

The Olive Oil Tourism as a Development Factor in Rural Areas

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Abstract

The olive oil production is a socio-economic activity largely extended in the Mediterranean area and which forms the basis of the so-called “Mediterranean Diet”. Therefore, the olive oil, and all the elements related to it, has become a key element for the development of rural areas, also presenting a growing interest, in what concerns to the visit, by travelers.

In this paper we present an analysis from the olive oil tourism supply perspective, in the province of Córdoba (Spain), one of the largest areas in the world of olive oil production. The main results show the increasing importance of the olive oil mills related to the tourism and the culture, in order to generate additional income as also for the commercialization of the product itself, the olive oil.

KEYWORDS

Olive oil tourism, rural areas, socioeconomic development, tourist routes, Cordoba.

Introduction

The tourist activity is currently characterized by major changes motivated by the need of an adjustment to a traveler who is seeking different types of experiences and new destinations. So, and among other changes, we find that the travellers make more trips during the year, although shorter, they are more informed about the destination and the product and they search new types of tourist experiences in order to satisfy other senses, in addition to the visual. As a result of all these changes, a thematic tourism has appeared which emphasizes everything related to the recovery of the cultural, environmental and social legacy of the geographical areas, the contact with nature and the countryside and the knowledge of the local community's customs (Pulina et al., 2006; Nogues, 2007; Alonso and Krajsic, 2013). Thus, in recent years there has been a strong commitment to everything associated with gastronomy, a concept understood in a broad sense as an identity reflex of a geographical area (Murgado, 2013). In this sense, gastronomy and tourism (with local culture) appear to be a perfect symbiosis, allowing the visitors to purchase a different product and also to know an alternative destination, leading to the economic development in certain rural areas (and sometimes also in urban), all with a sustainable character. For its part, in rural areas, there is an interdependency of multidimensional character, to promote the tourism development, based on local resources in order to create a competitive destination grounded on its own characteristics (Saxena and Ilbery, 2010).

According to Stewart et al. (2008) we can point out that the increasing importance of gastronomy suggests and promotes the idea that knowledge of

agricultural products can be, and often is, the main attraction to visit a particular region and not necessarily a second (or complementary) motivation of a trip. In this sense, we must remember that gastronomy reflects the historical, social, cultural and environmental heritage of peoples, i.e. the idiosyncrasy of its inhabitants (Brunori and Rossi, 2001). We must also note that rural areas, generally out of tourist flows, are increasingly playing an important role as a place of leisure and as space for the development of different types of activities that allow the contact with nature (Alonso and Northcote, 2010).

The aim of this paper is an analysis about the existence of tourist routes related to gastronomy, in particular olive oil, reflecting the Mediterranean cultural heritage and as a way of achieving a better socio-economic development of rural areas. To accomplish this purpose, our article is structured after the introduction, with a second section where a review of the scientific literature in the field of tourist routes is briefly presented; in the third section we analyze the social and economic importance of olive oil; in the fourth we present an analysis of the olive tourism in the province of Córdoba (Spain), province characterized for being one of the geographical areas with largest production of olive oil in the world.

Literature Review

According to Briedenhann and Wickens (2003), we can define a tourist route as the creation of a cluster of activities and attractions which encourage cooperation between companies in the same geographic area and serve as a vehicle to stimulate economic development through tourism, therefore implying that the tourist routes must have a series of differential elements that support them as a tourist destination. In fact, there are already documented routes based on different aspects such as the Vikings

(Halewood and Hannan, 2001), ghosts (Inglis and Holmes, 2001) or the geographic locations mentioned by different literary works (Herbert, 2001). Within the tourist routes related to gastronomy, the routes related to wine, and to the activities related to vitiviniculture in general, stand out. For this reason, it is interesting to make a brief reference to the articulation of the wine routes as a reference element and as a starting point for the configuration of the olive oil tourism (De Salvo et al., 2013). Thus, we can define wine tourism, following Getz and Brown (2006), from a triple perspective; Firstly, as a consumer behavior; secondly, as a strategy to develop the geographical area and the wine market in this area; and thirdly, as an opportunity for the promotion of the wineries to sell their own products directly to consumers. Hall et al. (2000) state that wine tourism is the experience of visiting vineyards, know wineries and attend festivals and wine demonstrations in which the wine tasting and/or attributes of the wine experience are the main reason for the visitors.

The first researches about wine tourism started in the mid-nineties, particularly located in Australia and New Zealand. The focus of these first researches was centered in two aspects: the tourist behavior in wineries and the socioeconomic impact of wine tourism in rural areas (Getz, 2000). We can identify an important research line in wine tourism, designated by “wine tourism product” and in this product we can find in a very significant way, the analysis of the tourist routes (Mitchell and Hall, 2006). In this sense, setting a wine route consists in the definition of one or various itineraries in a selected geographical area, well signposted and where the different wineries and other wine related attractions are indicated, also providing information about historical places among others with importance (Hall et al., 2000). Finally, we cannot forget that the routes should help the economic, environmental and social development of the geographic area, generally located in a rural context. All should be done in order to

provide the tourist an experience based on the knowledge, appraisal and tasting of the wine, resulting in the valorization of rural tourism in the areas where the routes are located.

The articulation of gastronomy as tourist resource in Europe has been developed based on tourist routes, which are characterized by natural attractions (mountains and other landscapes, especially with a rural character, but that could be urban in some cases), and also physical attractions (wineries, mills and olive oil museums). About the “design” of a tourist route we need to differentiate two aspects: firstly, the theoretical definition and the design of the route; secondly, the commercialization, for which it is essential to offer an attractive tourist product for the visitor, differentiated from other similar tourist routes. In this respect, the theoretical definition phases of a tourist route are: first, the definition of the necessary resources for the development of the geographical area, for example, establish the values and priorities concerned to the beginning of the creation of the route, their possible enlargements and modifications; secondly, when the product is already in commercialization, the analysis by different studies related to the offer and demand of the product, that could result in recommendations to modify and improve the product; thirdly the analysis, by the route managers, from the statistical data related with the route visitors, with the goal to improve the offer in order to respond to the visitor’s needs. It is important to sign that this third phase occurs simultaneously with the other two phases, because it is really important, in all the product implementation to adapt the offer to the demand (Herber, 2001).

After the implementation of the tourist route, concerning its commercialization, it will be subject to a series of variables which boost the promotion. Among other essential variables we can point the following: firstly, the tourist route must be designed

under the basis of a specific economic activity that distinguishes it and also improves the differentiation from other similar or geographically close routes. This element can be varied, including literary places, film locations, olive oil mills or wineries; secondly, the tourist route must have good infrastructures that allow an appropriate displacement by the visitor through the proposed itinerary; thirdly the creation of the route must be supported by a cohesion focus that could be the key for the visitor's decision to take the tourist route.

Summarizing, the planning, the theoretical design and the development of tourist routes should be based on the way the visitor perceives the attractions, the natural environment and the services offered, with the purpose to achieve a unique experience.

Regarding the olive oil tourism, the tourist experience components in an olive oil route are, among others, the visit to olive oil mills, the contemplation of an olive grove, the visit to olive oil museums, the tasting of gastronomy, purchase of furniture made of olive wood, or the accommodation in places related to this subject, in a similar way to how it is done in other gastronomic routes (Ravenscroft and Van Westering, 2001). It is perceived that there is a relation between the number of tourist resources in the area and the length of the stay of visitors in the area, so if an olive oil route has plenty resources to visit like olive oil mills, museums, natural parks, active tourism activities, the visitors will spend more time in the area. In fact, regarding the different studies about gastronomic routes, one of the biggest critics by academics (López-Guzmán et al., 2009) is the scarce complementary offer in rural areas hosting these tourist routes, which means that the level of overnight stay in the area is usually very low. On the other hand, we should not forget that a tourist route, specially when related to olive oil, results from the amount of effort, and the synergy of many public and private stakeholders, and the academic literature states a lot of strategies in the development of

these partnerships at a formal and informal level (Telfer, 2001). Therefore, and for the proper management of the route, it is necessary to create an organization formed by public and private companies, through an identity coordinator, to boost, manage and stimulate the tourist product following the phases for the creation and management of a tourist route mentioned above. The implementation of an olive oil route is an opportunity to create synergies between different tourism typologies, as the rural tourism (encouraging the hospitality and the active tourism companies), the gastronomic tourism (through geographical area food degustation, together with local wine), and the cultural tourism (through the contemplation of different man-made products and the local landscapes). Thus, the olive oil tourist experience can be reflected in the following two points (Brunori and Rossi, 2000): firstly, the olive oil taste and the “wedding” with other typical products from the area; secondly the importance for the tourist from the visits to olive oil mills, key elements in the articulation of one route based on the olive oil.

The promotion of olive oil tourism should be carried out in a coordinated way with the advertising of the different olive oil mills, restaurants, hotels, etc. So, a joint advertising of the whole geographical area should be done with the individual advertising of the different local businesses. It is also necessary to promote scientific researches, particularly based on field work, which allow to obtain knowledge about the profile of the tourist that visits the area, the quantification of the demand (and the segmentation), the articulation of new products that will answer the tourists’ needs, the existent offer and the identification of certain market niches. Moreover, it is necessary to enhance the tourist offer from the area, creating (or empowering) businesses which allow an answer to the demand from the visitors to the geographical area, through the

structuring of various infrastructures that improve, for example, the access to the area and that allow the increase the welfare of the local community.

On the other hand, it is also important to differentiate the dissimilar goals of olive oil producers regarding development of the tourist routes. So, for larger olive oil producers (and for the Denomination Origin itself, which protects the quality of the olive oils from that geographical area) the main purpose of an olive oil route is to enhance, improve and place their brand among different consumers, mainly foreigners. But the main goal for the small olive oil producers, facing some distribution problems in a regular basis, it is the sale of their own product to the visitors in their own facilities.

An olive oil route in Europe, considering that Europe has so many cultural resources, is designed as more than just good oil tasting, and indeed these routes allow tourists to experience different sociocultural and environmental factors, which allow that each route, though similar in its content, could be different in a particular way, thanks to the characteristic values of the area where the route is implemented (Bruwer, 2003). All this can allow an answer to the search, by the visitors, of differential values from an area, and also reflect the cultural and gastronomic identity of a particular geographical area (Alonso and Northcole, 2010).

Currently, researches centered exclusively in olive oil tourism are practically inexistent. Curiously, similarly to what happened with wine tourism, the main contributions came from Australia and New Zealand. In fact, most of the research about olive oil tourism is very superficial and related with rural tourism, particularly farm tourism (Busby and Rendle, 2000). As major works related with olive oil tourism, we can refer to one carried out by Alonso and Northcote (2010), presenting an interesting research focused on the of supply analysis in a region of Australia and which concludes that this type of tourism could be an interesting way of marketing and obtaining

additional income for farmers, conclusions that are similar to those found on other types of tourism as wine tourism. Moreover, Alonso (2010) stresses hospitality planning as a key factor to tourist development in rural areas. In the same way, Northcote and Alonso (2011) reinforce the positioning from oil olive tourism as a way to diversify the agricultural incomes. In Europe, we should stress the research from Ruiz-Guerra (2010) which presents a quantitative and qualitative approach to olive oil tourism and which deals with the study of olive oil tourism through different perspectives such as cultural, social, economic or sustainable; the analysis between olive oil tourism and rural socioeconomic development in the Jaén province (Spain) (López-Guzmán and González Fernández, 2011); a research focused on how oil olive tourism can be a tourist attraction for rural areas (Ruiz Guerra et al., 2011); and the research about tourist companies related with agro tourism, more specifically with the olive oil tourism in Sardinia (Italy) (Pulina et al., 2006).

Olive Oil as an Economic and Social Resource

Olive oil is a vegetable oil, mainly for culinary use, extracted from the freshly harvested fruit from the olive. The olive fruit is collected in late autumn or early winter when it has the highest level of fatty acids. After harvesting, occurs the milling of the fruit which leads to the oil drop, and through the process called “the beating”, the olive oil is extracted. The olive oil can be segmented in three types: high quality extra-virgin, industrial extra virgin and industrial staple oil. Following Brunori et al. (2002) in the high quality extra-virgin oil, the production process is the key because there is a selection of the best fruits and the extraction is very quick. This product, with a relatively high price, is sold generally in international markets, but also consumed by the locals from the geographical area of production. Olive oil is a base nutrient from

Mediterranean countries, where food is based on the denominated Mediterranean diet, recognized as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in November 2010.

Furthermore, we should remember that olive oil has a scarce production when compared to other vegetable oils, and its production is done mostly in Europe, where Spain, Italy and Greece are the biggest producers and retailers. Relatively to oil olive production in the world, table 1 presents the data from the periods between 2009/10 and 2013/14.

Table 1 – Oil Olive World Production 2009-2014 (in thousands of tons)

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Spain	1,200	1,389.6	1,347.4	616.3	1,536.6
Italy	540	440	440	415.5	450
Greece	348	300	310	357,9	230
Tunisia	140	120	180	220	80
Turkey	147	160	180	195	180
Syria	150	180	200	198	135
Morocco	95	140	120	100	120
Portugal	50	62.9	71.8	59.1	76.2
Other	211.5	146	171.8	182.7	197.2
Total	2,881.5	2,938.5	3,021.0	2,344.5	3,005.0

Source: Authors, based on data from the National Institute of Statistics International Olive Council (2014) – 2012/2013 and 2013/2014 data are forecasts

According to the data from table 1, Spain produces annually about 45 to 50% of the world production of olive oil; if we join the production of Spain with two other countries, Italy and Greece, we conclude that the three together represent 70% of the world production. Spain produces more than 1.5 millions of tons of olive oil/year, maintaining a clear lead, followed at a great distance by Italy, producing 30% of Spain's

production. Thus, concerning the data presented we can see the great importance of olive oil production in some rural areas from Spain. Inside the country, the geographic area with more relevance concerning olive oil production is Andalucía, the province of Jaén being the leader, followed by the province of Córdoba.

The leadership from Spain in the olive oil production was made possible by the olive oil policy followed by the country in the last decades, based fundamentally on the development of different support plans from the European Union. With the monetary support from European Union, the olive oil sector was able to modernize the rural areas. Moreover, Andalucía, aware of their olive oil wealth and in line with the common agricultural policy of the European Union, promotes the Spanish Municipalities of Olive Grove Association and, significantly, has introduced the olive theme in the Andalucía Rural Sustainable Development Program for the period 2010-2014.

Figure 1 – Spanish Olive Oil Protected Denominations of Origin



Source: http://farm4.static.flickr.com/3529/3222933482_3897accdd.jpg?v=0

Olive Oil Tourism in Córdoba Province

The Andalucía region stands out in Spain as the main olive oil producing area, representing around 70-75% of the Spanish production. In the Córdoba province, eight different tourist routes which seek to respond to the specific characteristics of the different existing denominations of origin in the area and the natural and heritage resources that reinforce these routes have been established by the authorities that manage tourism in the province. They are: Route 1. Montoso-Adamuz Olive Oil; Route 2. Los Pedroches Olive Oil; Route 3. Baena Olive Oil; Route 4. Priego de Córdoba Olive Oil; Route 5. Campiña Sur Olive Oil; Route 6. La Veta Olive Oil Route 7. La Vega Olive Oil; Route 8. Córdoba Olive Oil

Regarding tourism in the Córdoba province, the main data concerning the number of visitor arrivals are reflected in table 2.

Table 2 – Córdoba Province Visitor Arrivals (2009-2013)

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Spanish	577,389	567,190	608,526	594,308	603,645
Foreigners	266,645	305,091	370,755	387,801	385,146
Total	824,033	872,281	979.281	982,109	988,791

Source: Authors, based on data from the National Institute of Statistics (2014)

According to table 2, we see that the tourists that arrive at the province of Córdoba are mostly Spanish, thus, an enhancement in the structure of tourist routes, based on olive oil, could lead to an increase in foreign tourism in this geographical area. And, related with an increase from foreign tourism, this could lead to an increase in the olive oil sales in the origin countries of tourists, as is the case with the wines.

The Baena Denomination of Origin has 19 olive oil mills producing extra-virgin olive oil that can be visited by the tourists. Indeed, the different olive oil mills and the Denomination of Origin management are articulating different initiatives for the visitors, letting them obtain knowledge from all the olive oil production process. In addition olive oil tasting is taking place as well as the “marriage” of olive oil with food. In this Denomination there are five museums which reflect the ancient heritage of this form of agricultural production. The Denomination of Origin conducts research projects centered on the olive grove and olive oil. Also, the tourist can find, together with the olive oil tasting, beautiful landscapes within a prestigious and renowned National Park.

The Lucena Denomination of Origin has 10 olive oil mills. The origin of this agricultural production dates back to the time of Rome, providing olive oil to the metropolis. For this reason, this tourist route allows also to get to know the important archaeological richness in the area.

Montoro-Adamuz Denomination of Origin has 9 olive oil mills. Regarding tourism, this area is characterized for receiving a visitor typology that wants to know the heritage, but also enjoy the gastronomy, which is based logically, on the olive oil, with an emphasis on the olive oil produced under strict environmental criteria. In this area advertising activities are being developed to join heritage and gastronomy.

Regarding Priego Denomination of Origin, we can identify 13 olive oil mills. This is the most advanced denomination of origin in the olive oil tourism field, with a disseminating center related to the olive oil. This center has two restaurants, one hotel and one museum about the olive oil culture, where the visitor can see indigenous varieties from the entire Mediterranean basin. Also, it has a thematic class which deals with the study of the different olive oil components, and it has become a reference for the analysis of the gastronomy based on the Mediterranean diet. The development of

this area is also shown by the variety of their route, which includes four itineraries, reflecting the cultural identity.

Among the tourist routes of the Córdoba Province, olive oil tourism allows the visitor to taste olive oil as well as the attendance of several types of courses about olive oil and its inherent culture. The visitor can also see different kinds of olive oil mills where they learn about all the olive oil production process, from the fruit to the final product. This is accompanied with thematic restaurants where the gastronomy is based on the olive oil, and finally, the visitor can enjoy rural accommodation, generally rehabilitated old olive oil mills and farms now used as rural tourism units.

Conclusions

In the beginning of the 21st century, the tourist activity is being transformed, as a result, among other aspects, of the evolution of the demand that does not look for the traditional “sun and sea” and the old-fashioned destinations, but that requires new products and new destinations. As a result, the tourist offer is creating new products to answer to the demand from more active travelers, who search for new experiences and want to know different destinations. From these new products, we highlight a product that matches the local traditions and the gastronomy from an area that brings together the wine and the olive oil.

In this paper we have focused on a new research area, which emerges around the articulation from tourist routes based on the food products from rural areas, specifically the olive oil, food produced predominantly in the Mediterranean countries.

We can underline the relevance of the tourist routes in the rural areas, where tourism becomes a complementary activity to agriculture, generating economic incomes, new jobs and at the same time being an important element for the promotion

of local products. We should also refer to the possibility of articulating different tourist gastronomic routes, based on significant scientific contributions made around the wine tourism. And for this reason, the wine routes could be a good starting point to the in depth study of tourist routes related to olive oil.

However, we believe that more scientific studies in this field are needed, allowing to answer different questions, especially those related to the articulation of routes and also to the demand, which will allow us to better understand who are the tourists that take a route, their origin, motivations, preferences and average spending. Finally we stress that it would be interesting to design a tourist product that integrates olive oil and gastronomy with natural and social resources as an important part of the people's culture.

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