

WINE TOURISM IN ALENTEJO – TOWARDS A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

Alentejo has a long tradition in wine production. However, it's only in the past decade that investors, tourism industry professionals and other regional strategic players began recognising the link between the tourism industry and wine as a relevant factor of regional development and sustainability of its economy.

In fact, at global level, wine tourism is an economic activity of rising importance with several potential positive impacts and this explains why countries and regions with a strategic vision of the future integrate it in their tourism strategies. On the other hand, the fierce competition among international destinations, unthinkable until very recently, highlights the need for their differentiation and strategic (re)positioning, based on their endogenous and really distinctive resources.

In this context, it is essential to understand the structural dimensions of wine tourism, its dynamics and interactions, in order to develop an appropriate model for the Alentejo region.

KEYWORDS

Wine Tourism, Tourism Product, Governance, Travel Motivations, Marketing.

1. INTRODUCTION

We are growingly witnessing wine as an added value and differentiating factor with the potential to attract tourists, especially to traditional wine producing regions, that hold particular characteristics in terms of landscape, culture and climate, providing knowledge and a diversity of experiences. For these regions the tourism offer is increasingly seen as a catalyst for economic and social development (Alebaki e Yakovidou, 2011; Carlsen e Charters, 2006). On the other hand, each destination is composed by a set of elements and factors that characterize and differentiate it such as supply, image, demand, governance between strategic players and the marketing tools used. In the specific case of the Alentejo Region, located in southern Portugal, although it is a territory with great wine tradition, it has only recently began to offer facilities focused on wine related products and seeking to position itself as a wine tourism destination. It is therefore necessary to understand the structural dimensions of wine tourism, its dynamics and interactions, in order to develop and discuss an appropriate wine tourism model for the Alentejo region, subject of the present investigation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Carlsen and Charters (2006) narrowed the study of wine tourism into two structural dimensions: (I) the macroeconomic, based on national and regional scope factors, as regional identity, infrastructures, regulation, funding, marketing, branding, as well as the role of local organisations; (II) microeconomic, linked to the places of consumption, such as wineries, wine cellars and museums, to the knowledge of national and regional tourism authorities about wine and tourism industries; entrepreneurs and managers; and the consumer himself. Perri (2010) and Golloway et al., (2008) define the wine tourist according to their degree of involvement, interest and knowledge about wine. However, Alevaki and Iakobidou (2011), Tassiopoulos and Haydar (2006) and Getz and Brown (2006) classify it based on demographic criteria. In terms of attractiveness and positioning of a wine tourism destination, Pikkematt et al. (2009) emphasized the importance of unique experiences, the surroundings and the possibility of learning, while Yuan et al. (2006) and Taylor (2006) emphasized the importance of the events related with the wine theme. Another perspective supported by Charters and Fountaine (2006) and Griffin and Loersh (2006) highlighted the importance of training and qualification of human resources, in order to respond effectively and efficiently to consumers in terms of quality of service, knowledge of wine and the region. Getz and Brown (2006) highlights “time”, that is, the period before, during and after a visit to a winery and the “space” of the experience itself, embodied by the attributes of the winery, the experience lived in region and elsewhere, and even their own consumption habits at home. Golloway et al. (2008), Fisher and Gil-Alana (2005), Griffith (2007) and Presenza et al. (2010) underlined that the relevance of wine tourism is not strictly economic, it should also be seen as a territorial enhancement factor. Menival and Charters (2011) and Lignon-Darmaillac (2009) wonder about the indifference and even resistance from many wine producers to become involved in tourism, even if they could benefit from increased direct sales to consumers.

3. METHODOLOGY

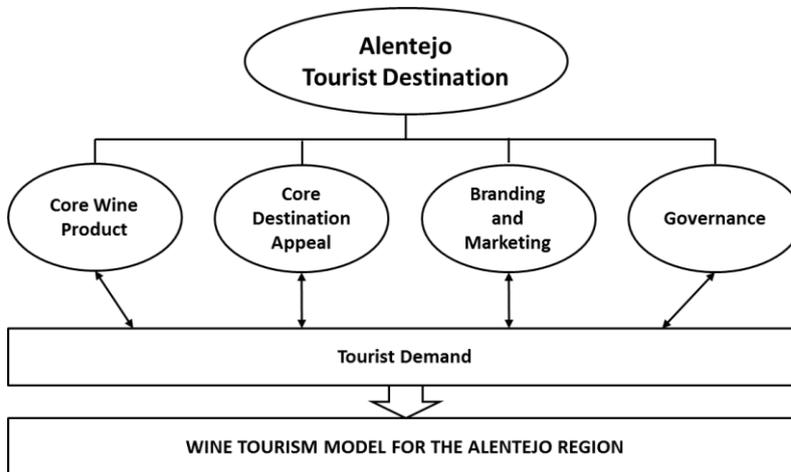
The methodological approach followed was based on the following steps: (1) review of the literature on wine tourism, on regional development, on development and marketing of tourism products; (2) secondary data collection based on existing studies, reports and statistics on the region’s economy, tourism and wine tourism; (3) inventory and assessment of Alentejo’s existing wine tourism resources as well as other tourism resources which contribute to increasing the value of wine tourism; (4) primary data collection and analysis, in order to develop a qualitative study. This was achieved through interviews with various players somehow involved in wine tourism, public (Municipalities, Tourism regional and Tourism promotion agency and the Alentejo Regional Wine Producers Association - CVRA) and private (owners/managers of wine tourism facilities, wine producers and people in charge of other tourism facilities); and (5) survey to tourists and participants in wine tourism activities in the Alentejo Region through questionnaires distributed to wine related tourism facilities, accommodation units and other.

The assessment of tourism, wine tourism and other complementary resources consisted of two components – firstly, a qualitative assessment based on published official sources and on the authors own perception and experience. Secondly, an assessment of the number of visitors registered in the last three years. Apart from the interviews content analysis all other data collected was processed using the SPSS software 18.0 based on descriptive statistics and multivariate analysis.

4. MAIN RESULTS

Results show Alentejo's region as a high potential wine tourism destination. Moreover, it was possible to develop a wine tourism model for Alentejo mainly supported on five structural pillars: Core wine product, Core destinations appeal, Branding and Marketing, Governance and Tourist Demand (Figure 1).

Figure 1: A Conceptual Wine Tourism Model for Alentejo Region



Source: Authors systematization

The core wine product pillar embraces a set of factors that shapes Alentejo's identity as a wine tourism destination such as: wineries, cellars and support facilities; the range of activities and events related to wine; category of accommodation with regional character and themes linked to wine; wine and wine-related products specialised shops; winery staff training, and available information about the wine tourism supply. The Core Destination Appeal pillar regards the essential elements that reinforce the tourism attraction of the Alentejo's destination, including landscape, culture, the tourism and the complementary resources, accessibility, as well as other tourism products or services that offer the possibility of additional tourist enjoyment within the destination. Branding and marketing are fundamental pillars that give visibility to the destination through an effective differentiation based on authenticity and identity, as well as allowing the selling of the destination through appropriate distribution channels. Governance is another structuring pillar of the Alentejo destination, considering the importance of joint responsibility of the various regional and national players, each playing a specific role in the complex wine tourism system. These players are the institutional entities linked to tourism, agriculture and territory management, as well as wine producers, managers and / or wineries owners, wine routes, and other actors considered strategic for the development of wine tourism. Finally, tourism demand importance should be highlighted since there is no tourism without tourists. In addition to the motivations that lead an individual to seek wine destinations specifically, understanding to what extent these motivations intersect with other reasons to visit, as well as deepening the knowledge about the type of behaviour of wine tourists during their visit to Alentejo, emerges as critical factor for the design of a wine tourism model in Alentejo.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The results show that the theoretical-conceptual model presented by the authors of this study may provide a useful contribution to the development of wine tourism in the Alentejo. In addition to the

clear identification of structural pillars that support the wine tourism product itself, the model presented also allows a deeper understanding about the forms of interaction between different players, who have different logics and interests, placing them with specific roles. These players also have joint responsibility in terms of intervention and strategic positioning of the destination. As in every research, this study has some limitations: the model developed applies to a specific region of Portugal being therefore doubtful to extrapolate it to other regions. On the other hand, as the survey was undertaken within a short timeline, months of June and July 2011, results may not be fully representative of the population under study, since surveys should ideally be undertaken over various tourism periods: low, medium and high seasons. Nevertheless, in terms of future research, this study points out several clues, such as (i) applying the model developed, and adapted as appropriate, in other wine regions of the country and in international wine tourism regions; (ii) to identify categories of tourists, wine tourists and other tourists, and draw parallels with tourists from other regions or other wine tourism destinations.

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