



## Olive oil tourism: Promoting rural development in Andalusia (Spain)



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### ABSTRACT

Foods with certificates of quality are gaining more and more relevance in people's diets. Every day there is more of a demand to visit production facilities, to learn how food products are elaborated and to sample them. These products include olive oil, a typical product from Andalusia (southern Spain). This study aims to analyze what olive oil tourism has to offer in this region. A survey was conducted on companies on the olive-oil gastronomic route and their designations of origin in order to determine their degree of involvement in the development of the tourism product of "olive oil tourism". The main contribution of this study is that is the first to analyze several olive-oil Designations of Origin from all of Andalusia, looking for the synergies with other gastronomic routes in the region, which could increase visitors' demands and also the level of development and wealth in the area.

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### 1. Introduction

Gastronomic tourism is one of the tourist areas becoming more popular in Spain, due to a more selective demand on the part of tourist consumers who prefer a select quality product adapted to their tastes and needs. There is no one single profile for this type of tourist, but rather a variety depending on the type of tourism involved – wine lovers do not present the same characteristics as olive-oil enthusiasts (Millán & Pérez, 2014; Millán, Arjona & Amador, 2014; Moral & Orgaz, 2014), so it is necessary to know what they are looking for and what desires they seek to satisfy during the trips they take. Then strategies can be established, depending on the local tourism product, to increase demand without harming the local community, designing a sustainable tourism product.

Cuisine is part of the cultural identity of a territory. Given its historical and cultural facets, food has become a tourism resource and not only as a facilitator of the tourist experience. Therefore, traditional food can be the element that differentiates a place (Renko & Bucar, 2014; Alonso & Krajsic, 2013). If the proper tourism products are identified, the products will not only increase the value of a destination but also their own; local identity is intertwined with the territory and its produce (Barrera & Bringas, 2008). Gastronomy, as a tourism resource, is not only appreciated for its own intrinsic value but also for its symbolic character in that it acts as an identifier of peoples and territories (Armesto & Gómez, 2004). Some traditional foodstuffs are protected as Intangible Heritage by the UNESCO, and the places where they are

produced or manufactured are identified by this distinction (the gingerbread craft in northern Croatia).

One can also call gastronomic tourism those visits to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and specific places where the sampling of dishes and/or experimentation with the attributes of a region specialized in the production of food is the main reason behind a journey (Schlüter & Thiel, 2008). In the Spanish tourism panorama, gastronomic tourism is one of the up-and-coming products in development in recent years. This type of tourism has gained the support of public entities such as the General Secretariat of Tourism within the Framework "Quality touristic products" and has encouraged the development of Gastronomic Routes, the most well-known being those of wine, although others exist, like cheese, ham or olive oil routes.

The potential of the resources that Spain can offer underlies this growing development: geographical and cultural diversity provide a wide variety of foods and ways to prepare them (Gómez & Armesto, 2002). The enhancement of these resources is providing new opportunities in many territories, especially rural ones; this type of tourism is becoming an important stimulus for the economy and culture of these areas. The development of gastronomic tourism contributes to integrate the primary traditional productive function with a specialized tertiary one, increasing sources of income and improving earnings and employment levels in the local population, while endowing rural areas with multifunctionality.

Among these agricultural products is olive oil, probably one of the most representative in the balance of payments of Spanish agricultural-food exportation and a symbol of its gastronomic wealth. Even so, due to its characteristics (not only oligopeptic, but also with respect to the traditions and emotional ties it can evoke), it transcends its merely nutritional aspect, and thus considered, can surround itself with an

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industry dedicated to attracting tourists, in order to simultaneously explain the real meaning of olive oil and create a new channel of economic diversification in the Spanish countryside for those dedicated to farming, and the environment that survives with them, developing ways to recuperate income levels that have been diminishing in recent years (Ruiz, Molina, & Martin, 2011).

The territory is one of the key factors that determine the supply and demand of olive oil tourism. Spain, along with Italy Greece, France and Portugal, form the core of traditional olive-oil producing countries, the core of the economy of many regions and furthermore the basis of their ecological balance (Moreno, Rubio, & Guerra, 2011).

This paper analyses the possibilities of olive oil tourism in a region of Spain (Andalusia) in order to study this tourist product, and the involvement of different agents in the development of olive-oil tourist routes, a basic pillar for developing this modality of tourism.

## 2. Literature review

Gastronomy in Spain has revealed itself to be a diverse and rich tourism resource, which forms an intrinsic part of its culture far-removed from the hustle and bustle, relishing the present moment (López, 2006). Especially in rural zones, gastronomy involves introducing typical dishes to the consumer, cooked in traditional ways with natural and local elements, far removed from designer kitchens and devoid of fashionably foreign elements or the modernistic drizzling of brightly colored sauces that water down the splendor of the purest sovereign tradition of Spanish cuisine. Therefore, traditional cuisine predominates in rural areas while designer kitchens characterize urban areas, but what they both have in common is using food to satisfy the aspirations of gastronomic tourism travellers (Kivela & Crofts, 2006; Hillel, Belhassen, & Shani, 2013). Gastronomy and therefore the foods that compose it, as well as supplying physical and nutritional needs, have the ability to confer a wide range of material and symbolic elements, since “just like spoken language, the food system contains and conveys the culture of those who practice it; it is the guardian of traditions and the identity of a group. Therefore, it is an extraordinary vehicle for self-representation and cultural exchange” (Montanari & Staniscia, 2009:1465).

There are many studies on gastronomic tourism, some based on research about gastronomy in a specific geographic zone or for products like wine (Cohen & Ben-Nun, 2009; Mitchell, Charters, & Albrecht, 2012; Cho, Bonn, & Brymer, 2014; Alonso, Bressan, O’Shea, & Krajsic, 2015; Medina, 2015; Schlüter & Norrild, 2015; Stewart, Bramble, & Ziraldo, 2008), tequila (Camargo, Garza, & Morales, 2014; Millán, Caridad, Arjona & Amador, 2014), or cheese (Blanco, 2012; Marcoz, Melewar, & Dennis, 2016). Olive oil tourism is a relatively recent addition to the area of produce tourism and there are fewer studies into it than for other products, such as wine. However, there are a growing number of studies analysing this type of tourism, examining different aspects such as economic development in rural areas (Duarte & Northcote, 2010; Millán, Agudo, & Morales, 2011; Molina, Quesada, & Ruiz, 2011; Ruiz et al., 2011; De Salvo, Hernández, Di Clemente, & Calzati, 2013; Moral, Cañero, Orgaz, & López-Guzmán, 2014; Hernández, Folgado, & Campón, 2016), analysis of the tourist profile (Millán & Pérez, 2014; López-Guzmán, Cañero, Moral, & Orgaz-Agüera, 2016) or analysis of olive producing territories as a tourist resource (Barreca, Marciandò, & Menguzzato, 2014; Millán, Amador, & Arjona, 2015). Despite this, there are no studies analysing olive oil tourism exclusively from the point of view of the profile of the supplier.

Gastronomic routes are an interesting instrument for positioning products and associating them with a geographic quality appellation (Barrera, 2003). According to Millán and Pérez (2014), gastronomic routes should be viewed as a rural product, thereby forming part of the tourism offer in territories. The promotion of food brands through these routes will be a means of promoting typical regional products, and adding value to the service/product offered to satisfy tourist demand. The promotion of culinary and gastronomic heritage does not

only include sample tasting on the premises but also the acquisition of regional food products as *souvenirs*.

These routes are defined as an itinerary that allows the agricultural and industrial productive process and the sampling of the regional cuisine that is considered an expression of cultural regional identity. They are made up of producers who receive tourists in their establishments and offer them samples to taste, and regional restaurants that showcase their traditional dish menus based on primary local production and agro-industries in the area. They are organized around a key product that characterises the route named after it or, in some cases, around a basket of products, and the itinerary is developed based on the roadway network (Schlüter & Thiel, 2008) (Fig. 1).

The route should offer those who travel it a series of pleasures and activities related to the distinctive elements of the product itself: food, agricultural production, rural activities, entertainment within nature and activities typical of the regional culture. They are organized in order to: consolidate the productive culture of the region, enhance regional foods, stimulate the development of Quality Brands (including the Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographical Indications (PGI), organic products... etc.), boost regional economies, promote regional dishes and foment national gastronomic culture. The establishments that form part of the route receive tourists and serve them, while regional restaurants highlight traditional dishes in their menus based on primary local produce and the agro-industrial suppliers in the area.

The routes can be organized differently (Barrera, 2006):

- *Gastronomical Routes by products*: These are routes organised based on a specific product: wine, olive oil, cheese, etc. are the most frequent.
- *Gastronomic Routes by dishes*: This refers to an organisation based on the most important dishes elaborated with the agrarian product, (for example, in the Mediterranean diet the essential element is olive oil). That is, the cuisine is the main theme of the organisation.

Innumerable activities can be related to the products that characterise the route: visiting the producers, who receive tourists in their establishments showing them the process involved in their elaboration and offering samples of the products for tasting; restaurants that offer traditional dishes with local produce; museums, etc. All of these link the product to its place of origin.

Public entities and producers should link tourism with food products when they are designing a gastronomic route. They should never ignore the annexes that link the *cluster* of foods and drinks to tourism, because this could lead to losing opportunities for development and markets for both the entities and producers. Among the elements that characterise a gastronomic route are:

- a) The product that distinguishes one region from another.
- b) The culinary trail developed using a highway network.
- c) The establishments found along the route named after the product, that distribute or promote the product in question.
- d) A minimum number of members on each route to justify its inauguration.
- e) A regulatory law that controls the functioning of its participants.
- f) A regional menu with dishes that have been prepared with the products that characterise the route.
- g) A local organisation, association or tourism office that offers information on the culinary trail.
- h) A map with information with explanations about the location and the product(s) in question.
- i) A culinary selection offering the product in restaurants and in local venues.

In Mediterranean Europe, and Spain in particular, there is a vast tradition in designations of origin and geographical indications, denominations that link the quality of a food product to its geographical origin and that favour the creation of a tourist route based on gastronomy. There

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