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### **textul lucrării:**

**SPATIAL ACCESSIBILITY TO WINE TOURISM DESTINATIONS INSIDE A PERIPHERAL TOURISTIC REGION. A STUDY CASE ON REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA** Abstract The results of previous studies regarding the relation between spatial accessibility and tourism development do not share a unanimous opinion by the side of the scientific community. In this context, the present paper approaches a particular case of the above mentioned relation: up to what extent the development of wine tourism destinations in the Republic of Moldova depends on geographical position and spatial accessibility? The research consisted in getting through three methodological steps: 1) a critical review of previous results; 2) a review of the enterprises responsible for wine production, followed by a selection of the 11 enterprises that provide wine tourism offers and the collection of official statistics concerning these types of offers (supplemented by conducting on-site interviews); 3) the interpretation of the relation between geographic accessibility towards the city of Chişinău and the variation of the annual tourist number and the prices demanded by each enterprises. The results prove that, in peripheral areas such as the Republic of Moldova, there is a significant impact of spatial accessibility on the way in which these enterprises are functioning. This influence affects firstly the annual number of visitors and secondly the prices they practice. Key words: spatial accessibility, peripheral region, wine tourism, tourist flow, wine tourism package. JEL Classification: R40, R41, L91. I. INTRODUCTION Tourism is a generating factor of synergistic relations among vinicultural and culinary activities and regional/local identity (Hall and Page, 2006, pp. 302–308). One of its peculiar forms is wine tourism, which depends both on basic tourist activities (accommodation, food) and on the input of oenological science reflected in wine quality and in the wine-tasting process (Mănilă, 2012). This makes wine tourism a sub-form of cultural tourism where experience is considered as the triggering factor (different from recreation, where enjoyment plays the major role). Wine tourism tends to become more and more important, both in Romania and the Republic of Moldova. Nevertheless, if compared to other European countries, it is in its early stage of development (Soare, Man et al., 2010). Moreover, in a three-stage model created in order to explain the evolution steps and to implement the concept of “wine route”, Hall, Johnson and Mitchell (2004, p. 207) place the Republic of Moldova and Romania on the first step of evolution (inchoative), which is characterized by lack of coordination and joint promotion of the wine tourism destinations. Integrating these two countries into international tourist circuits involves reaching some performance standards, irrespective of the fact that we are taking into consideration organizing tourist activities in situ, selling them or the corresponding marketing. One of the few geographic studies approaching wine tourism in the historical region of Moldova (Manea and Mardare, 2013, pp. 126-127) highlights the fact that wine tourism activities in this area are underprivileged because of their peripheral geographic position, from a European point of view, and

because of the precariousness of transport infrastructure. Starting from this observation, the current paper aims at examining the role that geographic accessibility plays in developing wine tourism destinations in a peripheral region such as the Republic of Moldova. Tourist accessibility represents the degree of ease or of difficulty with which tourists (real or potential) “access” activities, equipment, appliance, transportation, amenities, products or information that are included in the tourist destinations or integrated into the tourist circuit (Bulai, 2014). Its role in developing tourism destinations is a topic that has been addressed by several researchers (Nicolau and Más, 2006; Prideaux, 2004; Toth and David, 2010), but the greatest majority of studies take into consideration tourism destinations at a generic level and too rarely the relationship between spatial accessibility and the destinations of some particular forms of tourism, as is the case of wine tourism. It is a well-known fact that a peripheral region/country reduces the number of tourists for certain categories (the model proposed by Plog, 2001, can be seen as an iconic expression for this situation). Giving the fact that the main gateway to the Republic of Moldova is the capital city of Chişinău and that within the country only the road circulation is important (rail transport plays only a small role from a touristic point of view), the present study regards the analysis of the role that spatial accessibility along the road network plays in the development of wine tourist destinations. In such a context, the following question: to what degree does spatial accessibility influence on the annual number of people visiting wine tourism destinations in the Republic of Moldova? A possible answer can contribute both to a better understanding of the influence that distance can have on the segmentation of visitors’ profile and to identifying ways in which less accessible destinations can overcome such a drawback. II. THE ROL OF ACCESSIBILITY IN THE SET OF FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR TOURISTIC DEVELOPEMENT: A STATE OF THE ART Given the fact that the tourism development of a certain destination

**1 depends on a number of factors, the role of**

spatial accessibility can be defined only in reference to them. On a general level, Rodrigue, Comtois and Slack (2013) distinguish among three functional categories of factors of localization: the characteristics

**1 of the site, the level of accessibility and the socio-economic environment.**

Even more

**24 in the case of (wine)tourism destinations, the importance of**

the site is explained through the micro-geographic features, the availability of land and basic utilities, the way in which the place is seen (its prestige), facilities (life quality), nature and the level of accessibility to transportation infrastructure (for example, the

**1 proximity to a highway). All these factors have an important effect on establishing the costs associated with a certain location.**

According to the above mentioned authors, the

**1accessibility includes a series of opportunity factors related to a certain location,**

which consist of work force (wage, availability and qualification level), resources (especially

**1for raw materials and dependent activities), energy, markets (local, regional and global) and accessibility to suppliers and customers (important for intermediate activities).**

Similarly, Bulai (2014) emphasizes the factors that influence tourist accessibility in the Romanian case: the consistency of the tourist offer, the available transportation options, distance, income, the possibility of owning a vehicle, the interlinking of the transport networks, the duration and the cost of travel and the use of tourist infrastructure. The connection between spatial accessibility and tourism is known at different levels, depending on the type of tourism that one refers to, on the type of area taken into account and on the geographic scale the reference is made to. By analyzing the behavior for Australian case, Prideaux (2004) addresses the dynamic relation between different types of holiday expenses and the tourists' origin. The author suggests a model that illustrates the

**22impact of transportation on the development of tourism destinations depending on the**

distance factor, which is subdivided into three categories:

**6intrastate, interstate and international. The distance between the tourist generating area and the tourist destination, the travel expense, expressed as a monetary value, and the time**

required by a trip

**25play an important role in choosing the type of transportation. There is a**

greater probability for intrastate tourists

**6to travel by car, whereas interstate tourists**

will most probably travel by plane. If the tourist has to cover a very long distance to the destination and does not have sufficient time to spend a holiday, he will probably choose to travel by plane, irrespective of the high expenses. On the other hand, the tourist who is at a small distance from the destination will prefer

to travel by car because he has sufficient time for holiday and the trip expense will be considerably smaller. Prideaux (2004) concludes that, in some situations, the travel time can have an influence on choosing the type of transportation to a greater extent than the cost factor. This observation is confirmed also by the studies that have addressed the same topic for the region of western Moldova. Bulai (2014) concludes that, in the case of the tourist destinations of the eight counties of western Moldova, the access cost, which is seen as distance-time or as average travel speed, has a greater significance than distance (physical space) because the time or the time budget activates in contemporary society as a structuring element of human activities. However, not all studies reach to the same conclusion that between geographic accessibility (either physical or temporal) and the development of tourism destination there is an obvious connection. In a case study about Hungary, Toth and David (2010) analyze the extent to which tourism incomes (from accommodation receipts) are linked to public roads accessibility and the local features of the region. The authors conclude that there can be established no link between the improvement of accessibility and the rise of the incomes coming from accommodation structures. The role that the features of the region play is much more important for increasing tourism incomes. Nonetheless, they acknowledge the fact that, in the case of international tourism, there can be found a direct link to tourist accessibility, reviving, in this way, the role of the geographic scale in the manifestation of tourist mobility. Following an empirical study regarding the case of Spain, Nicolau and Más (2006) conclude that “the effect of distance and price for tourism destinations can be moderated by the tourists’ motivations. The connection between motivation and the two discouraging elements can be both direct (when the discouraging effect increases) and reverse (when the discouraging effect decreases). The impact is direct when the tourists seeking for peace and relaxation do not prefer going to remote destinations because it involves intensive physical and psychological effort. On the contrary, the impact is reverse when interest is shown in exploring and discovering new sites or in returning to the place of origin in order to visit family and friends.”

### III. REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA AS A PERIPHERAL TOURISM AREA: A GENERAL OVERVIEW

In a European context, the Republic of Moldova is a peripheral region, irrespective of point of view. From a political point of view, it has been, for most of the time, an unstable territory, representing either a periphery of the Ottoman Empire, of Western Europe or of Soviet Union. Therefore, the country is not functionally integrated in any of the great political and economic assemblies, having semi-stable borders that restrain or even prevent the mobility of goods, people and tourists. The peripheral situation, from a political point of view, is duplicated by the economic one, given the fact that it has the lowest GDP per capita in comparison with all European countries (2,240 \$/inhabitant in 2013, according to World Bank, 2015). In addition to this, there is also a lag in the social and human development. Having a HDI value of only 0.663 in 2013, the country occupies the last position in Europe (UNDP, 2014). In the context of the lack of significant natural resources and of the precarious social and economic state, the Government of the Republic of Moldova considers the development of the tourism sector a potential alternative source of income. Even though from this point of view, the country can also be considered a European periphery (occupying the penultimate position, with only 89,000 international tourist arrivals according to UNWTO, 2014), the legislation defines tourism as

**4one of the primary domains of the national economy (Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, 2006a). Regarding the existing forms of**

tourism, it is estimated that their level of development is extremely varied, the most intense developed ones being wine tourism, business tourism, rural tourism, balneary tourism, and religious tourism (Government of the Republic of Moldova, 2014, p. 10). The typical tourist profile emerges from the motivations underlying the tourist flows: business tourism (36%), activities of recreation and relaxation



(30%) and treatment activities (28%) (Government of Republic of Moldova, 2014). The most popular destinations are wine cellars (in Moldova, there are two of the largest wine cellars in the world: Cricova and Milestii Mici), city of Chişinău and monasteries. In 2014, the greatest majority of foreign tourists came from nearest countries such as Romania (17%), the Russian Federation (12%) and Ukraine (8%) (NBSRM, 2014a). Globally, approx. 60% of the total numbers of tourists come from the Commonwealth of Independent States and 30% come from the European Union (Tourism Agency of the Republic of Moldova, 2014). According to National Spatial Plan of the Republic of Moldova (NSPRM, 2008), the country comprises over 15,000 anthropic tourism attractions and more than 300 important natural areas. However, their touristic potential is extremely diverse and their valorization extremely rare. Of these, the present study addresses only to the vinicultural attractions represented by 11 destinations that provide touristic services in the main regions of wine-making (Figure 1). The spatial distribution of the vinicultural areas in the Republic of Moldova is characterized by a spatial concentration in the central part of the country (according to the spatial data taken from soviet topographic maps, 53% of the surfaces can be found less than 50 km away from the city of Chişinău). It is not so much a coincidence that the greatest majority of wine tourist destinations are nowadays concentrated in the same region. According to the data provided by the Agency for Land Relations and Cadaster of Moldova (ALRCM, 2012) the vineyards encompass 120,000 ha at the beginning of 2012 (with a decrease of 46% as compared to the surface existing before the '90s on the topographic maps). Of the total number, 56,000 ha belong to rural households and 37,000 ha belong to cooperatives, to stock companies and to limited liability companies. According to the Vine and Wine Law of 2006

13(Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, 2006b) the wine culture in the

Republic of Moldova is divided into 4 development regions: the Northern Region (Bălţi) comprising 4 wine centers (Teleneşti, Făleşti, Bălţi, Raşcov), the Central Region (Codru) comprising 9 centers (Hânceşti,

26Răzeni, Ialoveni, Bulboaca, Chişinău, Româneşti, Nisporeni, Călăraşi, Orhei),

the Southern Region (Cahul) comprising 7 centers (Trifeşti, Ciumai, Tigheci, Comrat, Cimişlia, Purcari, Căuşeni), and the Southeastern Region comprising 2 wine centers: Dubăsari and Tiraspol. Figure 1: The spatial distribution of vineyards and wine tourism destinations IV. DATA AND METHODS The present study involved a three-step methodology. The first step consisted in a review of the wine tourism destinations of Moldova. Due to the fact that there were no previous studies regarding this topic, several studies were conducted in the field, in the form of interviews. As a result, a considerable amount of information was gathered from 40 wine cellars out of 170 existing in the Republic of Moldova. At the end of the stage, it was concluded that only 11 producers are interested in providing touristic activities related to wine production or merchandising. The place and time of interviews differ from one wine cellar to another, still falling into the period 2012- 2015. The first interviews were conducted in the summer of 2012, during a field trip in the counties of Căuşeni and Ştefan Vodă with the purpose of interviewing three wine producers: Sălcuţa, Vinaria Purcari (Purcari Winery) and Suvorov. The next 14 interviews have been conducted during the “ExpoVin Moldova” exhibition in February, 2013. In this case, only the enterprises that presented a wine tourism offer have been interrogated (Mileştii Mici, Vinăria din Vale, Vinuri de Comrat etc.). A number of 16 interviews have been conducted during the Wine Day Festival that took place in October, 2013, where companies such as Cricova, Pivniţele Brăneşti, Chateau Cojuşna, Et Cetera or Româneşti have been interrogated. In addition, there were six enterprises that chose to send the

information via the Internet and the data was received during the period March 2014 – January 2015. The second step consisted in collecting the quantitative data regarding average prices (from the official sites of the producers), the distances separating these destinations from the main access gate to Moldova (having as source Google Maps) and the annual number of visitors (obtained from the interviews). Furthermore, during these interviews, it has been collected some data regarding the elements of the wine tourism offer, the vinicultural and viticultural potential of the enterprise (the vineyard area, the wine production quantities and information concerning the problems, actions and development prospects of the wine tourist projects and their impact on the development of the adjacent areas). At the same time, using the producers' official sites, an important amount of data about the structure of wine tourism products, the prices, the capacity of the accommodation structures of the wine cellars, the average duration of visit for a wine tourism visit, the touristic program and other touristic offers. The final stage consisted both of a qualitative interpretation (by using the comparison method) and of a quantitative interpretation of data and information. V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 13 In the case of the Republic of Moldova, the

most accessible region is the capital area of Chişinău due to the fact that the country's only airport can be found here and to the fact that the tourism infrastructure is relatively well developed and promoted. Thus, the capital city concentrates 45% of country's the total number of domestic tourist arrivals, but 92% of the total number of international arrivals (NBSRM, 2013). In order to see whether the development of the wine tourist destinations falls into this logic or not, the data collected from this research have been analyzed comparatively. Table 1 is a synopsis of the wine tourist offer in the Republic of Moldova and of the geographical accessibility it benefits from. Table 1: The prices, number of visitors and distance of the wine tourist destinations from Chişinău

Name of the wine cellar	Average price per package (visit + wine tasting) No. of km from Chişinău	No. of structure observations	Chişinău visitors per year
Cheateau Vartely	5-30	from 2 to 6	55 15 000
Vinăria Purcari	11-30	from 3 to 8	109 4 000
Cricova	12-70	4-9	20 25 000
Mileştii Mici	12-80	3-7	22 22 000
Et Cetera	10-14	5	124 300
Chateau Cojuşna	8-50	4 – 6	25 700
Vinăria Sălcuţa	-	-	-
Pivniţele Brăneşti	16-32	3	52 2000
Vinăria Româneşti	5	2	36 500
Vinuri de Comrat	-	-	-
Vinăria din Vale	10 - 76	1000	-

The most important and notorious wine cellars (Cricova, Chateau Vartely, Mileştii Mici) are at a relatively small distance from the capital city, which gives them a certain sense of stability regarding the number of visitors. The tourist circuits starting from the central part of the country comprise only wine cellars located at a distance ranging from 20 to 50 km from Chişinău. The number of tourists interested in wine tastings and other wine tourist products offered for sale by these vinicultural structures goes beyond 15,000-20,000/year (Figure 2). The benefits of the destinations adjacent to the capital city consist in the decrease of transportation costs which explains, up to a certain extent, the development of wine cellars such as Cricova and Mileştii Mici. Figure 2: The relationship between the annual number of visitors and the distance from Chişinău Even though from the point of view of the wine tourist offer in Moldova it has a leading position in the viti-vinicultural knowledge of the tourists, and it is only 100 km away from Chişinău, Purcari Winery attracts a smaller number of visitors (only 4,000/year, as compared to the max. no. of 25,000/year for Cricova). Et Cetera wine cellar develops a richer wine tourist



offer, but the number of tourists that come to visit it is extremely small, as compared to the above mentioned wine cellars (approx. 500). The lack of intense marketing and the distance from Chişinău does not allow this wine cellar to attract a higher number of tourists. The same factors also apply to Vinăria din Vale winery. Located 70 km away from the city capital, this wine cellar attracts approx. 1,000 visitors per year. Many vinicultural structures from Moldova express only the intention of developing wine tourism within the wine cellar. Because of their location in a less accessible area and because their lack in investments in the marketing and in the development of tourism activities, they receive a small number of visitors. For example, there are two wine cellars that fall into this category: Vinăria Sălcuţa (with only 60 visitors per year) and Vinuri de Comrat (with only 100 visitors per year). Geographic accessibility is a very important factor, yet it is not decisive. Chateau Cojuşna and Româneşti are two wine cellars located at 20-30 km away from the capital city. Still, they attract approx. 500-700 visitors per year. The competition, together with the lack of advertising and of attractive tourist offers explain the limited number of visitors if compared to the value they expect regarding proximity to the city capital. Therefore, the wine cellar in Româneşti does not provide customers with an official wine tourist offer (presented in the form of a web page, flyers or a tourist guide) and the number of visitors (approx. 500) is inferior to similar wine cellars located at the same distance from the capital and which benefit from intensive advertising, but superior to the wine cellars located at great distance from Chişinău (also benefiting from advertising). Chateau Cojuşna takes advantage of its location, only 25 km away from the city of Chişinău, and attracts a continuously increasing number of visitors (700 visitors in 2014). It also benefits from a strategy that fosters investments for tourist offers. Thus, in the last two years, it has managed to provide tourists with a wine tourism program. Therefore, big cities that monopolize tourist flows through accommodation capacity, through the wine tourism offer they propose to people interested in the urban attractions and through food services, through landmarks, and through cultural life, strongly influence the development of the types of tourism identified within geographic proximity. An illustrative example is vinicultural tourism, developed, especially, close to the capital city, where it benefited both from the opportunities offered by its location and from the great variety of wine cellars. The notoriety resulted from advertising and the geographic position is only two of the conditions responsible for the development of such vinicultural structures. As seen, Toth and David (2010) claim the idea that the role the region plays is more important for increasing tourism revenues than spatial accessibility. As an example, the Orheiul Vechi (Old Orhei) region of Moldova has helped blossom tourist infrastructure due to its cultural heritage (the medieval city of Orhei, from the XIIIth to the XVIth century, is currently in the process of enrollment on the World Heritage List of UNESCO). This touristic attraction has created the motivation needed for developing the wine tourism destination of Chateau Vartely, by starting from an already existing vinicultural center. Another wine cellar which attracts an important number of tourists, but does not reach the same level as Cricova and Mileştii Mici wine cellars, is Pivniţele Brăneşti. This wine cellar attracts a number of 2,000 visitors per year, which is ten times smaller than that of Mileştii Mici. However, the wine cellar is in the process of expanding and it provides tourists with a wide range of wine tourism products: 3 tasting rooms, traditional dishes service, and rooms for wine cellar visit, exhibition and sale. Pivniţele Brăneşti wine cellar enjoys the advantage of being located within Orheiul Vechi National Park, being very close to the main tourist attractions of the country: the cultural and national Reserve of Orhei. The wine tasting offer of most wine cellars is included in the standard offer, meaning that they offer from 3 to 8 wines for tasting and that the average prices depend on the number of wines tasted. The average prices per package can be compared to those of the European top vinicultural countries. However, establishing the prices for the wine tourism offers of all 11 wine cellars follows the same criteria regarding accessibility and demand. The closer a wine cellar is to the capital city and the more notorious it is, the higher the prices of the wine tourist products are (Figure 3). The highest prices for wine tourist offers are demanded by the best-known wine cellars from Mileştii Mici and Cricova, situated approx. 20 km away from the city of Chişinău. The two

wine cellars represent a very important brand both on a national and on an international level. The prices start at 12 euro (for a wine cellar tour and for a 2-wine tasting) and can reach 70 euro (for Cricova) or even 80 euro (for Mileștii Mici), the last two including a higher number of wines (up to 9 wines) available for tasting and some traditional dishes, depending on the chosen package. In order to keep up with the competition from wine cellars such as Cricova and Mileștii Mici, two other wine cellars, Chateau Vartely and Purcari Winery (which represent very important brands for Moldova on a national and on an international level, as in the case of Purcari Winery) have established smaller prices for their wine tourist offers with the main purpose of compensating the fact that they are situated at a greater distance from the capital city as compared to the competing wine cellars from Cricova and Mileștii Mici. Being situated 55 km away from Chișinău, Chateau Vartely has prices ranging from 5 euro (wine cellar visit and tasting of 2 wines) to 30 euro (wine cellar visit and tasting up to 6 wines). In order to provide tourists with food services, the winery from Orhei has its own restaurant, where visitors can be served for a certain amount of money, according to the chosen type of menu. A similar policy applies to Purcari Winery (tour + wine tasting + food services in their own restaurant). Situated more than 100 km away from Chișinău, Purcari Winery has prices ranging from 11 euro (for a wine cellar visit and tasting of 3 wines) to 30 euro (for a wine cellar visit and tasting of 8 wines). Most of the wine cellars providing tourists with a wine tourism offer have focused on establishing some overall prices for the Republic of Moldova, irrespective of the distance from Chișinău. However, the offers from these wine cellars are not as diverse as the ones presented above, meaning that they only provide a basic number of tourist packages. The price for a package which does not include traditional dish serving, but which includes the tasting of 3 wines is 10 euro, whereas the package including dish serving and wine tasting costs 30 euro. A similar situation can be encountered at other wineries, such as Brănești, Crocmaz and Cojușna, situated at 52 km, 124 km and 25 km from the capital. The wine cellar of Brănești has prices similar to those of Purcari and Orhei and enjoys the advantage of being located close to the natural reserve Orheiul Vechi and offers 2 tourist packages. The prices range from 16 euro (wine cellar visit + tasting of 3 wines) to 32 euro (visit + tasting of 3 wines + traditional dish serving). The difference consist in the fact that Pivnițele Brănești presents an oenotouristic offer which includes a smaller number of wine for tasting and dish serving at the price of 32 euro. The minimum price demanded at Et Cetera wine cellar is 10 euro for a wine cellar visit and tasting of 5 wines and the maximum is 30 euro for a wine cellar visit, tasting of 5 wines and traditional dish serving. In comparison with the wine cellar of Brănești, Et Cetera increases the number of wines for tasting with the purpose of making the offer more appealing to visitors, but they are also comprised into 2 packages. Vinăria din Vale demands a minimum price for its oenotouristic offer, only 10 euro, which includes a wine for tasting. Figure 3: The relationship between the annual number of visitors and the value of the most expensive offer (euros) Enjoying the advantage of being located close to the capital city, Chateau Cojușna presents a more diverse offer than other wine cellars, such as Brănești, Crocmaz or Săseni. Its location in the proximity of Chișinău enables the wine cellar to have a more diversified offer due to a higher demand (4 tourist packages). For that matter, the prices range from 8 euro (for a wine cellar visit and tasting of 4 wines) to 50 euro (for a wine cellar visit, tasting of 6 wines and traditional dish serving). The vinicultural structures of Sălcuța and Comrat do not present an official oenotourist offer. For this reason, the prices for the oenotouristic offers have not been established. Sometimes, the wine cellars establish the prices on the spot, during the visit, according to the type of visitors, and sometimes they offer free visits and the wines are paid by the visitors or offered for free to some categories of visitors. Such a situation can be encountered when the wine cellar lack proper advertising.

**VI.CONCLUSION** The present paper has analyzed some aspects regarding the functioning of oenotouristic companies according to the degree of spatial accessibility it benefits from. The variation of prices and number of visitors per year (depending on the distance from Chișinău) point to a significant impact of spatial accessibility on the functionality of the centers analyzed in this article. In the first place, the impact is reflected in the number of visitors per year

and, secondly, in the prices they demand. In peripheral areas (such as the Republic of Moldova if viewed from a continental perspective), the wine tourism destinations are not sufficiently integrated into regional tourist circuits. In such conditions, the location of the destination plays a very important role, especially from the point of view of the distance from the main attraction centers already existing or from the main gateway of the country. The reasons underpinning customers' decision consist in reducing travel costs. Further studies may research for strategies that can contribute to the valorization of spatial accessibility when it is an advantage, or to help overcome it when it acts like a disadvantage. Furthermore, research could address how increasing cooperation and coordination between wine tourism destinations can counterbalance the low levels of spatial accessibility, both on a local and on an international level.

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