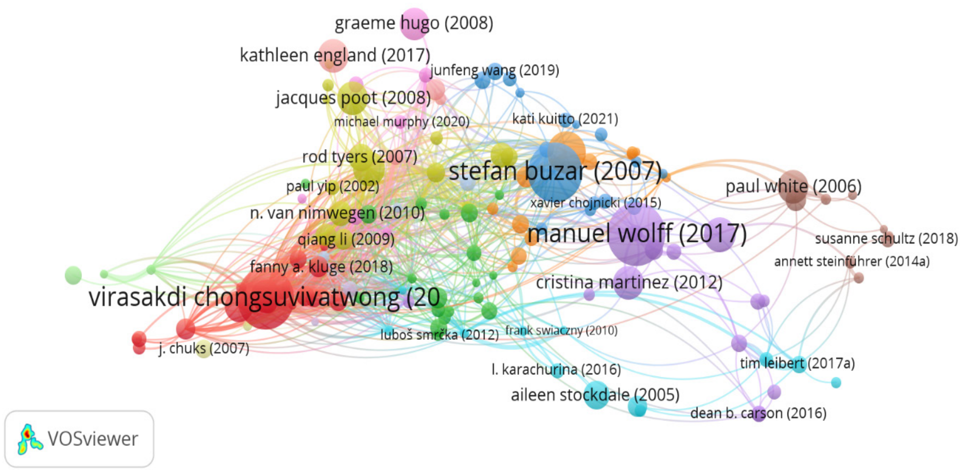

Figure 6. Bibliographic coupling between documents – network visualization

Source: Author' s elaboration using VOSviewer software

In the overlay visualization (Figure 7), using the average year of publication option, it can be observed the evolution of subtopics over time, from the blue areas that represent reference scientific production, capitalized at the beginning of the analyzed period, to the yellow points, of recent date, which have not yet had time to be capitalized very much, but which signal new lines of research, emerging directions in the field. The large size of the nodes is relevant to the importance of the documents in the represented field, and the distances between them reflect the degree of bibliographic similarity and therefore aligning with the same scientific approach.

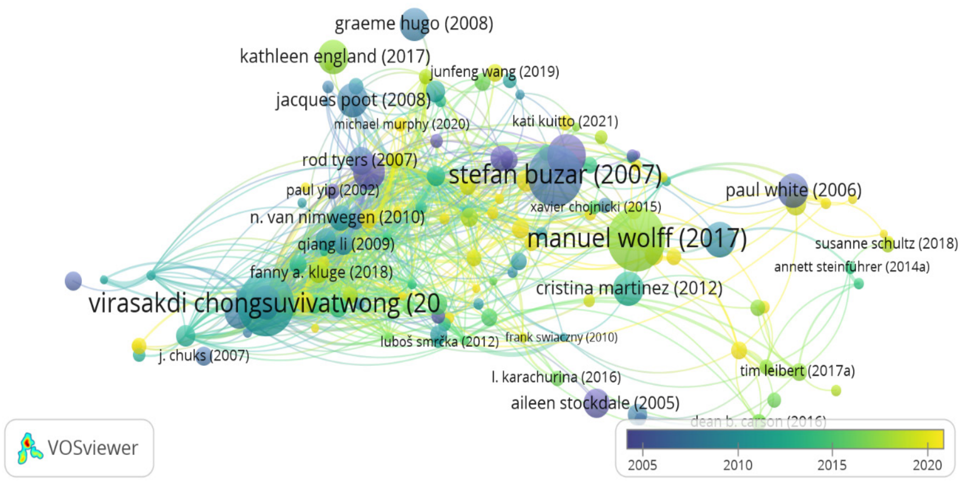

Figure 7: Bibliographic coupling between documents – overlay visualization

Source: Author' s elaboration using VOSviewer software

The bibliographic coupling map of the sources (Figure 8) highlights the bibliographic links established between the journals that contributed to the scientific production of the analyzed field. Of the 357 sources identified in the publication of the analyzed articles, 63 met the set threshold of at least 2 documents, with at least 1 citation, and the largest set of connected items was identified at 47 items, grouped into 7 clusters. Thus, clustering (colors), node size, link thickness and distances between sources are relevant indicators of the degree to which scientific journals are closer or more differentiated thematically, with the identification of centers of influence, the groups of journals that deal with common topics, or the journals with peripheral positioning in the scientific publishing community.

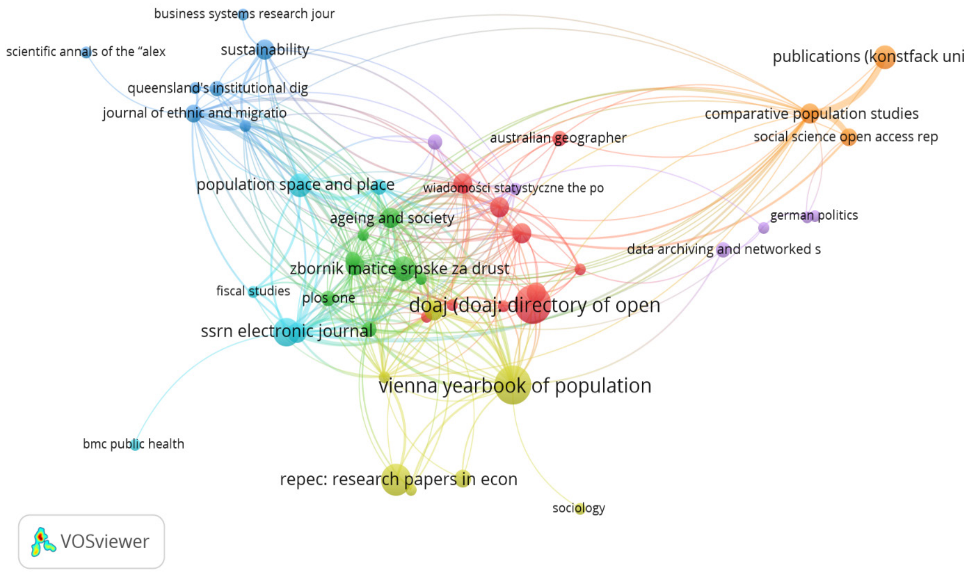

Figure 8. Bibliographic coupling between sources

Source: Author' s elaboration using VOSviewer software

Similarly, the bibliographic coupling map at the organizations level identifies the incidence of situations in which researchers from two different institutions cite the same works in their publications. Even if they do not collaborate directly, organizations can be assimilated to a common theme from the point of view of the common number of references of their own scientific publications production.

In order to perform a sorting of organizations, taking into account the large number identified in the analyzed sample – 409 organizations, they were filtered, retaining only those with at least 3 documents published in the analyzed field, and the threshold of at least 3 citations. 33 organizations were thus generated, and on the map below (Figure 9) the thematic proximity between the institutions involved in scientific production can be visualized. The colored clusters (7 in number) can be an indicator of subdomains or schools of thought, grouping institutions with similar thematic orientations, and their positioning shows the degree of conceptual similarity, with organizations close in representation sharing similar bibliographic bases.

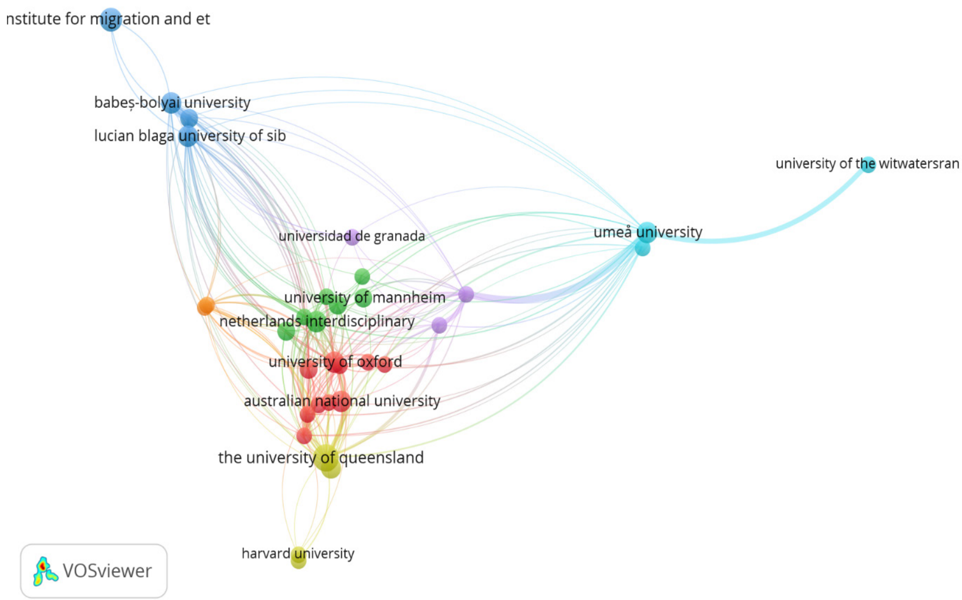

Figure 9. Bibliographic coupling between organizations

Source: Author' s elaboration using VOSviewer software

The allocation of countries according to the degree of thematic proximity in the scientific production of the field can be visualized in the bibliographic coupling of the countries map (Figure 10). Even if two countries have never published together, they can be highly coupled when working in the same field and adhering to the same bibliographic sources.

Therefore, the map is not one of international collaboration, but one of similarity in the conceptual approach to the research topic.

The identified clusters (6 in number) may reflect common academic traditions, regions with similar research interests, currents of thought to which different countries have adhered.

Cluster 1 (red): 7 countries: Germany, United Kingdom, United States, Netherlands, Serbia, India, Slovenia

Cluster 2 (green): 5 countries: Romania, Italy, Spain, Croatia, Lithuania

Cluster 3 (blue): 5 countries: Poland, France, Sweden, Finland, South Africa

Cluster 4 (yellow): 4 countries: Russia, China, Japan, New Zealand

Cluster 5 (purple): 4 countries: Czechia, Ukraine, Portugal, Slovakia

Cluster 6 (light blue): 3 countries: Australia, Canada, Malaysia

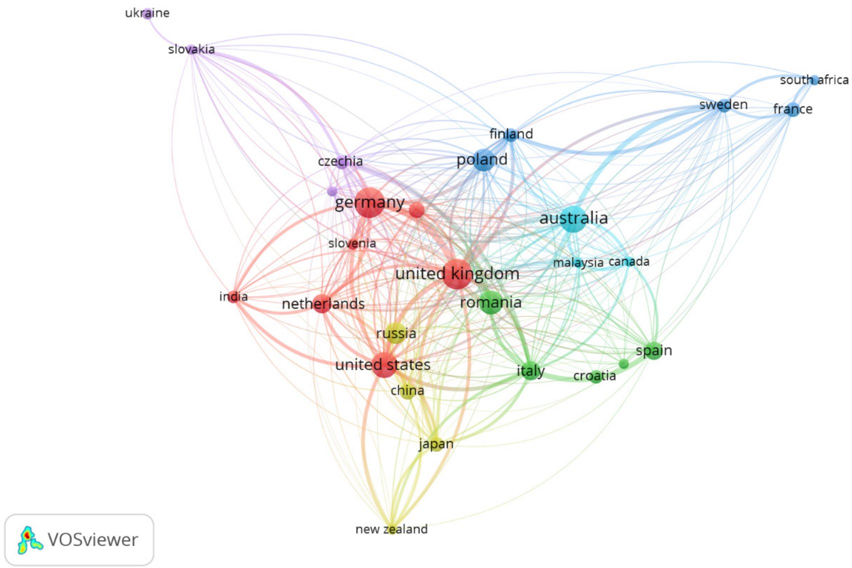

Figure 10. Bibliographic coupling between countries

Source: Author' s elaboration using VOSviewer software

Conclusions

The paper aims to reviewing the specialized literature focused on the connection between international migration and demographic ageing. The analysis carried out finds an increase in scientific concerns on the combined topic of international migration and demographic ageing, as a confirmation of the connection between transnational mobility, population structure and public policies. As the main findings of the study, the paper identifies two major characteristics: on the one hand, the concentration of research topics in certain conceptual clusters (labor mobility, healthcare system transformations, public finance challenges, pension system sustainability, changing consumption needs structure, social integration, redefinition of intergenerational relations, etc.), highlighting the areas of attention of the scientific community, which can guide future research; on the other hand, the emergence of concerns regarding the two phenomena in research areas strongly delimited from the first, manifesting itself in an alarm signal of the implications that societal transformations cause on multiple levels.

A polarization of the literature is observed on several main levels: the impact of migration on the demographic structure of the country of origin, the role of migration in mitigating the effects of ageing, the economic impact of migration, the implications of migration on the elderly. However, interdisciplinary works, which project the issue of the incidence of the two phenomena in distant scientific areas, which go beyond the socio-demo-economic character of the topic, reflect the increasing degree of concern regarding the management of the effects felt as a result of the strong manifestation of the two phenomena during the last century. The study identified the combined issues of international migration and demographic ageing in emerging topics such as: urbanization and city planning, rural developments and sustainability, demographic modeling and climate adaptation, coastal and marine management, land use and ecosystem services, aviation industry analysis and trends, disaster management and resilience, military and defense studies, law and migration, housing market, intergenerational family dynamics and caregiving, ageing and gerontology research, technology use by older adults, assistive technology in communication and mobility, old age disorders, mental health in a transforming society, youth education and societal dynamics, tourism and development, etc.

Observing the geographical distribution of publications, as well as the international collaboration of researchers, helps to identify areas that show intense concerns related to the developments, implications and solutions of these problems; other areas are less well represented, with implications for knowledge transfer and the formulation of public policies. The research results can help decision-makers in becoming aware of and understanding the transformations of society from the perspective of the two phenomena studied, identifying possibilities for intervention to support and correct their effects.

The application of VOSviewer allows a clear visualization of co-citation, co-authorship and co-occurrence networks of keywords, which brings a detailed perspective on the structure of knowledge. The paper contributes to the research domain by identifying dominant trends, emerging themes, as well as scientific collaboration structures. The use of maps generated by the VOSviewer software highlighted thematic clusters based on keywords and the evolution of interest over time in extremely diverse emerging research topics. The bibliographic coupling analysis allowed the visualization of intellectual similarity based on the references used, highlighting schools of thought and articles considered as reference points, as a result of the number of citations recorded. The collaboration of the authors could be delimited according to the country or institution of origin. The study can function as a reference point for researchers, providing a solid basis for understanding the literature and facilitating orientation towards insufficiently explored subtopics.

This study does have some limitations. The bibliometric analysis depends on the database used (OpenAlex platform), which means that scientific products indexed in other sources may be omitted. The choice of search criteria (keywords, period, document types) can influence the results and the structure of the clusters. The study does not assess in depth the opinions addressed in the included publications, but only the bibliometric relationships between them.

As future research directions, the analysis can be extended by including other databases for a broader coverage, and by adding keywords that allow a more rigorous filtering of the sample of papers. The research can be extended by investigating the identified clusters in depth, in order to understand the thematic developments and the conceptual connections behind them. Comparative analyses can be carried out between countries or development areas, in order to observe the different ways in which migration and ageing are addressed in the scientific literature, in order to observe the particularities of manifestation of the phenomena and to identify solutions adapted to them. Another research direction can consist in exploring the emerging themes identified for the development of new conceptual frameworks.

The scientific literature dedicated to the current issue of migration and demographic transition is rich and complex. Even if a strong segmentation can be observed between researchers in the demo-economic field, and those in the medical field, engineering, law, etc., the analyzed phenomena create a scientific bridge that can be capitalized only through the combined effort of specialists regardless of the field. There is appreciable potential for capitalization in using the results of research in this field and applying them to develop macroeconomic policies of stabilization, equilibrium and resilience, targeting effects at the microeconomic level: protection, adaptation, integration.

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REVIVING HERITAGE THROUGH PARTICIPATION: FAI SPRING DAYS AND THE POLITICS OF CULTURAL CITIZENSHIP IN ITALY

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ABSTRACT. This paper examines the *Giornate FAI di Primavera* (FAI Spring Days), a prominent public heritage initiative organized by the *Fondo per l'Ambiente Italiano* (FAI), as a lens through which to analyze contemporary practices of participatory heritage-making in Italy. In March 2025, marking FAI's 50th anniversary, more than 750 cultural and environmental sites—many of which are usually inaccessible— were opened to the public, attracting over 400,000 visitors and involving the active participation of over 50,000 student volunteers. Drawing on a multi-source qualitative analysis that integrates institutional discourse, digital ethnography and national media coverage, the article explores how FAI Spring Days operate as affective apparatus that shape collective memory, civic emotion and national identity. It argues that the initiative operates as a form of soft civic power, mobilizing aesthetic engagement, ritualized participation and digital storytelling to foster a sense of cultural stewardship. Social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook amplify the event's emotional and symbolic resonance, contributing to a digitally mediated public of belonging. By engaging diverse audiences across generations and regions, FAI Spring Days exemplify a civic model of heritage democratization and cultural citizenship in 21st-century Italy. This

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paper contributes to ongoing debates on participatory heritage, media rituals and affective publics, situating the case study within broader transformations in heritage governance.

Keywords: Italian culture, affective heritage, digital publics, cultural citizenship, FAI

JEL classification: Z11, Z18, H41, O52

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Introduction

In recent decades, the field of heritage studies has increasingly investigated how cultural heritage is produced, experienced, and circulated through participatory and affective practices. Scholars have challenged the notion of heritage as a fixed, institutional asset, emphasizing instead its performative and processual dimensions (Smith, 2006; Waterton & Watson, 2013). Public heritage initiatives that rely on large-scale citizen engagement therefore constitute rich sites of analysis—not only as moments of access to cultural goods, but as intricate assemblages of memory, identity, affect, and governance.

Within this broader context, Italy offers a particularly salient setting, given the centrality of cultural heritage to national identity and public life. This study examines the FAI Spring Days as a key instance of contemporary participatory heritage-making in Italy and as an entry point to explore how civic engagement, affective experience, and media circulation intersect within cultural events. The aim of this article is to understand how the FAI Spring Days operate as an affective apparatus of participatory heritage that combines institutional authority with grassroots involvement, ritual with spectacle, and memory with media. Specifically, it explores three interrelated research questions:

1. How do institutional narratives, volunteer practices, and social media content interact to shape the affective experience of heritage?
2. What forms of cultural citizenship are enacted through participation in the Spring Days?
3. How does this form of heritage engagement reflect broader transformations in the politics of memory and national identity in Italy?

To address these questions, the study adopts a mixed-methods design combining: (i) an archival analysis of FAI communications, reports, and promotional materials (2003–2025); (ii) a digital ethnography of social media activity during the 2025 Spring Days; and (iii) an analysis of national media coverage in outlets such as RAI and La Repubblica. This approach enables a comprehensive mapping of how the Spring Days are imagined, performed, and mediated across multiple publics.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: Section 2 outlines a focused Literature Review on public heritage initiatives, affective heritage, cultural citizenship, and media rituals. Section 3 provides an overview of the FAI Spring Days. Section 4 details the methodology and data sources. Section 5 discusses the results of the analysis, integrating social media data, institutional materials, and media coverage to examine how the 2025 Spring Days shaped public engagement, affective participation, and cultural citizenship. Section 6 concludes with reflections on policy and practice.

Literature review

Public heritage initiatives are increasingly understood as laboratories for rethinking the social, affective and civic functions of cultural heritage. Scholarship over the past decade has examined how publics participate in heritage through community-based practices, emotional experiences, and digitally mediated forms of engagement. This section synthesizes two major strands of research relevant to understanding the FAI Spring Days: (i) public heritage, participation, and cultural citizenship; (ii) affective heritage, atmospheres, and media-mediated forms of engagement.

Public heritage, participation and cultural citizenship

Research on public heritage initiatives has highlighted a broad shift from expert-driven conservation models to participatory frameworks that emphasize social inclusion, shared governance and community empowerment. The emergence of **public–private–people partnerships (P4)** exemplifies this transformation, placing local actors at the center of heritage co-production (Boniotti, 2023). Comparative studies further demonstrate that community-driven heritage projects contribute to local development by activating collective narratives and enabling intergenerational engagement (Butters *et al.*, 2017) while shaping which heritage values are recognized or contested (Apaydin, 2017). These participatory transformations extend to professional practices: heritage specialists increasingly work within **networked ecosystems** characterized by co-creation and negotiated expertise (Van der Hoeven, 2019). Similar dynamics appear in collaborative models involving universities, volunteers and civic actors that generate hybrid forms of public engagement (Frullo & Mattone, 2024). Yet scholarship also notes persistent tensions: public participation often remains formal rather than substantive (Swensen *et al.*, 2012), and participatory initiatives may surface conflicts around contested or "difficult" heritage (Macdonald, 2008).

This literature intersects with research on **cultural citizenship**, which conceptualizes participation in heritage as a form of civic practice through which individuals negotiate identity, belonging and recognition. Building on classical formulations (Rosaldo, 1994; Isin & Nielsen, 2008), recent studies show how heritage participation fosters civic learning, social cohesion and intergenerational ties while redistributing interpretive authority to non-experts (Lahdesmaki, 2016; Ceginskas *et al.*, 2025). Within the Italian context, Fiorillo & Ofria (2024) demonstrate that human and social capital strongly shape participation patterns, aligning with the volunteer-based model of the FAI Spring Days, where students and volunteers act as mediators of heritage and agents of informal cultural citizenship.

Despite extensive international scholarship, relatively little work addresses volunteer-driven heritage events in Italy. Existing studies focus more on museums or archaeological sites than on large-scale civic ritual events such as the FAI Spring Days, making this case particularly relevant.

Affective heritage, atmospheres and digital participation

A second major strand of literature concerns the **affective dimensions** of heritage, exploring how emotions, atmospheres and embodied encounters shape heritage experiences. Foundational frameworks (Knudsen & Stage, 2015; Wetherell, 2012) have inspired research into the sensory, relational and emotional qualities of heritage spaces. Recent contributions emphasize how affective atmospheres mediate feelings of authenticity, attachment and belonging (Bondi, 2016; Bissell, 2025), while Maddrell (2025) provides a comprehensive account of the interplay between affect and emotion in cultural geography. Affect also functions as a tool of governance: heritage organizations mobilize emotions to cultivate civic dispositions and forms of "affective responsibility" (Waterton & Dittmer 2014). These dynamics are highly relevant to events such as the FAI Spring Days, where exceptional access to closed spaces generates heightened emotional responses—wonder, intimacy, nostalgia—that reinforce the symbolic power of the event.

The affective and experiential dimensions of heritage are increasingly mediated through **digital platforms**. Expanding Couldry's (2003) concept of media rituals, recent research analyses how social media environments create networked publics that co-produce and circulate heritage narratives (McCarthy &

Schorch, 2018; Villaespesa & Murphy 2021). User-generated images, storytelling and hashtag campaigns act as forms of collective witnessing, extending the temporal and spatial boundaries of heritage experiences. Building on Papacharissi's (2015) notion of *affective publics*, scholars argue that digital participation amplifies emotional dynamics, shaping interpretive communities and national imaginaries.

Despite a growing body of international research, the application of media ritual and affective-publics frameworks to Italian heritage events remains limited. The FAI Spring Days therefore offer a valuable case for understanding how affect, ritual and digital participation intertwine in contemporary civic heritage.

The FAI Spring Days: background and significance

The *Giornate FAI di Primavera* (FAI Spring Days) represent a flagship initiative of the *Fondo per l'Ambiente Italiano* (FAI), founded in 1993 to promote the appreciation and protection of Italy's cultural and environmental heritage. Originally conceived as biannual open days to grant temporary access to normally closed sites, the initiative has progressively expanded its geographical reach, volunteer base, and institutional partnerships.

By 2025, marking FAI's 50th anniversary, the Spring Days mobilized over **750 sites** across more than **400 municipalities**, attracting **over 400,000 visitors.** The event relies on an extensive volunteer network—more than **16,000 FAI members** and over **50,000 students** serving as *Apprendisti Ciceroni*—whose pedagogical training and local knowledge are central to the event's intergenerational and educational mission (Cinieri & Zamperini, 2019).

The Spring Days operate as a ritualized public practice: ephemeral access to private or restricted sites produces heightened affective responses (wonder, intimacy, civic pride), while curated narratives and guided tours encourage shared meanings and collective memory. Digital mediation—particularly through Instagram and Facebook hashtags such as **#FAIprimavera** and **#GiornateFAI**—extends the event's temporal and spatial reach, creating crowdsourced visual archives and affective publics that amplify the initiative's symbolic presence.

Although the FAI Spring Days receive substantial media and institutional visibility, scholarly attention to the event is limited. Journalistic and curatorial commentary (e.g., *The Flora Journal,* 2019; *Finestre sull'Arte,* 2018) offers useful historical context, but there remains a clear gap in peer-reviewed literature analyzing the event's affective, civic and media dynamics—a gap this study seeks to begin to fill.

Material and methods

This article employs a qualitative, mixed-methods approach to investigate the civic and affective dimensions of public engagement during the 2025 edition of the *Giornate FAI di Primavera*. The study draws upon a triangulated corpus of institutional, media and social media data to examine how the event operates as a participatory heritage *dispositive,* mobilizing emotional investment, cultural values and performative expressions of belonging.

Three main data sources were analyzed:

1. Institutional materials and grey literature: this dataset includes official reports, press releases, promotional materials and newsletters published by the Fondo per l'Ambiente Italiano (FAI) between 2003 and 2025. Particular emphasis was given to documents and digital communications produced in the lead-up to and during the 2025 Spring Days, alongside retrospective institutional messaging related to FAI's 50th anniversary.

2. Media coverage and public discourse: A targeted review of Italian mainstream media sources — particularly *La Repubblica*, *RAI Cultura*, and local newspapers — was conducted to assess the broader discursive framing of the event. This helped contextualize public narratives around civic participation, youth involvement and national heritage valorization.

3. Social media content analysis: To assess real-time public engagement and participatory dynamics online, a digital ethnographic analysis was conducted using the analytics tool Social Searcher. The analysis focused on user-generated content posted between 22 and 27 March 2025, corresponding to the period immediately surrounding the Spring Days event. The analysis focused on content associated with the hashtags #GiornateFAI, #FAIprimavera and #ApprendistiCiceroni. Key metrics examined included total mentions, number of unique users, sentiment ratio, media type (text, image, video) and thematic content.

The hashtag-based analysis facilitated the identification of key trends in digital participation, including the visual and affective dimensions of engagement, as well as the prominence of specific social actors—most notably student volunteers (*Apprendisti Ciceroni*). Although not exhaustive, this methodology offers useful analytical perspective through which we examine how heritage experiences are publicly shared, emotionally framed and digitally amplified.

Data were coded inductively to identify recurrent patterns and themes, particularly those related to affective citizenship, visibility and ritualized practices of cultural engagement. In line with heritage studies' focus on performativity and everyday practices (Waterton & Smith, 2009), the approach prioritizes thick description and interpretive depth over representativeness or statistical generalization. Ethical considerations were adhered to throughout this research process only publicly accessible posts were analyzed, and user data were anonymized unless accounts were official or institutional in nature. The integration of institutional discourse, media representation and user-driven content enables a multi-perspectival analysis of the FAI Spring Days, capturing both top-down messaging and bottom-up expressions of heritage participation. This framework enables a nuanced understanding of how civic rituals such as the Spring Days mediate relationships between citizens, memory and place in the digital era.

To contextualize the scale and institutional support for cultural participation in Italy, this study also draws on public expenditure data from ISTAT and the Ministry of Culture (2018–2022), comparing Italy's investment levels with those of other major European countries.

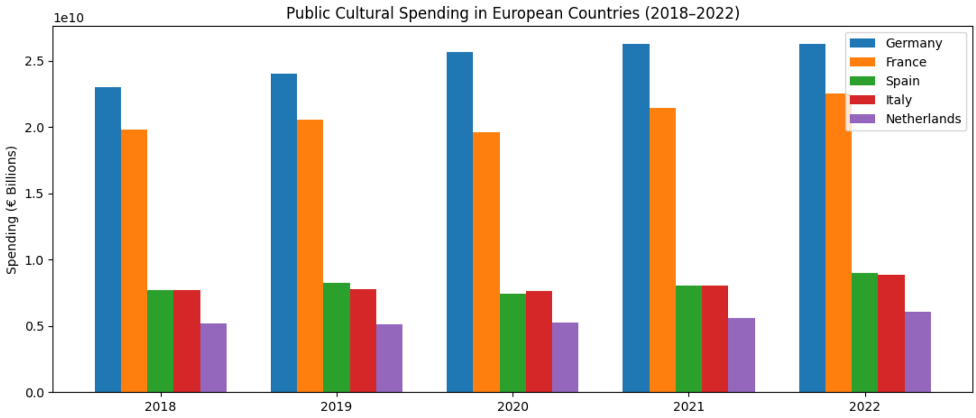
Results and discussion: participatory heritage in sction

Public investment and cultural infrastructure

To contextualize the socio-cultural ecosystem in which the FAI Spring Days operate, it is essential to consider the broader landscape of public investment in culture in Italy and across Europe. While the primary focus of this study is qualitative, national statistics provide key insights into the institutional conditions that enable participatory heritage practices to thrive.

Italy continues to hold the highest number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites globally, with 59 sites recorded in 2023. According to official statistics published by the Italian Ministry of Culture (*Minicifre della Cultura,* 2024), this rich cultural endowment is further reflected in the extensive network of museums, monuments and archaeological sites open to the public. Between 2018 and 2022, however, the number of such institutions declined slightly—from approximately 4,908 in 2018 to 4,416 in 2022—likely due to temporary or permanent closures related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Museum attendance data confirm this trend, showing a sharp decline in 2021 followed by a strong recovery in 2022. In 2021, Italy registered 11.5 million paid and 13.3 million unpaid entries, whereas in 2022 these figures almost doubled, reaching 23.5 million and 35.1 million respectively. Public museums accounted for the majority of these visits, with 42 million paid entries in 2022 compared to 19.6 million in 2021. This post-pandemic rebound suggests a renewed interest in cultural experiences among both residents and tourists. The high proportion of non-paying visitors—particularly in public museums—highlights the importance of accessibility policies and sustained state support.

A broader understanding of this institutional framework emerges when examining cross-national trends in public cultural expenditure. As shown in Figure 1, Italy's investment in cultural services and related media sectors increased steadily between 2018 and 2022, rising from €7.73 billion to €8.85 billion. Of this total, €5.72 billion were dedicated to cultural services—including museums, monuments, archives and heritage conservation—while €3.13 billion supported broadcasting and editorial activities. Despite this growth, Italy continues to invest less than other major European countries such as Germany (€26.3 billion), France (€22.5 billion) and Spain (€9 billion).



Year	Germany	France	Spain	Italy	Netherlands
2018	23.05	19.85	7.74	7.73	5.18
2019	24.03	20.55	8.24	7.81	5.14
2020	25.66	19.62	7.44	7.64	5.29
2021	26.31	21.46	8.08	8.03	5.57
2022	26.31	22.52	9.01	8.85	6.08

Figure 1. Public Cultural Spending in Italy and Selected European Countries (2018–2022).
Source: Authors' elaboration based on *Minicifre della Cultura* (Ministero della Cultura, 2024).

Nevertheless, Italy's sustained financial commitment to culture reflects the centrality of heritage within its national policy framework, particularly when considering the combined contributions of both central government institutions (e.g., Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and local authorities (e.g., regional and municipal governments). Between 2018 and 2022, national cultural expenditure increased by more than €1.1 billion, driven in part by post-COVID recovery funds and a renewed emphasis on regional cultural programming.

These conditions provide the material and policy landscape within which initiatives like the FAI Spring Days emerge and gain traction. They show that such events are not merely symbolic performances of civic culture but are instead grounded in structural investments and governance mechanisms that enable their growth. As the following sections will demonstrate, FAI strategically leverages this institutional infrastructure to activate large-scale volunteerism, foster emotional engagement with heritage and promote a democratized model of cultural citizenship.

A closer look at institutional support further reveals the growing operational integration of public bodies within the FAI Spring Days. Although the event relies primarily on civil society and student participation, a distinct layer of structured institutional engagement has emerged in recent years. Figure 2 illustrates the stable annual contribution—since 2021—of volunteers from the Civil Protection service, the Italian Red Cross (CRI) and the Carabinieri, whose presence ensures the safe and coordinated management of hundreds of site openings across the national territory. While smaller in number compared to the broader volunteer base, these actors play an essential role in enabling the logistical and safety infrastructure required for large-scale heritage events.

This pattern reflects not only logistical necessity but also the deepening entanglement between civic participation and state infrastructure. In an environment where public investment in culture continues to grow—particularly through recovery plans and regional programming—the presence of institutional volunteers signals a shift toward hybrid models of cultural governance. The FAI Spring Days, in this light, are not merely festive or symbolic interventions but increasingly constitute a coordinated exercise in public–private collaboration for heritage activation. These conditions provide the material and policy landscape within which initiatives like the Spring Days gain traction. They indicate that such events are not simply symbolic performances of civic culture, but are grounded in structural investments and governance mechanisms that enable their expansion. As the following sections demonstrate, FAI strategically leverages this institutional infrastructure to mobilize large-scale volunteerism, foster emotional engagement with heritage, and promote a democratized model of cultural citizenship.

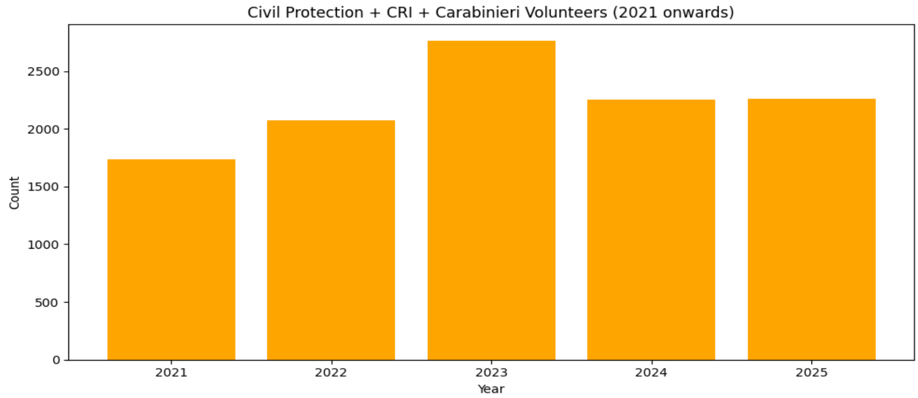


Figure 2. Institutional Volunteer Involvement in FAI Spring Days (2021–2025).
Source: Authors' elaboration based on FAI annual reports and event archives.

While the Spring Days have become a fixture in the Italian cultural calendar, academic literature on the subject remains scarce. The earliest sustained commentaries can be found in cultural magazines such as The Flora Journal (2019) and Finestre sull'Arte (2018), which framed the initiative as a national awakening to overlooked heritage and as a ritual of civic identity formation.

Digital ethnography and social media analysis

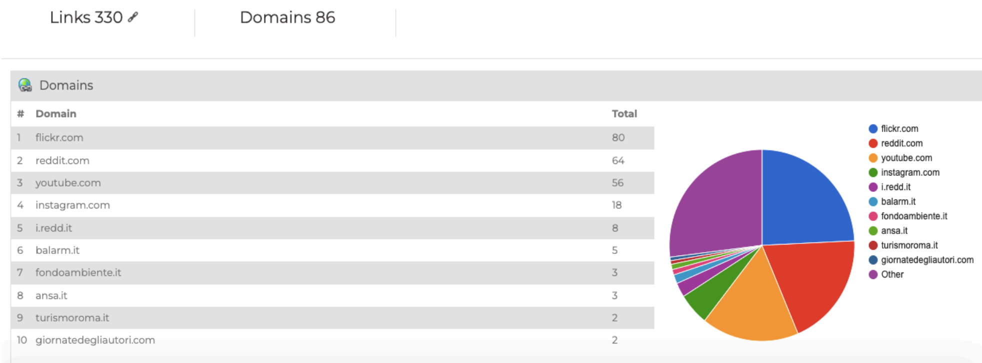
To assess public engagement and digital participation surrounding the FAI Spring Days 2025, a social media analysis was conducted using the platform *Social Searcher*. The analysis focused on relevant hashtags circulated between 22 and 27 March, 2025, particularly: #GiornateFAI, #FAIprimavera and #ApprendistiCiceroni. Key metrics collected include hashtag frequency (mentions), number of unique users, sentiment ratio (positive:negative), diversity of web domains, and the types of media attached (e.g., videos, photos, external links). The quantitative distribution of hashtag engagement is summarized in Table 1, which details the relative visibility of each hashtag and shows that #GiornateFAI was the most widely used, followed by #ApprendistiCiceroni and #FAIprimavera.

Table 1. Hashtag Analysis of the FAI Spring Days 2025 Social Media Campaign

Hashtag	Mention	Users	Sentiment	Domains	Video	Photo	Link	Status
FAIprimavera	71	51	3:0	8	50	14	7	0
GiornateFAI	331	210	9:1	86	56	99	175	1
ApprendistiCiceroni	97	80	5:0	80	0	14	83	0

Source: Authors' elaboration of hashtags based on the platform Social Searcher.

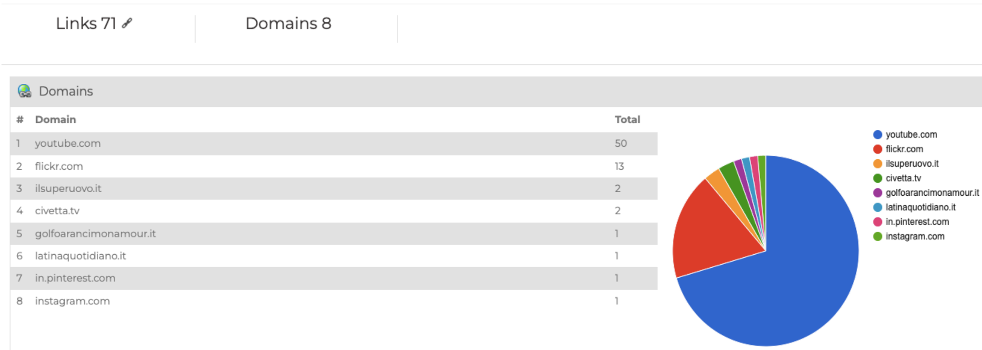
#GiornateFAI emerged as the dominant tag, generating 331 mentions from 210 unique users and displaying a predominantly positive sentiment ratio (9 positive vs. 1 negative). As illustrated in Figure 3, the posts associated with this hashtag prominently feature visual storytelling, enthusiasm for reopened heritage sites, and personal accounts of site visits, confirming the strong alignment between user-generated content and the event's public messaging.



#	Domain	Total
1	flickr.com	80
2	reddit.com	64
3	youtube.com	56
4	instagram.com	18
5	i.redd.it	8
6	balarm.it	5
7	fondoambiente.it	3
8	ansa.it	3
9	turismoroma.it	2
10	giornatedegliautori.com	2

Figure 3. Representative User Posts with the Hashtag #GiornateFAI
Source: Authors' elaboration based on the platform Social Searcher

Figure 4 further shows that #FAIprimavera—recording 71 mentions—was closely associated with images and videos highlighting the seasonal identity of the event, including architectural details, landscapes and volunteer portraits, thereby reinforcing the aesthetic framing of the Spring Days.



#	Domain	Total
1	youtube.com	50
2	flickr.com	13
3	ilsuperuovo.it	2
4	civetta.tv	2
5	golfoarancimonamour.it	1
6	latinaquotidiano.it	1
7	in.pinterest.com	1
8	instagram.com	1

Figure 4. Representative User Posts with the Hashtag #FAIprimavera
Source: Authors' elaboration based on the platform Social Searcher

As depicted in Figure 5, the hashtag #ApprendistiCiceroni (97 mentions) foregrounded the active participation of student volunteers, whose self-representations emphasize their educational role and symbolic visibility within FAI's civic mission. These posts consolidate the perception of the Apprendisti Ciceroni as central mediators of heritage during the event.

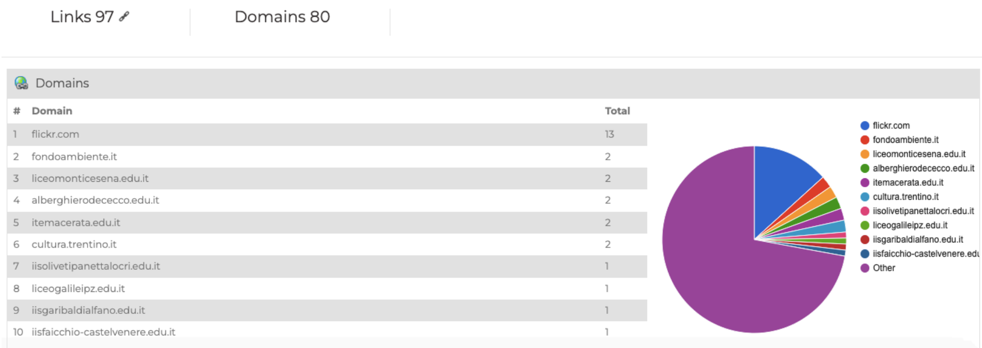


Figure 5. Representative User Posts with the Hashtag #ApprendistiCiceroni
Source: Authors' elaboration based on the platform Social Searcher

The overall content leaned heavily toward visual storytelling, with over 50 videos and 127 photos shared across platforms, underscoring the immersive and aesthetic appeal of the events. The low incidence of negative sentiment further reinforces a generally positive public perception, validating the initiative's resonance with both participants and observers.

Although a few older posts were retrieved—likely due to residual indexing from previous editions (e.g., 2021)—the majority of activity clustered around the actual event dates, confirming the reliability of the selected hashtags for capturing short-term public engagement. These results demonstrate that the *FAI Spring Days* act as digital catalysts for cultural engagement, transforming online spaces into participatory arenas of heritage expression.

Importantly, the role of social media extends beyond communication or marketing: it contributes to the construction of a collective narrative of heritage experience, shaped by visitors' perspectives, emotions, and representations. In this sense, digital platforms offer a complementary ethnographic lens through which to examine how individuals relate to heritage spaces and reframe them within their everyday digital practices. As the next section will show, these interactions are further amplified through the voices of volunteers, local communities, and young participants who embody the participatory ethos of the FAI.

Heritage as civic ritual: The Spring Days in practice

The *Giornate FAI di Primavera*—or FAI Spring Days—have evolved into one of the most influential and widely attended heritage events in Italy (La Repubblica 2025; RAI News 2025). Originally conceived in the early 1990s to raise awareness about under-recognized or inaccessible sites, by 2025 the initiative had become a fully-fledged civic ritual. It now merges mass participation, affective engagement, and strategic media visibility, embodying a performative, multi-sited event that mediates relationships among citizens, institutions, and place.

The fiftieth-anniversary edition, held on **March 23–24, 2025**, mobilized over **400,000 visitors** across all Italian regions, granting temporary access to more than **750 cultural and environmental sites**. Many of these spaces—private palaces, deconsecrated religious buildings, military infrastructures, or restricted natural areas—are ordinarily closed to the public. Their ephemeral accessibility generates a heightened emotional charge, transforming site visits into extraordinary, collectively shared experiences. This temporality contributes to the ritual character of the event: a fleeting encounter with heritage that gains meaning precisely through its impermanence.

At the heart of the Spring Days lies FAI's distinctive **volunteer-based model**. Over **15,000 FAI members and local coordinators** collaborated with more than **50,000 high school students**, known as *Apprendisti Ciceroni*, who served as guides during the event. After preparatory training, these students deliver presentations in informal, accessible language, often drawing on personal or local narratives. This intergenerational pedagogy empowers youth to position themselves as **active custodians of cultural heritage,** disrupting traditional hierarchies of expertise. It marks a shift from authoritative transmission to participatory storytelling, reinforcing civic values such as responsibility, openness, and belonging.

Echoing broader patterns of cultural participation, the educational and social dimensions embodied by the Apprendisti Ciceroni align with recent findings on the determinants of heritage engagement: Fiorillo & Ofria (2024) show that in Italy, human capital (educational level) and social capital (social networks) play a decisive role in predicting both the likelihood and frequency of visits to museums, sites, and monuments.

The performative dimension of the Spring Days is also inscribed in its **spatial politics**. By foregrounding "hidden" or marginal sites—such as hydroelectric plants, abandoned gardens, or working-class housing—the FAI subtly challenges the dominant heritage imaginary centered on monumentalism and high art. In 2025, several itineraries focused on **20th-century industrial archaeology, environmental regeneration sites**, and **migrant heritage**.

In Genoa, for example, a repurposed slaughterhouse now serving as a creative hub was among the most visited venues, with tours curated by a coalition of students, artists, and activists. In Palermo, the inclusion of a migrant-run urban garden marked a symbolic (if still tentative) expansion of what is recognized as "heritage" within FAI's institutional scope. These curatorial choices are not devoid of politics. While the event promotes broad participation, the **selection of sites remains centrally orchestrated**, often shaped by strategic partnerships, institutional endorsements, or donor interests. This raises important questions about **whose heritage is legitimized**, and how power circulates in the public production of civic rituals.

Despite these tensions, the **affective impact** of the event is significant. Visitors frequently describe the experience using emotionally charged language—"magical," "unexpected," "moving." Standing inside an otherwise inaccessible space, often guided by a local student, fosters a sense of connection to both place and history. These moments generate what Papacharissi (2015) terms **"affective publics"**: ephemeral communities formed around shared emotional experiences and mediated acts of collective meaning-making.

The annual recurrence of the Spring Days reinforces this affective dimension. The event typically takes place during the same March weekend, generating a sense of **anticipation and ritual regularity**. Families, couples, and students plan around it, sometimes crossing regional borders to attend specific sites. The symbolic alignment with the arrival of spring strengthens the emotional resonance: heritage becomes a seasonal practice of **renewal, discovery, and national re-connection.**

Moreover, the Spring Days are increasingly **hybrid events,** extending into digital space. Platforms such as Instagram and Facebook amplify participation, with thousands of user-generated images and videos circulating in real time. In 2025, hashtags such as **#GiornateFAI** and **#FAIprimavera** reached over **2 million interactions**, offering a **crowdsourced visual archive** of the event. These digital traces not only extend the temporal and geographic boundaries of participation but also contribute to the **symbolic construction of contemporary heritage**, shaped by emotion, visibility, and grassroots documentation.

These dynamics of participation are captured quantitatively in Figure 6, which traces the trajectory of three key participation metrics—total volunteers, event visitors, and the number of Apprentice Guides—from 1993 to 2025. It shows sustained growth up to 2019, a clear dip during the pandemic in 2020, and a gradual recovery in subsequent years, demonstrating both resilience and the continued civic value of the initiative.

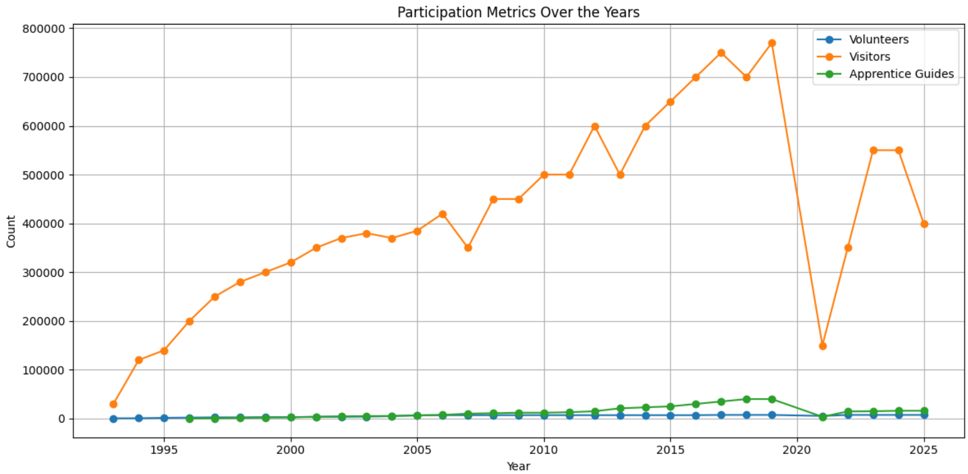


Figure 6. Long-Term Participation Trends in FAI Spring Days (1993–2025).
Source: Authors' elaboration based on FAI annual reports.

In sum, the 2025 edition of the *Giornate FAI di Primavera* exemplifies how **heritage practices can function as civic rituals**, weaving together participation, pedagogy, and place-based emotion. While the event is not immune to contradictions—particularly concerning inclusivity and institutional control—it enables a **temporary reimagining** of the relationship between the public and cultural space. Far from being mere spectacles of access, the Spring Days represent occasions of **co-creation and national imagination**, in which heritage is not only preserved but actively performed, felt, and shared.

Conclusion

The FAI Spring Days 2025 offer a compelling case study of how heritage is increasingly co-produced, performed, and circulated within a hybrid ecology of participation. This study has shown that digital platforms—especially through the use of curated hashtags—function not merely as channels of communication but as affective infrastructures that shape how the public engages with cultural heritage. The prevalence of positive sentiment, the predominance of visual content and the emergence of recurring figures such as the *Apprendisti Ciceroni* point to a digitally mediated form of civic pride and aesthetic witnessing.

By mobilizing affect, users actively participated in the construction of a shared heritage narrative, reinforcing a sense of belonging that transcended physical presence. In this context, social media posts should not be viewed as peripheral or secondary representations of the event, but rather as integral components of the heritage experience itself. The digital trace becomes part of the ritual, not its aftermath.

Furthermore, this affective engagement reveals the evolving nature of public participation in heritage practices. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter) allow individuals not only to consume heritage, but to perform it—to curate, frame and emotionally invest in it. These practices signal a shift from passive observation to active co-authorship, where publics shape and reshape what counts as cultural value in real time.

Future research might deepen this analysis by comparing multiple heritage events, exploring platform-specific dynamics, or integrating more nuanced metrics of affective engagement. What remains clear is that digital participation is not an accessory to heritage, but one of its contemporary modalities. As cultural rituals migrate online, they invite new publics, new forms of presence, and new grammars of collective memory.

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APPROACHING PODCASTS AS A LEARNING TOOL FOR IMPROVING LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES

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ABSTRACT. This article aims to analyze how team leadership competencies can be developed and optimized through a non-formal learning tool: podcasts. The study takes as its starting point the podcast series Teamology, which explores current topics related to team functioning, the role of the leader, decision-making, conflict management and adaptability in complex organizational contexts. In an era marked by uncertainty, remote work and cultural diversity, leaders need to adopt flexible practices and acquire accessible, applicable and authentic learning sources.

The paper starts from the premise that podcasts can become a valuable educational resource for developing leadership competencies, by exposing listeners to real experiences, diverse perspectives and concrete solutions. From a methodological viewpoint, the research is qualitative and is based on the content analysis of eight representative episodes of the Teamology series, selected on the basis of thematic criteria. The analysis aimed to extract and interpret the essential team leadership competencies, the strategies presented by the guests and how they can be applied in practice, within modern teams.

The results highlight that podcasts provide an authentic and accessible narrative framework that facilitates learning through reflection, emotional connection and immediate applicability. Recurring themes, such as clear communication, psychological safety, trust and distributed leadership, are presented in a practical, easy to understand and adaptable way to various

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contexts. The paper thus highlights the value of podcasts as a support in the formation of effective leaders and offers recommendations for their use in educational and organizational environments.

Keywords: team leadership, leadership competencies, leadership education, leadership, podcasts

JEL classification: M12, M10.

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Introduction and review of literature

In the current context of organizations characterized by uncertainty, diversity and work in hybrid teams, there is a need to identify effective methods for developing team leadership competencies. A major challenge is the lack of applicable and accessible educational resources that provide relevant leadership models adapted to the new realities. This raises the following question: To what extent podcasts can be a valuable tool for optimizing leadership in teams?

From an overall perspective, the concept of team leadership is defined as "problem-solving activities directed at the generation of solutions that advance team goal attainment" (Zaccaro *et al.,* 2001). In its completion, Hackman (2002) emphasizes the essential role of the leader in "creating optimal conditions for the functioning of the team, both at a structural and psychological level".

Kozlowski & Ilgen (2006) expand this definition by introducing three fundamental dimensions of leadership in teams:

1. The cognitive-strategic dimension: "The leader's ability to analyze, plan and anticipate the team's needs";
2. The relational dimension: "The ability to build and maintain productive relationships within the team";
3. The adaptive dimension: "The flexibility to respond to changing context and group dynamics".

According to an analysis operationalized by Bell & Kozlowski (2002), teams led by leaders who effectively combine diverse competencies perform 23% better than those led by a single-track approach. In the context of modern organizations, Northouse (2022) identifies four essential characteristics of effective team leadership:

- Clearly structured vision: “Clarity of objectives and roles”;
- Open communication: “Constant flow of information in both directions”;
- Effective delegation: “Trust in the skills of team members”;
- Collective resilience: “The ability to overcome unpredictable situations”.

Katzenbach & Smith (1992) stated that a team is made up of a small group of people with complementary skills, who share a common purpose, pursue the same performance objectives and adopt a working method together, assuming mutual responsibility for achieving results. In addition, Northouse (2022) considers that a team can be described as a group within an organization, consisting of interdependent members who collaborate and align their efforts around common goals, in order to achieve them effectively. The essence of teamwork lies precisely in the collaboration of members to achieve collective goals.

The optimal functioning of a team involves going through distinct stages of development. The classic model of Tuckman (1965) identifies four main phases: formation, conflict, normalization, and performance. This evolution is influenced by both structural factors (such as task organization and resource allocation) and psychosocial factors (such as group cohesion and relational dynamics). Salas *et al.* (1992) consider that two essential factors for the success of team collaboration reside in effective communication and mutual trust between members.

One issue that leaders often face consists of generational diversity. Schultz’s (2010) study identifies significant differences between the expectations of Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials. Despite all these differences, the study highlights the fact that they all share a common aspiration: to become transformational leaders even in a virtual environment, suggesting that “generational differences are less important than work environment when it comes to leadership preferences”. Thus, this leadership style – which is based on motivation, clear communication, and support for professional development – yields good results for teams that work together physically as well as for those that collaborate remotely.

To address these challenges, a series of concrete solutions are proposed:

- Implementing frequent and transparent communication to compensate for the lack of physical interactions. Using adapted technologies, such as video conferencing, to maintain human connection.
- Encouraging all team members to participate in the decision-making process and, implicitly, to assume leadership roles for certain projects.

Organizational success in the virtual environment depends, to a large extent, on the ability of leaders to combine transformational approaches with adaptability to new technologies and generational diversity. These results provide a useful framework for analyzing leadership practices in modern organizations.

The role of team leader vs. individual leadership

Nowadays, leadership has evolved beyond traditional approaches, becoming a process that must respond to both individual and collective needs. Lu & Li's (2021) study provides a theoretical framework for understanding the two notions, presenting how leaders can influence performance at the individual and team levels. Thus, the study explores the distinction between team-oriented and individual-oriented leadership, as well as their different impacts. Transformational leaders can have different impacts depending on their focus, while individual leadership stimulates personal performance by developing self-efficacy, focusing on the specific needs and abilities of each member through personalized coaching, intellectual stimulation, recognition of individual performances, managing to increase the effectiveness of members and, at the same time, their individual performance. The research is based on data collected from 477 team members and 132 leaders, managing to provide a solid basis for understanding these processes.

In addition to these conclusions, the study conducted by Burke *et al.* (2006) highlights an important aspect for teams, namely that the success of teams depends not only on the style of the leader, but also on when and how he intervenes. The authors introduce the concept of functional leadership, focusing on the fact that an effective leader is one who responds to the needs of the team according to its stage of development and the specific challenges that define the context in which it finds itself.

The leader can adopt an individual-focused or team-focused approach, but the real value lies in the flexibility with which the two styles alternate. For example, in the initial phases of the team, the leader has a role oriented towards clarifying individual roles, while in the advanced phases it is recommended to support independent collaboration. The study also highlights the importance of distributed leadership, in which formal leaders encourage team members to take the initiative and lead essential processes, thus contributing to a culture of shared responsibility. This approach proves to be extremely effective in virtual or hybrid teams, where autonomy and trust become fundamental conditions for performance. Finally, the study confirms that organizational performance cannot be reduced to a simple sum of individualities, but must be understood as the result of a well-coordinated ecosystem. Investing in team dynamics, promoting trust and developing distributed leadership are essential elements for long-term success.

The importance of podcasts in informal education and professional development

Podcasts have become a valuable tool for learning and personal development. In this regard, a study by Norsworthy & Herndon (2020) approaches a new perspective towards understanding how audio podcasts can transform leadership training practices. Therefore, it proposes an innovative model of leadership competencies transfer through podcasts. The first component included interviews with media leaders who have managed real crises, through which listeners are directly exposed to complex experiences narrated by practitioners, which provide a clear presentation of the decision-making process under pressure. Consequently, we conclude that leaders can learn both from strategies in practice, not just from theories, and that the example of crisis management in newsrooms is transferable to any team operating under pressure. The second component consists of the learning structure, which integrates cognitive development (through theoretical application of the concepts discussed during the interviews), emotional (through the connection established through tonality and vocal inflections), and behavioral (through practical exercises inspired by the guests' recommendations). The third component refers to holographic feedback, provided through observations made after the broadcast of episodes, which reveals the processes behind the creation of content and supports deeper critical reflection. Finally, contextual adaptability is another important advantage of podcasts, allowing for asynchronous listening and adapting the pace of learning according to each leader's needs and preferences.

The advantages and limitations of podcasts as a learning resource

The study handled by Stankov (2007) provides a detailed analysis of the benefits and limitations of podcasts, highlighting how they can support or, on the contrary, limit the learning process. The advantages of podcasts in the learning process are multiple and support the idea of optimizing autonomous learning and easy access to information. First, mobility is one of the most important advantages: podcasts can be listened to at any time and in any place. This feature supports continuous learning, without time or space constraints. Second, the revision of difficult content is facilitated by the possibility of re-listening the materials. This aspect is particularly valuable for students who are not native speakers of that language or for those who want to consolidate their understanding of complex notions, which is also very beneficial in team leadership. At the same time, podcasts complement traditional materials, offering an auditory alternative and sometimes more attractive than written texts. This diversification of sources contributes to better adaptation to individual learning styles.

However, the use of podcasts also comes with certain limitations. One of the most important is related to the technical quality of the production: for a podcast to be educationally effective, appropriate equipment and a careful editing process are required, which involves additional resources. Another disadvantage is the lack of visual support, which can be problematic in subjects that require diagrams, graphs or other visual elements for a full understanding of the content.

Additionally, low familiarity with technology can be a barrier to effective use of this resource, especially among people who are new to such digital formats. Used strategically, podcasts can contribute to the development of key leadership competencies by facilitating quick access to complex and relevant information.

Material and method

The Teamology podcast series is distinguished by a rigorous structure, with very well-defined episodes for the discussed leadership themes. Each episode has a very well-thought-out format to increase the educational impact, but also for its practical applicability in the right contexts. With an average duration of between 40 and 60 minutes, the episodes have an optimal interval that allows for the exploration of the content in an in-depth manner, while also maintaining the listener's attention.

The structure of the episodes combines several essential elements, most starting with a clear introduction that presents the central theme, placing it in context with other topics covered. In this opening section, the hosts emphasize the importance of the topic and, if applicable, introduce the guests, highlighting their relevant experience and skills. The central segment focuses on the main topic, which has a different format from case to case – from in-depth interviews with leadership specialists to detailed analyses of case studies from the organizational environment. A key element of this podcast series is the fact that each topic is treated starting from key concepts, followed by examples and tools that can be applied immediately by leaders. The end of each episode is reserved for consolidation of information, with the last 5-10 minutes being those in which a synthesis is made on the topics covered offering practical recommendations.

The main objective of the Teamology podcast series is to disseminate scientifically validated concepts and best practices in the field of building and leading high-performing teams. The hosts aim to bring up topics related to leadership and team building, focusing on improving fragile teams. All ideologies and discussions come from both their own experience and that of other teams of the leaders invited to the podcast.

As Alexandru & Răschip (2022c) point out, effective leadership in this framework is not limited to coordinating activities, but aims to cultivate authentic collective knowledge. This demonstrates that transforming a group into a high-performing team requires the development of interdependence, where responsibility becomes a collective commitment, not just a simple assignment of tasks. In addition, Alexandru & Răschip (2022b) focus on transforming "antifragile" teams, noting that: "this is a specific, complex and deeply satisfying process for any team that wants to achieve greatness". The Teamology approach to team transformation offers a practical perspective on team leadership, highlighting the critical role of the leader at every stage of the process.

The current paper adopts a qualitative methodology, based on the content analysis of the Teamology podcasts series, with the aim of identifying and interpreting the essential team leadership competencies promoted through this non-formal educational resource. The analysis focuses on extracting dominant themes, strategies applied by leaders, and values conveyed through the selected podcast episodes.

The purpose of the research is to analyze how leadership competencies can be optimized through the educational content offered by the Teamology podcast series, highlighting strategies and practices that can be applied in current organizational teams.

Research objectives:

1. To identify the main team leadership competencies highlighted in the Teamology podcast series;
2. To analyze the manner in which these competencies contribute to improving team performance;
3. To explore the role of podcasts as a non-formal education tool in training effective leaders;
4. To highlight the applicability of the strategies presented in the podcasts in real organizational contexts.

The methodological approach aims to investigate a number of eight strategically selected episodes, considering the thematic diversity and practical relevance for the context of organizational leadership. Each episode was analyzed through the lens of several key dimensions: communication, decision-making, conflict management, coordination of diverse teams, and adaptability to change. Through this approach, the aim is not only to describe the theoretical competencies, but also to understand how they are reflected and supported by the experiences of the guests, through concrete examples and strategies applicable in the professional environment. The results of the analysis will be interpreted in relation to the specialized literature and the real needs of contemporary leaders, in order to formulate conclusions and recommendations applicable into practice.

Results and discussions

The concept of team leadership as a prerequisite for performance in the Teamology approach

In the episode entitled "The Difference Between a Workgroup and a Team" ["*Diferența dintre un grup de lucru și o echipă*"], the concept of team leadership is very well outlined, starting from the basic key concept of this discussion, namely: "Why do people come together?". As Alexandru & Răschip (2022d) mention, teams are formed "exclusively for performance", also explaining that they could not have other purposes, which is absolutely essential for team leadership. Understanding these differences is crucial to creating a coherent and high-performing work environment. However, people choose much more often to work individually and to gather in teams only when strictly necessary, adding that:

> [...] *They don't really have any other significant motivation to meet with other people, now, from the work experiences I have with many hundreds of managers I've worked with so far, both with them and with their teams, there is a predisposition, people would rather do their own thing, meaning not to mess up their teams or the rest of the world and to gather with teams only when it suits them and they want to.* [...] *There is this tendency by default.*

In business, teams often work remotely, on different tasks, or with little or no time flexibility. The work group includes individual work with results that, when combined, contribute to a common goal. In this way, each member is responsible for their own performance, with minimal interdependence. The team, however, comes with other absolutely essential attributes, as members are interdependent, failing to deliver individual performance without collaborating with the rest of the team members.

"How do we produce performance as a team?" – A very important aspect for the team is to have clarity on the situations, to understand how they should work together. Clarity in the team brings understanding, understanding accumulates when team members understand which teams they are part of, they must have common perspectives so that frustrations do not arise. It is essential that leaders understand what type of structure they have in order to create processes that support that type, and if these things are not explicit enough, members can feel pressure to collaborate in a way that is not necessary, this leading to demotivation and waste of time.

In the episode entitled "Introduction to Team Performance" ["*Introducerea în performanța echipelor*"], Alexandru & Răschip (2022a) managed to answer the most frequently asked questions regarding organizational performance, namely: “How do you achieve team performance?” and “How do you build and lead a team for performance?”. Most of the time, the most complicated aspects were those related to hybrid teamwork:

> *I see, in general, two lines of force, of major challenge, one is hybrid work, working from home, working from the office... It is still a difficult topic, a topic that has not found a satisfactory solution for the manager in most cases. And the second is that of generational differences, because the way we have functioned in business and especially during the pandemic, and the way in which the new generations work in business especially after the pandemic, raises some very challenging topics, very difficult so to speak for managers.*

Although teams are considered today the most efficient and recommended working methods, they are also the most expensive options. Therefore, paying increased attention becomes a very important aspect so that their benefits are not completely outweighed by these high costs. For a good accumulation of benefits, one must invest, not just live with the idea that, once gathered, people form a team.

> *Starting from this premise that, although the team is a very sought-after, appreciated, sometimes revered word... In fact, in reality, the team is the most expensive way to achieve results and you have to be very careful when building a team so that you don't end up with only costs. To get benefits, you have to do things well, but you have to understand that in everything else that is built in this world, there is also a technique here, there are some things that are done, that are not done, but it is important to understand that it is not as easy as it seems: "We gathered 10-12 people and now we are a team". Things are far from this area.*

We understand that the team must generate tangible results, for example products, services, that truly meet the needs of the beneficiaries, and not just in a way of “doing something”, but the value should be recognized, useful and appreciated. If the team does not deliver visible value, it loses credibility and support from the organization. At the same time, the team must continuously evolve to consistently succeed in facing future challenges. Finally, team members must feel involved, motivated and confident that the experiences will bring them personal benefits, including professional satisfaction and personal development. A truly performing team does not choose between these dimensions, but balances all three.

> *Things are more complex, because we are talking about the performance of a team and not whether the team is functional or not.*

Therefore, team performance is not accidental, it is the result of conscious leadership, processes adapted to new realities (hybrid, different generations) and a culture that values interdependence. Organizations that manage to balance the three dimensions (value, evolution, satisfaction) will have teams that are not only functional, but antifragile, able to thrive in chaos.

The centrality of the conflict

In the episode entitled "Constructive Conflict Management" ["*Gestionarea constructivă a conflictelor*"], Alexandru & Răschip (2023a) have a very relevant discussion related to the challenges of a team, which generate conflicts, when we can conclude that they could be beneficial or not, what can be done in a practical way for the efficient and constructive management of a team.

Conflict, in essence, is an inevitable, but also beneficial, part of team collaboration. What makes conflict beneficial is that, in this way, weaknesses in plans or processes are exposed, which can be subsequently improved, forcing the team to agree on alternatives related to opinions or ideas. Thus, the team must have the ability to manage strong conflicts in order to create solutions in the future, relevant and valuable. Conflict in a team should not be seen as a weakness but rather as a sign of strength, ambition, maturity, and patience. However, this holds true only when there is trust among members, allowing them to distinguish ideas from individuals while maintaining mutual respect.

This episode is based on conflicts that arise in teams unintentionally, conflicts that are not born out of malice, from things thought out in advance with the intention of creating a malicious conflict.

> *People enter without wanting to create conflict, they enter because they care deeply about their own perspective, their own interest, their own understanding, their own beliefs.*

This attachment often manages to create disagreements between team members. However, it is good to understand when a conflict is good and when it is bad.

> *Conflict has a personal relational component, meaning we understand each other better or less well, we agree or disagree, or we enter into conflict more or less easily with certain people depending on our personality structures, reactions, and triggers, but from my experience working with teams, this is secondary to why people enter into conflict* [...].

This fact indicates that it is necessary to understand very well the fundamental difference between apparently personal and structural conflicts, which are, in essence, the main cause of tensions formed between team members, even if they appear to be conflicts of an emotional or personal nature. Effective leadership should be able to restructure the conditions that cause such conflicts, not just limit itself to calming emotions. Conflict is not good when it is not made explicit, when it is not discussed. If a conflict remains undiscussed, it can lead to very dangerous situations for the team but, nevertheless, they cannot be discussed if there is no "psychological safety" that helps to conclude each person's decisions, to listen to each other, to understand which ideas are good and which are less good, which are more beneficial and which are less beneficial, so that all team members reach a common sense.

Often, a conflict can turn into an argument, and the most common reasons that generate arguments depend on the context, intentions and emotional dynamics. Sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously, which happens as a result of unresolved situations, when the topic is used to gain power and status, indicating that the dispute is not about content, but about demonstrating superiority, using tactics such as invalidating the experiences of others or humiliation, when people are impatient to truly understand the topic, when the parties become very defensive, remain very closed in their own perception and are simply not receptive at all to opinions, to questions, to that curiosity to learn more and to see the issue from other angles, the parties adopting rigid positions, avoiding responsibilities.

To understand how such situations can be managed through different practices, it is necessary to consider that:

> *It goes from the area of "I am right" to "let's seek the truth together" and, simply, if you really change your perspective, just mentally, different words come to you, different interventions instead of very firm and determined sentences, rather questions come to you, they arouse mutual curiosity. This change of angle seems fantastic to me and, whenever I have proposed this change in teams, it has been like that, a breath of fresh air.*

This tactic proposes changing, mainly the mentality, by moving from a competitive mentality to a collaborative one, with a curious language, having the effect of opening the space for mutual learning through creative solutions. In this way, if a teammate feels that another sees him as an obstacle, he becomes defensive, but if he feels that he is seen as an ally, he becomes open. This tactic reduces tensions, people feeling listened to, not judged, stimulates innovation, bringing new ideas between team members and builds trust, showing that the truth is much more important than the ego. Another way to change the dynamics of a conflict is the premise of good intention and good faith, which refers to the fact that there may be a voluntary assumption according to which another team member involved in the conflict does not intend harm, is not wrong through negligence or malice, and that his perspective deserves to be listened to and understood, even if it is different.

It is very important to verbalize the valuable parts of the other person's opinions, thus showing that they are being listened to and respected, as well as that we are willing to collaborate, thus creating a constructive framework, where the conversation is directed towards "how to improve", instead of "who is right". "Clarity from the beginning on the purpose of the discussion" is another very good conflict resolution tactic. Consequently, when one of the members feels that the initial discussion is no longer present, he should remind himself whenever necessary, what the purpose of the discussion actually is. The more focused the team is on what needs to be resolved, the greater the chances of being able to understand each other.

Decisions made as a team

In the episode entitled "Practices for Team Decision Making" ["*Practici pentru luarea deciziilor în echipă*"], Alexandru & Răschip (2023c) focus on how the best decisions are made at the team level, discussing "the principles that govern them and the decision-making processes that we should use to achieve the best possible outcome." The main idea is based on the fact that, most of the time, decision-making is individual, but at the team level, things are different.

> *In terms of the relevance of a team, the purpose of a team, this is a very important point. A team is worth all the effort and all the cost and all the trouble of being, creating, and maintaining a high-performing team because of the decisions it makes.*

This represents the fact that the team is not just an organized group of people, but a true collective system that, together, is capable of making much better decisions than an individual, due to the diversity of perspectives. In this sense, all investment in the team is subsequently justified by the superior results it will obtain, and to justify the results, leaders must verify how each member contributes to subsequent much better choices. Decisions are described as a function, based on two essential components: the quality of the decision, a rational aspect, aiming to observe how well-founded and logical the choice made is, through clear information, through the team's experience and through clear thinking, as well as the team's dedication, as a human part, which aims to present the team's involvement and motivation to carry out a decision, even if not everyone agreed with it from the beginning. The goal is to "produce effects in practice", because a good decision is not measured by how smart or good it is, but by what kind of results it obtains after applying it.

Another aspect that is highlighted in the episode is that relating to the role of principles in the decision-making process:

> *Principles, in fact, set a framework for decision-making. With them in front of us, it is much easier to ensure that decisions will be made in an ethical, consistent way, in line with the company's values. In their absence, there is a risk that decisions will be exclusively opportunistic, which is not what we want.*

This statement emphasizes that the role of principles is to transform decisions from hasty and selfish choices, which could harm us later, into good decisions, functioning as a guide. An important example of a principle is the "principle of long-term decisions", where:

> *The decisions we make together as a team are long-term, meaning we always look at the long-term effect of the decisions we make, rather than the short term.*

This is a principle that refers to the idea of always looking at the long-term impact compared to the short-term. The long-term impact is much more important in evaluating options, because in this way we avoid superficial solutions that can solve problems now, generating much greater risks in the future.

> *If we, at the team level, made a certain decision, but I, at the personal level, did not agree with it, at the principle level we agree that I will embrace that decision and implement it as if it were my own, even if I initially at the input level did not agree with it.*

This principle is often used in large work teams, based on the idea that you can initially disagree, freely express your opinion on the decision, debate and bring arguments, but if that idea is decided to be applied, even if you initially did not agree, you must accept it 100% and help it succeed. Another example is the "principle of always putting the customer's interest first".

> *Here in the team, when we make decisions, we always put the client's interest first, that is, we ask ourselves: "Is this decision in the client's interest?". If so, we follow the path, if not, we don't. I know that this may seem a bit extreme, that sometimes you can't make all decisions in the client's interest, but this is something worth discussing, because, on the other hand, a company that doesn't make decisions in the client's interest doesn't last long. On the other hand, if this is the principle of*

> *"every decision we make must serve the client's interest", this is something that we have to take into account in every decision we make, sometimes it can happen maximally, other times it can't happen maximally, but it's still important to know that this governs us. Some teams also use the empty chair technique, where, between us at the table, there is an empty chair that we say is the client and, whatever decision we make, we role-play and ask ourselves what the client would say about the decisions we make: does it help them or does it not help them?*

This principle manages to increase customer trust, choosing companies that put them first, because many companies make choices that make their work easier, but without thinking about the needs of their customers, and this principle also helps to orient in the long term in the idea that there may be small losses now, but they will certainly gain the loyalty of current and future customers. Another principle is called the "ethical nature principle":

> *A simple question that the team can ask itself to validate or invalidate ethics could be: "If tomorrow the decision we make today were to be public, how would we feel? Is it something that makes us proud, is it something that we can support at any time and argue the decision, is it something that makes us happy?". That is, to avoid making decisions that we would rather hide than share.*

The last two principles discussed are that of data-driven decisions, also called "data driven" and the "consensus-seeking principle." The principle of data-driven decisions refers to the fact that the decision-making process should not be based on assumptions, intuitions or opinions, but on relevant, objective and critically analyzed data.

> *There are other companies that have a lot of focus on data driven, on principles that are driven by data, and then it is clear that any decision we make together will be governed by this principle and we will have a set of reliable data with which we can make our decisions. This does not mean that we make decisions only with a database, it means that we tend not to make decisions without data, meaning that data is a very important input in our decision.*

This shows that this decision-making process is critical for the team, because it eliminates arguments that are based on what team members think, although they should be based on what the data says. In addition, it eliminates uncertainties, because the results anticipated by the data work much better than the intuited ones, but also the fact that there will be no more arguments because they will be based exclusively on what the data shows. The last principle stated is represented by the "principle of seeking consensus".

> *It is very clear that, we will certainly have opposing opinions, I will always seek to find that consensus, I will try to convince you with all the arguments I have at my disposal, and I will also remain open to your arguments so that we can reach a consensus together. So the simple search for it greatly changes the perspective with which we conduct the dialogue in the team, precisely to find an answer and reach a result.*

This is a very beneficial principle for teams, because team members feel listened to, even though the final decision does not entirely depend on their preferences, it increases the quality of decisions made by the team, and people accept decisions more easily that they did not agree with at the beginning, but which prove to be beneficial in the end, still having the certainty that their opinions were listened to.

Effective communication within the team

In the episode entitled "Practices for Team Communication; Team Feedback" ["*Practici pentru comunicarea în echipă; feedback-ul în echipă*"], Alxandru and Răschip (2023d) delved into topics such as team communication tools, normalizing the interaction between team members as well as the feedback. Most of the time, team communication is the most common problem that needs to be mediated:

> *Whenever a team has communication problems, chances are that its members don't have enough things in common. Usually, naturally, without going to a lot of training, we communicate very well with people with whom we feel we have a lot in common. We communicate so-so with people with whom we feel we have something in common, and we communicate not at all or poorly with people with whom we either feel we have nothing in common or feel we are antagonistic.*

When this type of problem arises within teams, a first step would be to try to highlight the things the team has in common. Communication is very important in this regard, but it must be used with a common ground, sharing the truth to bring good results.

Regarding the discussion on how we can identify whether socializing is healthy or not in a team, we need to identify some key aspects, such as speaking time and how it is divided, in the sense that everyone should have the right to speak, not just one person, so that everyone feels listened to and has the chance to contribute. In addition, we need to convey clear information through concise messages: there is no need to believe that if we speak more, we convey better information. From this we conclude that a very important aspect is also the way in which the message is conveyed, in a respectful tone. It is essential that, in a good team, everyone speaks freely when they feel the need to, not just a discussion in which the boss asks questions and the rest answer.

Next, the norms of communication are discussed, starting from a key question, namely: "Do we listen to understand or do we listen to give answers?".

> *Sometimes, we don't even listen, but use the time the other person is speaking to construct our own responses, either to something the other person says or to something we say to ourselves in our minds.*

This aspect refers to the fact that it is much more important to listen to understand, to decode the message transmitted, not just to wait for us to respond in turn, or to impose our point of view. In communication, we must start from the premise that everything happens together: we cannot validate the idea of singularity, because this nullifies the notion of a group. Finally, we conclude that the most important component of collaboration and understanding in a team is communication. For a team to be functional, it is essential to develop a framework of trust, shared responsibility, curiosity about the interests of the team, all of these things leading to effective communication, which will have a real and lasting impact.

The impact of leadership on team performance

In the episode entitled "The Role of the Leader and Individual Performance" ["*Rolul liderului și performanța individuală*"], Alexandru & Răschip (2022c) analyze how leadership influences the collective behaviors and results of the team, starting from the idea that leaders "perceive their role as being extraordinarily important", both from a psychological point of view and for creating a space in which each member feels valued and listened to.

It is noteworthy that the leader must clearly state what he wants from the team and why, through honesty, clarity and commitment, which defines leadership. On the other hand, when the leader omits things and lies in order to convince team members more easily, manipulation is born. A common mistake of leaders is that many of them ask themselves the question: "What should I do, or what should happen for my people to agree to do what I ask of them?", a question that often leads to undesirable results by creating a transactional relationship based on a constant effort of persuasion, the consequence being that leaders get tired, because they are constantly having to push the team from behind. However, this question operates with another, namely:

> *What should happen, what should I do so that the people from my team want to perform?*

Ultimately, the goal is to change the perspective of leaders, based on internal motivation and how leaders can cultivate the motivation of those in the team, being an alternative with a much better long-term result. In addition to these, it is important to mention some fundamental ideas about the role of clarity and alignment in leadership, namely that the leader must form from the beginning the ideas and desires he has about how he wants to lead, what kind of relationship he wants to have with the team and what values guide his actions. It is much more essential that, in addition to a clear vision, he communicates with the team and ensures that there is a consensus among all its members.

At the same time, it cannot be ignored that the leader is responsible for creating the structure and processes with which the team manages to function efficiently, ensuring a clear organization and close collaboration between them. Last but not least, the leader aims to create and support the team, because without this very important pillar, even the best-defined objectives can remain unachieved. These responsibilities that a true leader should assume and master contribute to authentic leadership, which only a true leader can perform.

Coordinating interconnected teams in a systemic vision

In the episode entitled "The Organization as a Team of Teams" ["*Organizația ca echipă de echipe*"], Alexandru & Răschip (2023b) address the issue of extending the principles of team leadership to the organizational level, arguing that a modern firm must function as a network of autonomous teams, deeply connected to each other, not as a rigid hierarchy.

The pandemic accelerated this transformation: organizational cultures were "pulverized" and reconfigured at the team level, as teams continued to collaborate constantly online. In the new context, teams created their own rituals of connection, micro-cultures, and iterative feedback processes to maintain cohesion and performance, even in the absence of a shared physical space.

> *Teams had to create a way of doing things, build a culture and structure to be able to progress in this very uncertain environment* […].

A key component of this model is the "two elevators" dynamic, which describes the constant interaction between the strategic and operational levels of the organization.

> *On the one hand, the cascading of strategic objectives from top to bottom; on the other hand, the need for higher hierarchical levels to provide concrete support to operational teams. Managing this tension is essential.*

Another pillar of the model is the real autonomy of each team, which is impossible to be achieved without sharing information. "Power holds information and does not share it" – as long as this logic works, teams cannot act as part of a larger system. That is why the episode insists on the "continuous education" of the entire organization, so that all members understand their system and make decisions that take into account the interests of other teams.

The essence of the "team of teams" concept thus becomes the ability of members to see beyond the boundaries of their own team and propose solutions that are "useful to the entire system". Therefore, the contribution of the episode consists in highlighting how leaders can coordinate effective collaboration between teams, promote transparency in the exchange of information and support a fair balance between the autonomy of each team and the assumption of responsibility at a collective level, thus transforming environmental uncertainty into a strategic advantage for the organization.

Adaptability and antifragile culture in contexts of uncertainty

In the episode "Antifragile Teams" ["*Echipe antifragile*"], Alexandru & Răschip (2022b) address the idea that team performance is not only about resistance to stress, but also about the ability to grow and become stronger in the wake of it. Taking as a starting point the concept of antifragility formulated by Taleb (2012), it is explained that high-performing teams not only survive uncertainty, but also thrive on it.

Antifragility of teams involves five key directions: avoiding excessive team protection, redefining the relationship with mistakes, being open to conflict as a source of clarification, continuous collective learning, and training for the unpredictable. For example, leaders who overprotect teams – hiding problems, avoiding tensions, or shielding them from difficulties – unintentionally contribute to their fragility. Also, in the absence of a healthy relationship with mistakes, team members end up preferring inaction over responsibility, which generates stagnation. Antifragility requires the exact opposite: an environment in which mistakes are openly discussed, assumed, and used as a resource for development, within a framework of psychological safety.

A central element is the conscious assumption of small, controlled risks that generate continuous learning. Therefore, leaders of antifragile teams cultivate a culture of experimentation, rapid feedback, and psychological trust.

> *The first step in increasing antifragility lies in the leader's beliefs.* [...] *I have also met companies that, more or less consciously, have set out to be robust.*

These teams accept conflicts not as threats to cohesion, but as valuable opportunities to clarify differences of perspective and strengthen relationships. Tensions become learning moments, in which expectations can be adjusted, work processes can be refined and a climate of authentic trust can be built. At the same time, failures are not interpreted as blockages or definitive failures, but as important sources of adaptation and progress. An antifragile culture capitalizes on mistakes to extract concrete lessons, which contribute to the evolution of the team. Within this framework, flexible work systems are developed, capable of adapting quickly to changes, and iterable structures, which allow for continuous testing, frequent feedback and progressive improvement of performance.

Another essential principle is the conscious intention to learn, not just to execute. As Edmondson (2012) points out, teams that organize work around collective learning tend to achieve superior performance than those that only aim for efficient short-term delivery. In this sense, leaders of antifragile teams view tasks not just as goals, but as tools for people development, assigning them to those who have the most to learn, not just the most competent.

> *Fragile systems – break in the face of stressors. Robust systems – persist in an unchanged state. Antifragile systems – become stronger than they were before under the influence of stressors.*

The episode's contribution to the theme of leadership is to highlight the essential role of the leader in cultivating an antifragile culture within the team. The leader is no longer seen simply as a source of direction or control, but as a facilitator who creates the conditions for the team to develop through challenges. He supports the autonomy of members, encourages the assumption of controlled risks and normalizes learning from mistakes. In an environment characterized by uncertainty and rapid change, the antifragile leader does not try to eliminate uncertainty, but learns to transform it into an engine for adaptation and innovation. By creating a climate of psychological trust, by promoting constant experimentation and reflection, this type of leadership helps the team not only resist external pressures, but to use them to become more agile, more united and more efficient.

Conclusions

The paper examines in detail how leadership competencies can be developed, understood and applied in organizations, drawing on the content analysis of the Teamology podcast series. The results highlight a complex perspective on contemporary leadership, which appears as a dynamic, adaptive and interactive mechanism, shaped by cultural, relational and educational factors, not just as a rigid set of competencies. A key aspect of the analysis is that, in essence, team leadership does not focus on the role of the leader, but is defined as a collaborative process, equally distributed among team members. Team performance derives from the interaction and constructive and interactive collaboration between its members, not only from individual efforts, an idea supported in the literature by Katzenbach & Smith (1992) and Northouse (2022), but also by the episode entitled "The Role of the Leader and Individual Performance" ["*Rolul liderului și performanța individuală*"], which discusses how the leader must create conditions for each member to contribute to the common success of the team, in no case to control or direct their activity in isolation (Alexandru & Răschip, 2022c).

Another fundamental element of effective team leadership is the leader's ability to adapt. Leadership, following the recent changes in the organizational context marked by diversity and uncertainty, can no longer be exercised through a rigid model. Leaders must demonstrate a continuous ability to adjust their leadership style according to the particularities, emotional needs and development of their team, as well as the challenges that may arise. This ability to adapt is supported by Schultz (2010), who emphasizes that effective leaders do not only react to change, but also integrate it into their work strategy. In the analysis of the Teamology podcast series, adaptability was illustrated in the episodes that talk about conflict management and decision-making within the team. For example, in the episode "Constructive Conflict Management" ["*Gestionarea constructivă a conflictelor*"], Alexandru & Răschip (2023a) describe a practical tactic: changing the mindset from "I am right" to "let's seek the truth together", using open-ended questions to manage conflicts. This refers to how conflicts can be transformed into learning opportunities. Therefore, a good leader must be flexible, empathetic and have a vision for the future, these things being not only assets, but also the fundamental conditions of the team to be kept united and at peak performance.

In parallel, research has highlighted the significant value of podcasts as non-formal education resources. They provide direct access to authentic perspectives, personal reflections, and examples applied by leaders in their teams, contributing to a deeper understanding of leadership. According to the study conducted by Norsworthy & Herndon (2020), media formats of this type help develop critical thinking, contextual learning, and the training of contemporary leaders, observations that synthesize four important pillars that support the effectiveness of team leadership: clarity of common purpose, providing direction in team actions, communication, and mutual trust, which allow an open exchange of opinions and ideas, respectively the leader's ability to adapt depending on the context and the particularities of his team.

The research results confirm that team leadership is a competency that can be learned, improved and adjusted, it is not a quality that leaders are born with. Therefore, organizations can support the development of these competencies through structured interventions and well-defined strategies. A first direction that can be highlighted is the establishment of a common goal, in which the leader must invest in a good initiative that the team can follow, this being possible by organizing interactive workshops, team-building activities or collaborative planning sessions.

Promoting open dialogue and psychological safety plays a very important role in the team. An environment in which people feel confident to express their opinions, admit mistakes, and approach conflicts constructively is essential for team performance. According to studies conducted by Katzenbach & Smith (1992) and Lu & Li (2021), teams with such practices have much greater creativity, people share ideas without fear, conflicts are resolved more easily, and they have greater commitment because they feel valued and listened to.

In the episode entitled "Constructive Conflict Management" ["*Gestionarea constructivă a conflictelor*"], Alexandru & Răschip (2023a) emphasize that "highly trusting teams can manage intense conflicts without falling apart", to highlight the importance of members' decision to separate the person from the idea, managing to transform conflicts into sources of innovation. Psychological safety is discussed in the episode "Practices for Team Communication; Team Feedback" ["*Practici pentru comunicarea în echipă; feedback-ul în echipă*"], where it is clarified that the leader can build psychological safety through various methods. The applicability of the concepts discussed is high, especially in organizational environments characterized by complexity, uncertainty and interdependence between members. Team leadership can no longer be reduced to a series of formal attributions, but becomes a continuous process of adaptation, learning and facilitation of collaboration. In this dynamic, leaders must assume a dual role, that of mentors and good coordinators, encouraging teamwork and collective performance.

The analyzed podcasts highlight that effective leadership essentially involves cultivating a climate of trust, clarity of roles and expectations, and open and solution-oriented communication. It also highlights the importance of team decision-making, where member involvement generates higher commitment and more effective implementation of tailored solutions.

Another aspect of practical relevance is the recognition of the differences between the types of teams (co-located, virtual, hybrid) and the adaptation of the leadership style to the specifics of each. In particular, hybrid environments require additional strategies for maintaining cooperation, managing conflicts and supporting motivation, especially in the absence of direct interaction.

Podcasts offer a series of validated solutions, such as clarifying the decision-making structure and supporting collective learning, which can be successfully applied in practice.

In conclusion, the applicability of the concepts discussed in the Teamology podcast series is evident in various organizational contexts, and their use in leader training can contribute to the development of more effective, more adaptable and more united teams.

The podcast series highlighted the process of continuous professional development, contributing to the development of key competencies, such as communication, team decision-making and conflict management. The value of podcasts lies in their practical applicability and the authentic nature of the discussions. In this sense, active listening and analysis become essential elements for transforming these audio resources into an effective and valuable learning tool, as well as self-assessment in the field of leadership.

Thus, the learning process through podcasts involves not only exposure to content, but also active work of interpretation and contextualization, which contributes to a deeper and more applicable understanding of team leadership in modern organizations.

The aim of this paper was to explore ways in which team leadership competencies can be developed and optimized, using the Teamology podcast series as the main source of analysis. In an increasingly complex and dynamic organizational environment, the ability to effectively lead a team is becoming an essential competency for long-term success and adaptability.

In the first part of the paper, the analysis of concepts highlighted the differences and interdependencies between individual and team leadership, emphasizing the importance of adaptability, effective communication and a clear structure in teams. Also, relevant theoretical models regarding the role of the leader and the factors influencing collective performance were presented.

In the applied part, the content analysis of the episodes subscribed to the Teamology podcast series offered a practical perspective on the challenges and solutions encountered in team leadership. The selected episodes brought to discussion relevant topics, such as team decision-making, psychological safety, conflict management and the particularities of working in hybrid environments. The examples prove that non-formal learning is useful for leaders, but must be complemented with critical analysis to be truly valuable. Podcasts can be a useful tool in the leadership development process, especially when used complementary to other educational resources, such as specialized literature, case studies or personal experience. Leadership education thus becomes a continuous process, based on multiple learning and on connecting theory with practice.

Based on the analysis carried out in this paper, the following practical recommendations can be formulated for developing team leadership competencies through podcasts:

- Integrating podcasts into internal training programs: Organizations can include relevant episodes from podcasts like Teamology in leadership training sessions as a starting point for applied discussions, case studies, or individual and team reflections.
- Using podcasts as a coaching and self-development tool: leaders can use audio content as a resource for personal reflection, choosing topics that correspond to challenges in their own team, to explore tested solutions and best practices.
- Facilitating group listening and collaborative learning sessions: Collective listening to an episode followed by open discussions can stimulate social learning, clarify shared values, and improve team collaboration.
- Adapting podcast content to the specifics of the team: leaders can select episodes relevant to the team's stage of development and the specific needs of members.

By applying these recommendations, podcasts can become an effective, accessible and relevant tool for training leaders on an ongoing basis, stimulating both individual development and team performance.

Ultimately, optimizing leadership competencies requires an integrated and flexible approach that includes both traditional training and alternative resources, such as podcasts. In the current context, high-performing leaders are those who manage to combine theoretical knowledge with a deep understanding of team dynamics, supporting collaboration, innovation, and collective development.

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