

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

DIGITAL PLATFORMS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF WINE TOURISM IN CASTILLA Y LEÓN: WEBSITES AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

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This research focuses on Castilla y León, a Spanish region where winemaking has a key role in socioeconomic development. The wine industry is consolidated as an agri-food activity capable of diversifying the economy of the rural environment, based mainly on agricultural activity. The cultivation of vines and the subsequent transformation of grapes into wine have generated a business network that has been able to create new jobs and, at times, settle new settlers in a rural environment that is languishing economically and socially, and where the problem of depopulation along with strong aging, are the two challenges to combat in coming years. To the employment generated with this activity -taking care of the vineyards and working in the winery- we must add the interest that the world of wine has aroused among the population and their desire to visit the processing facilities and the countryside, giving rise to wine tourism, an expanding tourism typology that constitutes one of the bases of rural development of an important part of the municipalities located along the Douro River and in its vicinity.

The topic of wine tourism has aroused a growing interest in recent years and research has become more specialized, with both conceptual approaches and analysis of specific cases. Wine tourism has been defined as the visit to vineyards, wineries, wine festivals and wine demonstrations, experiencing the characteristics of a certain type of grape and wine in a particular region. This definition, simple in essence and very direct in terms of terminological precision, has been widely used in a large part of the published scientific literature, especially in the Anglo-Saxon sphere.

In the main wine producing countries, wine tourism has managed to reach a significant volume of visitors. Especially significant is the demand in countries such as the United States and Australia. In the first case, the Napa Valley receives millions of visitors annually and happens to be the first wine tourism destination in the world. Located in the State of California, this valley concentrates more than 300 wine producers and represents the success of the new wine industry and its tourist dissemination.

The level of development of wine tourism is not uniform, as most of the authors point out, and there are great differences between the more and less developed countries. In this sense, and within a relatively small geographic area like the Mediterranean basin, the difference between countries such as France, Italy and Spain, with high numbers of wine tourists, and Greece, Cyprus, Turkey or the Balkan countries is very significant. Wine tourism reflects, in some way, the levels of development of countries, regions and counties as a result of being a niche highly specialized in global tourism.

At present, there is a very extensive body of knowledge about this tourism. The applied method has been, and remains, basically descriptive. The descriptive method has been key in the primary objective of characterizing an initially little-known and well-known activity. It has been a first methodological phase that is progressively giving way to a second one, in which complex and varied explanatory, causal, comparative, evaluative or predictive fields prevail. However, this second phase still lacks the more sophisticated use of qualitative and quantitative techniques that expand the understanding of the wine tourism phenomenon.

The theoretical approaches to this tourism are very varied, as well as the number of publications appeared in this regard. The main topics addressed are the following: the wine tourism product and its development; wine tourism and regional development; the scope of visits to wineries and vineyards; the characteristics of the visitors; the behavior of winemakers; the level of satisfaction of the visitor and their motivations; and, finally, a field of recent and increasingly important research on biosafety risks posed by visitors. Some proposals to revise approaches to wine tourism point out the field referring to the links between wine tourism, culture and heritage, which would include aspects related to the improvement of heritage, conservation, culture and authenticity. Also important are the groups referring to the marketing of wine tourism and the behavior of wine tourism, having some authors established different profiles of the wine tourist to better understand the characteristics of the demand.

The main research aim of this article is to know the scope of networks and digital platforms in the dissemination of wine tourism. The work presented focuses on the set of 631 wineries that are registered in the thirteen Regulatory Councils of the Denominaciones de Origen (Registered Guarantees of Origin, hereinafter referred to as DO) of Castilla y León on July 31, 2018, and especially on the 496 that have a website. These represent a high percentage of the total, which shows their interest in transcending the strictly local scope in terms of attracting visitors. The exhaustive treatment of the information extracted from surveys, interviews and statistical and cartographic sources has allowed knowing in depth the topic that has focused the investigation.

Initially, the wineries offered the visit to the facilities as the only activity, but with the passage of time the offer has expanded considerably and nowadays, in many cases, the tasting and pairing courses and national and international congresses stand out. Most of the wineries also have a small shop where you can buy the wines they make, as well as other agri-food products from the area. We must add to this the opening of restaurants, accommodation, museums and spas with treatments based on wine therapy. Of the 157 analyzed websites of wineries that offer wine tourism, 50 have restaurants, 23 hotels, 6 museums and 4 a SPA. Most of these wineries correspond to the DO Ribera del Duero,

which is the main focus of wine tourism in the region, both by final volume of visits and by activities carried out.

The presence of information in other languages on websites is also important. This is essential for the marketing of wines abroad and their international projection, as well as for the reception of foreign visitors. Of the 496 wineries that have a website, 66.73% have it translated into two or more languages, while the remaining 33.27% is only in Spanish. In the latter case it is small and family wineries, whose owner is usually a person aged 55 and over.

The most common language is English, since 319 out of 331 wineries with two languages present the contents of their web pages in this language; this represents practically all wineries with two or more languages. Next, German and French stand out in this order. In the last decade, Chinese and Russian translations have increased (around 10% and 4% of the wineries currently), which indicates the increase of clients from these countries.

Complementing the websites, in recent years the use and management by wineries and consumers of social networks has expanded. The consumption of advertising on networks is increasingly important. It is a strategy to make oneself known to the public and sell the product, especially among young adults. This is one of the main objectives of expansion in some of the regions analyzed, especially Cigales and Rueda. 65.32% of the wineries that have a website have at least one social network profile, compared to 34.68% that do not. The most widespread social networks are Facebook and Twitter.

For wine regions, DO Rueda wineries are the ones that are most integrated into social networks. Above average, and within the set of large DO, are Toro and Bierzo, following a dynamic somewhat similar to Rueda. Next, it is noteworthy Ribera del Duero, whose relative disadvantage is due to the weight that the small family business acquires in this case.

The presence of digital platforms in the wine tourism sector of Castilla y León has a very significant role in re-launching and extending a very specific and a priori specialized tourism segment. Digital platforms are a powerful tool for the disclosure of wineries in terms of visits and tastings. The effort made by the wineries of the DO of Castilla y León has been important at a social and economic level. The ultimate objective, as some of its responsible managers have been able to demonstrate, is to be able to adapt to the demands of new markets and to consumer tastes and ways of buying. This objective represents a huge challenge that can become an effective tool for rural development.