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Study Finds Oltrepò Pavese Backs Wine Tourism but Fears Environmental Strain

Researchers say residents, growers and visitors see economic gains in the Lombardy wine region yet worry about land use and landscape pressures

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A new academic analysis of Oltrepò Pavese, one of northern Italy’s main wine regions, finds that local people broadly see wine tourism as an economic asset but remain concerned about the strain it can place on land, landscapes and environmental balance.

The study, published on June 18 by Francesco De Pascale and Eleonora Guadagno, examines how residents, winegrowers and visitors in Oltrepò Pavese perceive the relationship between wine tourism and territorial sustainability. The area, in Lombardy south of the Po River, is a major wine-producing zone and has long been shaped by viticulture, land-use policy and agricultural change.

According to the authors, the research focuses on the way human activity has transformed the region’s wine landscape over time, with particular attention to the link between soil, land management and broader social and environmental effects. Using a qualitative survey, they explored how different local groups judge the impact of food-and-wine tourism on the economy, the environment and the visual character of the territory.

Their findings point to a mixed but consistent view. Winegrowers, residents and visitors recognize that wine tourism brings economic benefits to the area. At the same time, they also identify an ongoing difficulty in balancing vineyard production with environmental protection. The paper argues that this tension is central to understanding how wine regions develop when tourism becomes more important to local income and identity.

The authors place Oltrepò Pavese within wider debates about sustainable land management in wine regions. They argue that vineyard landscapes are often treated not only as productive agricultural spaces but also as heritage assets with symbolic value. In their reading, that process can create friction when official narratives about sustainability or cultural value do not match the daily experience of people who live and work there.

The analysis highlights what the researchers describe as a persistent gap between the symbolic importance assigned to the wine landscape and the perceptions and practices of local actors. That gap matters because it suggests that policies built around heritage

branding or sustainability goals may not fully reflect local priorities or conflicts on the ground.

The paper also frames these issues in political terms, presenting landscape as something contested rather than fixed. In this view, decisions about preservation, tourism development and agricultural use are shaped by competing interests among producers, residents, institutions and visitors. That approach moves beyond a simple picture of wine tourism as either beneficial or harmful and instead presents it as part of a broader negotiation over land and identity.

For Oltrepò Pavese, the study says, those pressures are especially relevant because viticulture has played such a strong role in shaping both the economy and the physical appearance of the region. Changes in farming practices and land use have altered not just production systems but also local ideas about what should be protected, promoted or developed.

The authors say their findings support more participatory and multi-level governance for wine territories, with policies aligned to European frameworks on heritage and sustainability. Their argument is that local communities need a stronger role in decisions affecting vineyard landscapes if economic development through tourism is to coexist with environmental safeguards.

The study adds to a growing body of research on wine tourism at a time when many European regions are trying to increase visitor spending while also responding to environmental pressures and changing expectations around rural development. In Oltrepò Pavese, the paper suggests that support for wine tourism exists, but so does a clear awareness that growth without careful management can deepen tensions over land use and sustainability.