

Wine tourism in an agritourism context: Insight into agritourism providers' perceptions

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Abstract | Rural regions abounding in vineyards provide a perfect setting for blending wine and agricultural tourism. Both types of tourism offer a varied combination of heterogeneous agricultural products and experiences, which add value to rural regions. In this article, wine tourism is described as part of a wider agritourism phenomenon. We start with a brief summary of an extensive literature review of the concepts of 'wine tourism' and 'agritourism'. Some of the key themes resulting from this reading exercise were then confronted with the reality in the Vila Real district. Six in-depth interviews were conducted with the managers of accommodation units, which are officially categorised as agritourism units. Thus, a first set of data was collected which will allow a better understanding of the place of wine and agritourism in that area, which partially integrates the Demarcated Douro Wine Region. In other words, the supply side was analysed by comparing what happens in the Vila Real district with global widespread practices concerning the following topics: What are the main motivations of the managers, how do they perceive agritourism's benefits, what are their attitudes towards heritage preservation and how do they profile the agritourism visitors? The research results will increase insight into the agritourism reality and allow us to formulate valuable guidelines for the future development of the sector.

Keywords | Wine tourism, agritourism, Demarcated Douro Wine Region, perceptions of the supply side, experiences

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1. Introduction

Interest is increasing in rural areas, which are interpreted as peaceful, calm, tranquil, authentic and unique (Nilsson, 2002), and this has led to annual increases in the number of tourists, who mostly visit farms or vineyards (Carmichael, 2005). Therefore, the tourism supply side is responding to this ongoing demand through the creation of new tourism products such as agritourism, which are linked to the rural environment (Horng & Tsai, 2012). For as long as wine tourism has existed, it has been strongly associated with the use of agricultural land (Carmichael, 2005), simply because rural regions with an abundance of vineyards provide a perfect setting for blending wine and agricultural tourism. Visiting a winery tasting room and tasting wine are recognised agritourism activities (Grimstad, 2011; Wicks & Merrett, 2003) because they allow consumers to enjoy a farm-produced product and to gain a deeper understanding of the farming experience (Skinner, 2000). As wine tourism also encompasses wine education, wine and food pairing, agricultural education about grape varieties, and understanding the wine-making process (Singh & Hsiung, 2016), it is a heterogeneous agricultural product with the capacity to provide rural regions with added value (Molina, Gómez, González-Díaz, & Esteban, 2015) and offer guests co-creative moments (Golicic & Flint, 2013). In this article, wine tourism is described as part of a wider agritourism phenomenon due to the rapid development of agritourism – or should we say wine tourism? – activities in wine-producing regions.

Our research is based on an extensive literature review (which will be published separately at a later date) of the concepts of 'wine tourism' and 'agritourism', which became more vivid with the results obtained through the interviews conducted in Portugal's North region, or more specifically, in the Vila Real district. The aim of the study was to collect data which will provide a solid basis for a

deeper understanding of the place of wine tourism within the agritourism context in that area, which partially integrates the Demarcated Douro Wine Region, while focusing on the insights of the managers of accommodation units which are explicitly recognised as an agritourism business (*agroturismo*) by Portuguese legislation: What are the main motivations of these managers, how do they perceive agritourism's benefits, what are their attitudes towards heritage preservation and how do they profile the agritourism visitors? The research results will increase insight into the agritourism reality and will allow us to formulate valuable guidelines for the future development of the sector.

2. Literature review

2.1. Wine tourism

The most cited definition of wine tourism is likely that of Hall and Macionis (1998, p. 197): '[V]isitation to vineyards, wineries, wine festivals and wine shows for which grape wine tasting and or experiencing the attributes of a grape and wine region are the primary motivations for the visitor'. This definition goes beyond wine and viticulture by also including wine regions as a whole and their attributes, often referred to as the 'winescape' (Hall et al., 2000). Thus, wine tourism is not only about tasting and buying wines; it needs to be understood as a total 'experience' for the tourist (Beames, 2003). Those who engage in wine-related tourism seek an overall tourism experience (Alebaiki & Iakovidou, 2011), that is, a regional 'bundle of benefits' (Charters & Ali-Knight, 2002, cited in Getz & Brown, 2006, p. 49). And, of course, a good physical environment and atmosphere reinforce the experience (Alonso & Ogle, 2008, cited in Fernandes & Cruz, 2016). Increasing numbers of wineries are providing holistic

consumer experiences enabling tourists to interact with the winemaker and other consumers, and to become part of the unique ambience of the winery (Alant & Bruwer, 2004).

Many wine regions have realised that the benefits of wine tourism extend beyond the wineries to all aspects of the regional economy (Carlsen, 2004). Therefore, more and more destinations consider wine tourism as their development strategy. Several studies have confirmed the significance of wine tourism as an incubator of regional development that yields economic benefits for both wineries and the surrounding communities (Poitras & Getz, 2006), attracting new investments to the region and increasing regional employment (Carlsen, 2004). Moreover, wine tourism contributes to retaining or attracting people to rural areas, maintaining aspects of 'traditional' rural lifestyles and agricultural production, and conserving the rural landscape (Mitchell & Hall, 2006, p. 315, cited in Scherrer, Alonso & Sheridan, 2009).

Due to the recognition of numerous benefits and to the appearance of new wine regions, wine tourism has shown and continues to show a dynamic and constant increase on a global scale in an increasingly competitive environment (Alonso & Liu, 2010; Nella & Christou, 2014; Scherrer et al., 2009).

2.2. Agritourism

Agriculture, as a main source of income, is faced with serious threats, mostly due to poor prices, rising costs, environmental pressures, climate change and globalisation (McGehee, 2007). Therefore, pressure on farmers to generate sufficient income has influenced them to diversify their strategies in order to maximise farm-based 'countryside capital' (Garrod, Wornell, & Youell, 2006, p. 118). One of the possibilities is to shift from being mere agricultural producers toward implementing tourism activities. Thus, agritourism is usually

utilised as a tool to achieve farm diversification (Flanigan, Blackstock, & Hunter, 2015; McGehee & Kim, 2004; Ollenburg & Buckley, 2007; Veeck, Che, & Veeck, 2006; Yang, 2012), as it has the capacity to provide an alternative and additional source of income (Govindasamy & Kelley, 2014; Lapan & Barbieri, 2014), and consequently, promotes employment, prevents migration and achieves the sustainability of rural communities (Hall, Mitchell, & Roberts, 2003).

Although the concept of agritourism has been present in the tourism literature for a considerable time, few efforts have been made to understand the key features that define agritourism as a concept (Flanigan, Blackstock, & Hunter, 2014). Ongoing dilemmas around the meaning of agritourism in the academic and non-academic community are mostly due to geopolitical contexts associated with government policies (McGehee, Kim, & Jennings, 2007; Tew & Barbieri, 2012). Arroyo, Barbieri, and Rich (2013, p. 45) concluded that a conciliatory definition of agritourism 'should include staged or authentic agricultural activities or processes occurring in working agricultural facilities either for entertainment or educational purposes'. So far, the focus of agritourism studies has been on the supply side (McGehee, 2007; McGehee & Kim, 2004; McGehee et al., 2007; Ollenburg & Buckley, 2007; Tew & Barbieri, 2012) in order to understand the key drivers and characteristics of agritourism providers in an international context (Flanigan et al., 2014).

Over time, agritourism has been recognised not only as a tool for long-term economic recuperation and development, but also as a format to explore non-economic benefits, which include maintaining rural lifestyles, as well as increasing awareness of and preserving local customs and culture (Che, 2007; Everett & Aitchison, 2008; Ollenburg & Buckley, 2007; Tew & Barbieri, 2012; Turnock, 2002). Keeping the farm within the family and the ability to continue farming are other important goals for agritourism providers (Barbi-

eri, 2010; Ollenburg & Buckley, 2007). Flanigan et al. (2015) asserted that these non-economic goals should not be perceived only as personal, as they bring benefits to the wider public, as agritourism units promote education about food and farming (Tew & Barbieri, 2012) and sustainability (Barbieri, 2013; Hossein, Alipour & Dalir, 2014; Sonnino, 2004). Barbieri (2013) stated that agritourism supports the preservation of rural heritage better than any other entrepreneurial venture. Agritourism also plays the role of environmental protector, as agritourism development helps to preserve rural landscapes and promotes environmentally-friendly farming practices (Barbieri 2013; Gao, Barbieri, & Valdivia, 2013).

Economic benefits are also noticeable at the rural community level, as agritourism activities increase tax revenues, local employment and local entrepreneurship (Barbieri, 2013; Veeck et al., 2006), while its social benefits are related to the improvement of the quality of life in general. Local employment is a very important topic to consider, especially when we take the generalised demographic decrease in rural communities into account. On the other hand, involving tourists in agricultural activities might alleviate the labour shortage in agriculture (Andereck & Vogt, 2000), resulting in improved production efficiencies (Fleischer & Tchetchik, 2005). Nevertheless, in some circumstances (focussing more on the guests than on the land), the adoption of agritourism causes the farmer to lose his identity as a food producer (Di Domenico & Miller, 2012; Dubois, Cawley & Schmitz, 2017) or endangers the agricultural production process.

We must underline a particularity in the context we have studied: In Portugal, there is an official '*agro-turismo*' classification for accommodation units in rural areas. Legislation determines that agritourism businesses are lodging units situated on farms (*quintas*) that provide accommodation services to tourists and allow guests to accompany farmers and learn about agricultural ac-

tivities, or to participate in the work carried out on farms, according to the rules established by the local responsible officials (Portugal, 2008).

3. Methodology

In the context of the INNOVINE & VINE project, it was necessary to do an extensive literature review about the impact of wine tourism specifically and agritourism in general in order to be able to compare what is happening in the North of Portugal with the international data. In order to characterise the practices in North Portugal, a first set of qualitative data was collected through six semi-structured in-depth interviews with agritourism providers located in the Vila Real district. This district was chosen due to its rurality, as 66% of its population is perceived as rural or semi-rural (Vila Real, 2016), and also because it integrates the Demarcated Douro Wine Region which has a significant wine producing history, as well as, more recently, an increasing number of agritourism facilities.

Phone interviews were selected to collect the data due to limited time and funds. In the first contact, agritourism managers were asked whether they were interested in and willing to participate in this research. After their acceptance, the agritourism providers were asked to determine the most convenient time for them to be interviewed. The end of October and beginning of November were considered suitable for the survey because the major activities in the wine-related agricultural cycle were finished.

The questionnaire was based on a comprehensive literature review of wine tourism and agritourism, and resulted in questions about the preservation of rural heritage, the profile of agritourism tourists, the nature of the agritourism offer, the motivations of agritourism providers, and their perception of agritourism's benefits. The in-

interviews were implemented in order to fully understand and improve the agritourism product. The questionnaire was pretested among the project group members, and then, a final version of the questionnaire was given to a representative of the tourism board of the North region of Portugal in order to test the validity, unambiguity and comprehensibility of the questionnaire once more. After a few minor changes, the final version of the questionnaire was used in the research.

The agritourism businesses and their owners got codes in order to secure their anonymity. The interviews, with mostly open-ended questions, were transcribed by the authors of this article, coded and systematically analysed. The transcribed material was categorised according to pre-determined criteria focusing on the preservation of rural heritage, the profile of agritourism tourists, the nature of the agritourism offer, the motivations of agritourism providers, and their perception of agritourism's benefits.

4. Discussion and results

4.1. Profile of visitors, agritourism capacity for heritage preservation and nature of agritourism provider/tourist relation

Agritourism is usually perceived as a family activity, with a prevalence of families with young children (Dubois et al., 2017; Ollenburg & Buckley, 2011; Tew & Barbieri, 2012), as farms are a novel environment in which children can play accompanied by their parents. Dubois et al. (2017) also confirmed the importance of children in the context of school visits. Farms adapt their offerings to this young segment of the public, creating petting zoos, mazes and field or hay rides (Barbieri et al., 2008; Tew & Barbieri, 2012).

However, the appeal of rural living for relax-

ation and recreation is attracting another market segment towards agritourism as well: singles and couples without children (Che et al., 2005; Wicks & Merrett, 2003, cited in Gao et al., 2013). Their motivation is to escape from their mundane obligations and to find peace in a rural setting. Since there is no consensus in the agritourism literature regarding the most common agritourism visitor, one of the main focuses of our research in the Vila Real district was to investigate the profile of the most frequent agritourism visitors.

Tourists visiting agritourism facilities in the Vila Real district range from singles without children, to families with children, or couples of all ages without children. Customers are usually well educated and mostly foreigners, while some farms are focusing only on Portuguese visitors. According to one agritourism manager, French tourists have made interesting comments, explaining their choice of agritourism in Portugal as a means of avoiding terrorist attacks. Interestingly, one of the farms has, apart from families, hunters as repeat visitors. Ollenburg and Buckley (2011) stated that loyalty in agritourism is important, as some farms are visited by the same families routinely every year. Thus, we had to conclude that in the Vila Real district, the visitor profile is very diverse.

Agritourism has the capacity to preserve both the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of a region (Choo & Petrick, 2014; Di Domenico & Miller, 2012; Ollenburg & Buckley 2007). Barbieri (2013) found that agritourism farms contribute more to the preservation of heritage than other forms of entrepreneurial farm ventures (cited in Lapan & Barbieri, 2014). As a matter of fact, agritourism facilities usually preserve tangible assets in order to use them later to add value to the tourism experience as a whole or just for accommodation purposes (Yang, 2012). Preserving tangible heritage, historic buildings and agricultural equipment is very important from a local community identity perspective, as these communities are vulnerable to identity changes, which are easily provoked to-

day by increasing globalisation and urbanisation. Apart from preserving buildings, agritourism also provides the opportunity to preserve the insular viticulture-gastronomic patrimony, which is very important from an agritourism demand perspective (Scherrer et al., 2009). Preserving vineyards in rural areas provides a shield from the increased pressure of urbanisation (Scherrer et al., 2009). Therefore, given the vulnerable situation of the rural legacy (Lapan & Barbieri, 2014), agritourism provides a sustainable frame for both preservation and promotion, emphasising the distinctive characteristics of the rural environment in order to make it more appealing to the global tourism market.

The conducted research points out that the majority of the farms involved in our study do their best to preserve rural heritage. Selected farms usually preserve buildings in order to enhance tourism activities; therefore, one of the farms has reconstructed three buildings dating back to the eighteenth century and has restored some furniture to decorate them. Another agritourism provider revealed that three years ago European Funding (FEDER) was obtained to invest in a new warehouse and restaurant in order to diversify the wine tourism product and to upgrade the level of quality. This is in line with Marques' (2006) study, implemented in the Douro region, which emphasised the importance of EU funding (LEADER at that time) for the restoration of heritage buildings used in agritourism. Also, one farm restored half of the house before it could be opened to the public, while yet another agritourism business has invested a great deal of effort into all kinds of restorations, especially of the wine cellar and warehouses, but also of a chapel and a water mill, while pre-existing houses were transformed into high-class hotel units. We can easily conclude that the sense of rural heritage preservation is deeply rooted among Vila Real agritourism providers, and that these actions have a strong cultural and personal meaning, thus confirming the results obtained in the Lapan and Barbieri (2014) study.

Modern industrial agriculture interrupted the direct relationships between farmers and consumers, and now, the agritourism business is allowing the re-establishment of farmer/customer continuity (Ainley & Kline, 2014). Personal contacts allow a closer experience of the rurality upon which the rural idyll is built. Personal contact is not only part of the agritourism visitors' expectations, it is also a desire, or even an obligation, of agritourism families (Tew & Barbieri, 2012). However, the latter are often unable to provide it due to the pressures of agricultural work (Dubois et al., 2017). In order to come closer to meeting their guests' needs during their visits to the Vila Real district, one of the agritourism providers has started to offer more personalised itineraries which fully meet their expectations. As the host/guest relationship needs to be built on mutual trust, they introduce themselves by telling stories about the farm and the region, providing space for an informal conversation. They also invite their guests to accompany them to the kitchen when they prepare the meals, offering their clients a unique opportunity to learn how to make regional dishes. In line with this example, another agritourism provider also uses meals to offer visitors a glimpse of the local cuisine and invests time in personal conversations, using the history of the 300-year-old house as a starter and organising a small tour to enable their guests to become acquainted with the agritourism property as soon as they arrive. The manager of yet another agritourism business also saw socialising as a central aspect of host/guest relations. He, e.g., gives continuous explanations about the Douro region, providing his guests with information about nearby interesting places and bigger cities. This direct interaction with clients positions agritourism providers in a new role of tourist host and guide, which provides them with a short break in their agricultural routines. It also enables visitors to the agritourism units to be involved in co-creative experiences.

4.2. Agritourism providers' motivations and perceptions of agritourism's benefits

Agritourism providers were initially motivated by socio-economic drivers (Flanigan et al., 2015; Fleischer & Tchetchik, 2005; Veeck et al., 2006), mainly the opportunity for additional income, employment and expansion of their market share (Barbieri, 2013; McGehee, 2007; McGehee & Kim, 2004; Nickerson, Black, & McCool, 2001; Nilsson, 2002; Ollenburg, 2008; Ollenburg & Buckley, 2007; Phillip, Hunter, & Blackstock, 2010). Ainley and Kline (2014) noted that the focus on economic motivations for agritourism involvement have marginalised other social and lifestyle factors which are also part of the motivation. Therefore, some authors (Everett & Aitchison, 2008; Ollenburg & Buckley, 2007) have underlined the importance of exploring non-economic motivators. In this context, family circumstances and priorities (Flanigan et al., 2015), maintaining a rural lifestyle and the ability to continue farming (Barbieri, 2010; Ollenburg & Buckley, 2007; Tew & Barbieri, 2012) and education (McGehee & Kim, 2004; Ollenburg & Buckley, 2007; Tew & Barbieri, 2012) are particularly important. The personal value of 'being a farmer' in terms of self-identity, as well as of enjoying the practice of farming (Burton, 2004; Getz & Carlsen, 2000), is one more motivation which cannot be observed through the lens of economic benefits. Agritourism also provides a foundation for socialising within the host family (McGehee et al., 2007), and between the farm hosts and tourists (Nickerson et al., 2001; Ollenburg & Buckley, 2007). Finally, developing agritourism activities has been considered by older individuals as a second career choice or retirement activity (Ollenburg & Buckley, 2007; Tew & Barbieri, 2012. Allow us to make one final and crucial caveat: We considered the benefits from the point of view of the farmer, so unsatisfactory economic results that might be interpreted as a business failure may be de-emphasised by the farmer, as he val-

ues the achievement of other social goals as more important (Barbieri, 2010).

As the literature has already suggested, the motivations of the Vila Real district agritourism providers are also quite diverse. For instance, one of the agritourism providers stated that his main motivation for agritourism was of a personal nature, because with his renovation project, he was able to upgrade the quality of life of his own family. The opportunity to promote the existing wine brand and sales, as the main activity of the farm, through agritourism was also found to be important. Another manager explained that over the years, agritourism itself had become a leading business activity, stimulating the implementation of several projects in this area, such as a new hotel unit, a restaurant, a visitor centre, and a wine shop. He even added that, next year, the plan is to open a museum about wines and vineyards. He further recognises the desire to promote a unique regional setting as another motivational factor, just as he argues that agritourism has contributed and continues to contribute to the growth of the company and the consolidation of the brand. Moreover, agritourism provides him the opportunity to be a pioneer in the Douro with an innovative quality project and to connect with people from all over the world and exchange experiences. For the last manager, the primary motivation for creating an agritourism business was optimising the sales of wine and other agricultural products (olive oil), or to say it with his own words: *'The better we can impress people with our lodging facilities and services, with our haute cuisine, with the architectural style of our warehouse, the better we can sell our wine and other agricultural products (like olive oil)'*.

Indeed, agritourism businesses complement the primary wine producing and selling activity, and agritourism facilities and services are put into operation to reinforce this brand promotion. This confirms the results provided in the study by Barbieri et al. (2008) suggesting that the main eco-

conomic benefits derived from agritourism are not direct; they generally contribute to the sale of other farm products, such as value-added items. Another main personal benefit is the opportunity to be part of a challenging and very satisfactory working environment. The words of another agritourism provider clearly elucidate this idea: *'The main motive for getting involved in agritourism was to keep the house in the family, especially since the family house is big and classified as a heritage building by the Portuguese Institute of Management of Architectural and Archaeological Heritage (IGESPAR). As such, it requires a substantial sum of money to maintain it in a reasonable state'*. The manager of this farm even decided to give up her teacher position and to ask for funding (FEDER) in order to adapt the house to tourists. Finally, the decision to invest in the transformation of the old family house into an agritourism unit was wise, which is confirmed by the following statement: *'New forms of income allow me to keep the house alive'*. Please notice that what is been described here can be considered as a variant of a 'commercial home in tourism' (Lynch, McIntosh & Tucker: 2009). In this case, the personal benefits are the opportunity to keep the house in the family, to live life in a pleasant way, and to interact with well-educated guests.

Interestingly, one of the managers referred completely different agritourism business motivations: Initially, he bought the property for hunting purposes, but over time, the agricultural features became more and more important, widening the scope of the agritourism business. Today, the main economic goals of his unit are the marketing and sale of wine, olive oil and nuts.

In conclusion, it could be noted that wine-related activities play an important role in the motivational construct of agritourism providers in the Vila Real district, especially when it comes to the promotion of wine brands, internationalisation and the opportunity to increase wine sales. The results of the interviews have confirmed the earlier re-

sults about agritourism in North Portugal, as Pato and Figueiredo (2015) had previously argued that the main motivations for agritourism are diversifying the economic activities, house preservation and business opportunities. Revealing motives behind agritourism businesses helps us also to understand agritourism managers as small 'lifestyle entrepreneurs' already recognised by Carlsen et al. (2008). According to literature (Mitchell, 2004) income is a less important motivator for entrepreneurs in comparison to other factors, especially when it comes to those of personal nature. Our research confirms this finding, and once again underlines the importance of understanding the lifestyle motivations of agritourism entrepreneurs in rural tourism destinations.

5. Conclusion

Wine tourism has a strong connection with the rural landscape and rurality (Mitchell, Charters & Albrecht, 2012), both core elements of the wine tourism experience (Carmichael, 2005; Getz & Brown, 2006; Mitchell, 2004). O'Neill and Charters (2000) classified wine tourism as part of the agriculture-related service sector and stressed its contribution to rural development (cited in Lee & Chang, 2012). Thus, it is important to find a way to bring wine tourism back to its agricultural and rural 'roots'. Integrating wine tourism experiences into other activities (Beames, 2003), preferably agritourism, could be a viable way to accomplish this goal. As a matter of fact, thanks to its link with agriculture, wine tourism can be recognised as a form of agritourism (Flanigan et al., 2014; Yuan, Cai, Morrison & Linton, 2005), which is a mixture of products rather than one homogeneous entity (cited in Dubois et al., 2017).

The interviews conducted revealed that lodging units officially registered as agritourism units in the Vila Real district possess both global and unique

characteristics. Agritourism units in that region have a great diversity of visitors who appreciate the distinctive nature of an agritourism facility and its activities. The heritage preservation of agritourism facilities is seen as a way to achieve both personal and community goals, such as securing cultural uniqueness and community identity. Personal contact between the farm host and his guests is perceived as very important for agritourism. Visitors are motivated to stay at agritourism units in the Douro because they guaranty wine experiences, part of which involves being co-creative. Agritourism managers perceive agritourism as an opportunity to boost their wine producing and selling activities, and to achieve internationalisation by entering new markets, which also allows them to promote their wine brands globally. The benefits arising from agritourism are both of an economic and personal nature. The economic benefits have a direct connection to wine revenues, which have, over time, expanded to other agricultural products, apart from the overnight incomes. The personal benefits are more diverse, and they include a need for social interaction, the preservation of the family home, and a stimulating working environment.

The main limitation of the conducted research is the small sample size, since only six interviews were executed, providing a fragmented insight in agritourism activities in the chosen region. Future research could involve more agritourism businesses in a wider geographical region in order to verify prevalent opinions about the accumulation of benefits by their managers and their main motivational drivers.

The conducted study proved once more that the strength of agritourism units lies in the possibility that they may stimulate both economic and social rural development. The promotion of agritourism adds value to tourism products in general, with a special focus on the wine tourism product, at the same time allowing the achievement of strict personal and wider community goals. The blending of wine and agritourism is seen as in-

evitable, as they complement each other, which results in the increased competitiveness of local tourism products. Agritourism providers are aware of the value that the combination of agritourism and wine tourism has for their business, accepting its singularity and unexploited potential for (co-creative) experiences.

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