

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

TOURISM AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WINE- MAKING SECTOR IN MOUNTAIN AREAS WITH A “HIGH HERITAGE DENSITY”

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Over the last four decades, the wine industry has become one of the most solid pieces in the rural economy of Castile and Leon (Spain). However, while the central plains have seen the development of a highly competitive and globalised business, the value of vineyards situated in mountain areas along the edge of the region has not been properly acknowledged until quite recently, when depopulation and abandonment had already caused nearly irreparable damage to the most outstanding elements of exceptionally valuable agricultural landscapes. And yet, the present century has so far witnessed the emergence of these areas into the quality wine scene on the strength of features like the *authenticity* and *integrity* of their landscapes, as yet unaffected by the standardising changes brought about by modernisation. This has been the result of several novel initiatives and strategies adopted by a number of players in order to showcase the singularity of certain elements within a global context: unique and exclusive varieties, old vineyards, sustainable practices and scenic excellence. Positive externalities and intangible assets revolving around landscape and heritage become the springboard for the promotion of quality wines supported by a sense of local identity and by tourism's demand for previously institutionalised cultural and natural hallmarks.

The present paper pursues two major goals. The first one is to assess the role played by tourism in the reactivation of these vine-growing areas that are both fragile and resilient. The initial hypothesis in this regard is that the inflow of visitors does not only have a major impact on the current market strategies and on the heritagisation of the most consolidated segments of the wine market, but furthermore serves as a lever for transformation in such areas as already possess an institutionally recognised natural and cultural

heritage that consolidates these destinations as significant tourist attractions. Secondly, our research attempts to foreground the contradictions raised by this new frame of reference. In this sense, a marketing strategy that uses landscape without considering the role played by vine growing in the latter's quality (and the consequent need for policies targeted at overcoming long-pending issues of neglect and decline) will not yield the results that are needed. In order to illustrate this point, the article zooms in on two vineyards in Castile and Leon's Sierra de Salamanca. Their fragility, heritage density and strong local identity make these vineyards a good example of the kind of ongoing processes that are becoming more visible in other areas in the region where special protection measures have encouraged the emergence of a number of tourist destinations and enlarged their potential for economic and social growth by combining tradition and modernity on the principles of quality and uniqueness.

The paper's research methodology, on the other hand, resorts to a review of the most relevant literature as well as to the consultation of sources and documents published by the several public and private administrations involved. Above all else, however, the present research relies on field work entailing landscape reconnaissance and the assessment of the latter's values, as well as interviews with winemakers, vinegrowers and people responsible for the Protected Designation of Origin (D.O.P.). All of which ultimately evidenced that, contrary to the productivist model, competitive only in terms of product price, progress is being made towards "production models that exhibit greater diversification and differentiation as regards quality and attachment to territory" (Plaza, Cañizares & Ruiz, 2017:566). In such cases, tourism acts as a first order heritage-building factor (in the sense of preserving, managing and enhancing the value of resources), while additionally promoting — in the framework of new parameters, practices and stakeholders— the vine-growing and wine-making activity in mountain regions.

The Sierra de Salamanca is one of those areas that remained unaffected by productivist trends. The decay of what had been a rich and complex rural society whose economy rested on the production of wine, oil, honey, handicrafts, etc., ultimately led, by virtue of the new social values, to the construction of some kind of mythical "sierra": an imaginary and evocative territory (Llorente, 2001: 30-31) redefined against the backdrop of heritage and consolidated as one of the most outstanding destinations in Castile and Leon's rural tourism. In this context, and just as the naturalisation of the terroir seemed to be an inevitable outcome, vines and wine are becoming reactivated on the strength of the quality of local wines and the singularity of landscapes that are increasingly valued by visitors. Such developments are promoted by new wine-making players that engage innovative approaches to wine production and design imaginative strategies so as to hold a competitive position in the wine sector. Yet the thrust of wine making is countered by the issue of vineyard abandonment. This is a source of concern as regards the supply of quality grapes and the preservation of the Sierra's natural scenery. For this reason, it is contradictory to emphasise the value of landscape without implementing landscape management policies. At best one can find a buildup of individual interventions by the bodies responsible for the protection of natural spaces and cultural assets without a specific plan of action in order to safeguard vineyard sites. From this point of view, vineyard landscape protection remains a pending task in the Sierra.

The paper's conclusions underscore the fact that tourism is indeed an important trigger in the revival and relaunching of wine making in mountain areas. Our findings confirm the claim that tourism is not just one of the future alternatives for the diversification of activities in already consolidated wine-making areas, but can moreover become a decisive factor in the reclaiming of vineyards that in the past failed to modernise. Wine tourism, however, does not solely depend on the quality of wines, but rather has to do with the multisensory experience involved in vine growing and wine making: an experience that visitors perceive in an integral way. Against this background, landscape plays a critical role given its totalising import. This is why vineyard reclamation and the revival of wine making in fragile environments should not only focus on the work of wine producers and wine experts, no matter how important the latter is in positioning the local product in wine listings from which it was practically absent until a decade ago. Landscape involves more than form and meaning to be presented — with varying degrees of success— in promotion and market positioning strategies: above all it means function. Thence the need to maintain a living agriculture: one that implies participatory and integrative management; a common project, in short, that brings together the interests of winemakers, vinegrowers and actors in the tourism industry. From this point of view, the status of Biosphere Reserve granted to the Sierra de Béjar and the Sierra de Francia opens up an avenue of great interest and potential. Firstly, because agricultural landscapes in general and vineyard landscapes in particular, are key to gaining a comprehensive understanding of mountain areas that have so far remained fragmented between historical sites and natural spaces. Secondly, because while still lacking adequate means, biosphere reserves do enjoy legitimacy in policy implementation targeted at managing and protecting wine-related assets that possess special heritage values (as regards specific patterns of use, structures and buildings associated with vine growing and wine production), including the possibility of drawing up a solid and feasible management project involving multifocal strategies that harmonise the preservation of traditional features and the needs of areas that are socially living, economically active and territorially integrated.

