

## AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF OLIVE TOURISM CONSUMERS

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### **Abstract**

**The Purpose** – The production of olive oil is one of the most important agricultural activities in Mediterranean countries. As such, and given the importance of wine and food tourism in recent years, there is a potential commitment to the development of olive tourism.

**Design** – This paper aims to analyse the kind of the tourist for whom one of the reasons for travelling to a certain destination is to get to know the production of olive oil.

**Methodology** – The methodology for conducting this research was based on fieldwork to learn about different aspects of tourists interested in learning about olive oil production.

**Approach** – In this paper we present the results of fieldwork in Andalusia (Spain), the most important olive oil producing area in the world, to understand the relationship between olive oil and tourism. This paper also tries to create a profile of this kind of tourist.

**Findings** – The results show the significant judgement that respondent tourists make of this agricultural activity, their satisfaction with the experience and also their relationship with rural activities and culture.

**Originality of the research** – This paper is one of the first studies to be carried out in an important destination for olive tourism in Europe.

**Keywords** Agritourism, Rural Development, Destinations, Culture, Andalusia

### **INTRODUCTION**

Olive oil is a basic food product which represents the culture and heritage of a particular geographical area, centred mainly in Mediterranean Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. It is also a key element in the Mediterranean Diet, declared Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2010, due to, among other reasons, how it is preserved, transformed, cooked, shared and consumed, and where olive oil is a key element. It also implies an essential aspect in gastronomy, understood as a cultural component that differentiates ethnic groups and nationalities (Alonso and Krajsic, 2013) and it can be identified as food heritage and can benefit from the importance acquired by gastronomy in relation to tourism (Henderson, 2009; Lee Scott, 2015). Therefore, olive oil is not only a food product, it also has other features that exert their influence on other areas of society and knowledge such as culture, health, ecology, economy and tourism (Ruiz Guerra, 2010).

Moreover, in recent years there has been an increase in the popularity of gastronomy and wine tourism, reflected both in the increase in supply and demand and the significant increase in academic research, and now, based on this research, it is being

transferred to similar products and destinations, which prominently highlights olive tourism (Alonso and Northcote, 2010) because of the similarities between the two activities and even the synergies that occur between them. In fact, the concept, the territorial development and the planning of wine tourism can help to implement olive tourism in rural areas (Alonso and Northcote, 2010). Thus, there are already significant tourism resources related to olive oil such as olive oil mills, specialized museums, landscapes or festivals that can enhance this activity (Murgado, 2013). Therefore, there is a potential link between agricultural areas, hospitality and tourism implying a significance for destinations and for local communities, for example, an increase in employment, income diversification and the development of new products (Alonso, 2010). However, this requires a strong and distinct culinary image of the destination (Alonso, 2010), and furthermore it must be clearly identifiable by travellers.

The aim of this paper is to present the results of research to determine the socio-demographic profile, ratings and motivations of tourists visiting olive oil mills, olive oil interpretation centres and olive oil museums in the geographical area of the provinces of Jaén and Córdoba, in the region of Andalusia (Spain), the most important area in the world in production of olive oil, with the aim of reinforcing the research that exists in the field of olive oil tourism and, in general, with the links that relate gastronomy and tourism. To achieve this goal, the paper is structured after this introduction in a second section where a literature review is made, a third section that refers to the description of the geographical area, a fourth section where the research methodology is presented, and a fifth section where the main results of this research are shown. This article ends with the conclusions and the bibliographical references used.

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The term that defines the relationship between tourism and olive oil involves different concepts such as agritourism, olive tourism, olive oil tourism or olive-based agritourism. Some authors (Ruiz Guerra, 2010; López-Guzmán and González-Fernández, 2011) even consider that olive tourism, in addition to being a manifestation of agritourism, is also a manifestation of cultural tourism and even health tourism. Indeed, early studies in this field are in farm tourism as a form of relationship between jobs within agriculture and tourism (Murphy, 1985). According to Pulina et al. (2006) the three interrelationships that exist between tourism and a sustainable development are their economic, social and environmental interrelation which implies a growing interest in tourism conducted in rural areas due to an increase both in demand and in supply in infrastructure and services.

Earlier studies in the field of olive tourism were conducted in Australia (Alonso, 2010; Alonso and Northcote, 2010; Northcote and Alonso, 2011) and later expanded to Europe, specifically to Italy and Spain (Ruiz Guerra, 2010; López-Guzmán and González-Fernández 2011; Murgado 2013; De Salvo et al., 2013; Millán Vázquez de la Torre et al., 2014; Campón-Cerro et al., 2014). Thus, Alonso and Northcote (2010) present research on the basis of 23 growers dedicated to the olive oil industry in Western Australia where they present it as a new experience for tourism within rural tourism, where the tourist destination is characterized by a combination of local

agricultural products, landscape and leisure. Meanwhile, Ruiz Guerra (2010) presents one of the first investigations based on demand for olive tourism and focused on the opinions and perspectives of university students.

The concept of olive tourism has emerged as a line of direct marketing of olive products to consumers, generating other sources of business (Alonso and Krajsic, 2013) in line with what happened in the wine tourism and widely discussed in the scientific literature (Mitchell and Hall, 2006; Alebaki and Iakovidou, 2010). However, the absence of research in the field of olive tourism is obvious, due mainly to the scarce tradition of this type of tourism (Alonso and Northcote, 2010). It is therefore necessary to increase academic research in the field of analysis of relationships between the olive oil mills and attracting tourists, combining hospitality with different tourism activities, including the sale of agricultural products, or the study of how to structure and strengthen overnight stays in these geographical areas of those tourists who are interested in agricultural activities or, in general, as Ruiz Guerra (2010) notes, in activities related to the olive oil culture. The development of olive tourism could represent the strengthening of the image of olive oil and, at the same time, an added value thereof (Alonso and Northcote, 2010) both through an increased knowledge of the olive oil world and by direct sales of this product (Alonso, 2010). On the other hand, the main visitors to these geographical areas related with olive tourism come from bus tours, student groups and community groups (Northcote and Alonso, 2011), thus efforts should be made to reinforce the possibility of also receiving people who organize their trips individually. Nevertheless, right now tourist routes are poorly developed due to the existence of a small number of tourist activities as well as to low development in terms of marketing and management (Murgado, 2013).

The development of olive tourism could mean a potential benefit for different players (Alonso and Northcote, 2010). Namely, for agricultural producers of olive oil, as it could mean a new way of marketing their products and at the same time, finding income from other pathways, such as tourist services; for visitors, as olive tourism offers a different experience and at the same time, the possibility of getting to know a product with strong Mediterranean roots; and for tourist services' companies, through the creation of restaurant or catering services, farm tourism or olive tourism routes. Thus, among the activities that could be developed by olive tourism, we find the direct sale of oil, the visit to the olive oil mills by tourists, tasting of olive oil, learning about the olive oil world or contemplation of the landscape areas where it is located (Alonso and Krajsic, 2013). Nonetheless, for the development of olive tourism the location of this geographical area is critical, being the proximity to main tourist routes a competitive advantage (Northcote and Alonso, 2011). Likewise, the decision to supplement agricultural production with sales-orientated services in the same location and with tourist activities is equally important. And it would be a key factor for the development of olive tourism considering the economic conditions of the geographical area, the level of partnership between private companies and local and regional authorities and the level of tourism services that exist in the area (Northcote and Alonso, 2011).

Based on the development of olive tourism, different routes have been created, the main one being The Routes of the Olive Tree ([www.olivetreeroute.gr](http://www.olivetreeroute.gr)) which was created in 2005 (Dodd, 2011). This route is based on the fact that olive trees are one of the plants that are most often cited in literature and even in legends, being a symbol of peace. In fact, this route covers the knowledge of the following subjects related to the olive tree: heritage and culture, innovation, economics, olive products, strategy, development and environment. Nowadays this is a cultural route approved by the Council of Europe where the landscape of olive groves is reinforced, it is carried out through different Mediterranean countries and it is integrated into the EU Interreg III Sud programme in seeking tourist development of local resources associated with the production of olive oil. However, the main problems for the structuring of olive tourism are as follows (Murgado, 2013): lack of cooperation between those involved in the supply of tourist products, inexperience and lack of personnel training among olive tourism service providers, poor business infrastructure, lack of attractive tourist products in the market to spark demand for olive oil related tourism, and poor interactive marketing.

## 2. DESCRIPTION OF THE GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

As for world production of olive oil, table 1 shows the production in the main olive-growing countries for the agricultural seasons from 2010/11 to 2013/14.

Table 1: World production of olive oil (figures in thousands of tons)

Country	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Spain	1,391.9	1,615.0	616.3	1,536.6
Italy	440	399.2	415.5	450
Greece	301	294.6	357.9	230
Syria	180	198	198	135
Turkey	160	191	195	180
Morocco	139	120	100	120
Tunisia	120	182	220	80
Portugal	62.9	62.9	59.1	76.2
Other	199.2	183.8	177.7	391.7
Total	2,994.0	3,246.5	2,339.5	3,199.5

Source: Own elaboration based on the International Olive Council (2014)

According to table 1, we see that Spain produces over 60% of the world production of olive oil, with the exception of the 2012/13 season where production was very low due to the weather conditions. Also, in Spain, the region of Andalusia usually provides just over 80% of the total production and in turn, over 60% of this production comes from two provinces, Jaén and Córdoba. In turn, these two provinces annually provide a figure close to 35% of the world production of olive oil. These figures indicate the relevance of this economic activity in Andalusia, and more specifically in these two provinces. For this reason, a significant increase in the synergies between the production of olive oil and tourism is taking place. Moreover, this is coupled with the importance of tourism in this region and more specifically in these two provinces

where the cities of Córdoba, Úbeda and Baeza are World Heritage Sites, and where there is great proximity to the province of Málaga, a very well established tourism destination of sun and sand (López-Guzmán and González-Fernández, 2011).

In Spain, there are 31 Protected Designations of Origin (PDO) related to olive oil and recognized by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Environment (2014). This system allows us to recognize the quality of the product, based on its own characteristics and quality which differentiates each geographical area (Hinojosa-Rodríguez et al., 2014). Out of these 31 PDO, 12 are in the region of Andalusia, out of which seven are located in the provinces of Jaén and Córdoba. Thus, in the province of Jaén are the PDOs of Sierra Magina, Sierra de Segura, Sierra de Cazorla; and in the province of Córdoba are the PDOs of Baena, Lucena, Priego de Córdoba and Montoro-Adamuz.

In relation to the boosting of olive tourism in Andalusia, again the provinces of Jaén and Córdoba are the ones which have most advanced in this field. Thus in the province of Jaén, the Provincial Council of Jaén, Spain (Aybar León, 2004; Dodd, 2011) created a route called oléotourisme ([www.oleoturismo.com](http://www.oleoturismo.com)), which addresses the existence of olive tourism from different areas such as heritage and culture, innovation, economics, olive oil products, development and environment strategies. Meanwhile, in the province of Córdoba, planning of oleotourism is carried out through the design and implementation of eight different routes covering the different designations of origin. Both proposals show the potential for development of olive tourism in Spain (Murgado, 2013).

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology for conducting this research was based on fieldwork to learn about different aspects of tourists interested in learning about the production of olive oil. Thus, we have analysed the socio-demographic profile of travellers, their motivation, their assessment of the different features of the geographical area, their knowledge of the world of olive oil and their satisfaction with the trip. To conduct this research, a face-to-face survey was conducted to tourists in the region of Andalusia. Convenience sampling was used, this being commonly utilized in this type of research where respondents are available to be interviewed in a specific space and time (Finn et al., 2000)

The structure of the survey used in this research is based on various previous studies (Alonso and Northcote, 2010; Molina Moreno et al., 2011; De Salvo et al., 2013) and responds to three groups of variables analysed during the tourist visit (Poria et al., 2003): first, socio-demographic characteristics of tourist respondent; second, the motivations to visit the geographical area; and third, the rating by tourist of different variables related to the destination.

The fieldwork, based on surveys, took place between the months of April and October, 2014. Six survey points (two olive oil mills, two olive oil museums and two visitor centres) were chosen in the major olive-growing areas of Andalusia, particularly in the provinces of Jaén and Córdoba and corresponding with the PDO with higher annual

production olive oil. Participants completed the survey with complete independence, although the interviewers were present in case they had some kind of difficulty in filling it in. The survey was distributed in four languages (Spanish, English, French and German). The survey was completely anonymous. Previously, a pre-test of 30 surveys was conducted to detect possible deviations and errors. A total of 414 questionnaires were obtained.

The items used in the survey are intended to respond to the indicators and measures proposed for carrying out the analysis of the tourist demand. The number of items was 19. Thus, three types of questions were used: first, questions based on a Likert 5-point scale to assess the opinion of visitors; second, yes / no answers for the perception of certain aspects related with the geographical area; third, questions, both closed and open, where tourist surveyed could make comments on their olive tourism experience.

Table 2 shows the technical details of the research conducted on the analysis of olive tourism in Andalusia.

Table 2: **Technical details of the research**

Sample	414 surveys
Procedure	Convenience sampling
Performance period	April-October 2014
Performance location	Six points of the survey in the provinces of Jaén and Córdoba in the region of Andalusia
Sample Control	Implementation and monitoring of fieldwork by the authors of the research

Source: Own elaboration

The data collected were organized, tabulated and analysed using the SPSS version 19.0. Data processing was performed through the use of univariate and bivariate statistical tools such as mean analysis and variance analysis.

#### **4. RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION**

Table 3 shows the socio-demographic profile of respondent olive tourists taking into account the variables of gender, country of origin, age, educational level, occupational status and level of income.

Table 3: Social and demographic profile of the tourist

<i>Variables</i>		<i>%</i>	<i>Variables</i>		<i>%</i>
Gender (N = 394)	Male	43.1	Educational level (N = 388)	Primary education	12.3
	Female	56.9		Secondary education	35.1
Country of origin (N = 401)	Spain	43.1	Category Professional (N = 386)	University education	52.6
	France	28.2		Retired	40.4
	United Kingdom	11.7		Self-employed	16.1
	Germany	6.2		Employee	13.7
	USA	3.2		Student	13.0
	Other	7.6		Civil Servant	10.1
Age (N = 391)	Under 30 years	14.6	Income (N = 333)	Housewife	6.7
	30-39 years old	6.6		Under €700	6.0
	40-49 years old	9.8		From €700 to €1,000	6.3
	50-59 years old	15.3		From €1,001 to €1,500	23.7
	60 years old or more	53.7		From €1,501 to €2,500	32.7
				Over €2,500	31.3

Source: Own elaboration

According to table 3, we see that the profile of olive tourists has a higher percentage of women, moreover originally from Spain, France and the UK, mainly aged over 50, with an average medium-high level of income, retired and with a university educational level. The percentage of respondent tourists who indicated they did not previously know this geographical area was 68.1%. As for the time spent in the area, 47.1% indicated that they will stay between 3 and 7 days. We believe that this response is due to the tourist importance of this geographical area, the provinces of Jaén and Córdoba since, according to Northcote and Alonso (2011), this area has the competitive advantage of being within a large tourist route both because of the location of some of the World Heritage Sites of Spain and the proximity of the coastal areas of the city of Málaga. Tourists mainly travel with work colleagues or friends (40.8%) or with a partner (34.6%). In this sense, most of the respondent tourists have visited the places where the survey points were located through organized groups of tourists, there being very few tourists surveyed who approached these places individually, confirming the results obtained by Northcote and Alonso (2012). We believe that this finding should serve to strengthen the promotion of these places so they can also reach people who organize the trip individually. On the other hand, and as to the reason why they have visited this place, there is the recommendation of family and friends (24.6%) and the recommendation of the travel agent (12.4%). Also, those tourists who had already

visited this area explained that they had been very pleased with their experience and they indicated that they would like to return. Therefore, we would find an important loyalty to this geographical area, a variable that has already been identified in other scientific works (Correia et al., 2008) and which is of great relevance in consolidating a destination. On the other hand, negatively, we can highlight the lack of information available on this geographical area and on the possibility of knowing the olive oil world through the Internet as only 2% stated they had learned of these places through Internet. We believe that this result should serve to enhance the visibility of olive tourism through the Internet, and for it to become known by potential tourists visiting this geographical area. Additionally, the position of the different websites related to olive tourism should be strengthened, some of which have previously been outlined, to reinforce both the destination and the tourism product.

The main motivations for visiting this geographical area are set out in table 4, measured on a Likert 5-point scale, with 1 being very little and 5 very much.

Table 4: **Main motivations for visiting the geographical area**

Motivations	Score	Std. deviation
Getting to know the geographical area	3.94	1.28
Learning about the world of olive oil	3.75	1.37
Eating and drinking traditional products	3.55	1.28
Entertainment	3.46	1.38
Relaxation	3.13	1.35
Spending a day out	3.07	1.50
Tasting different kinds of oil	2.89	1.52
Buying oil	2.62	1.50
Visiting friends and family	1.81	1.47
Work	1.61	1.26

Source: Own elaboration

According to table 4, the main reasons for the visit are to know the geographical area and to learn about the world of olive oil. Insofar as learning about the world of olive oil is concerned, it is considered one of the most important reasons that reinforces the tourist experience (Alonso and Krajsic, 2013) along with tasting typical gastronomic products of the area, also one of the most valued reasons by respondent tourists. On the other hand, the low rating given by tourists surveyed to purchase oil is significant. We believe that this result stems from the problem of transferring olive oil by airplane, since the levels of intent to purchase are significantly lower among foreigners than among Spaniards, who usually travel by bus. In fact, this result is similar to that obtained in research carried out on wine tourism in Andalusia where a similar problem arises as to the transport of wine by plane (López-Guzmán et al., 2014). According Alonso et al. (2007), it is necessary to segment, to determine and to relate the profiles of tourists with different aspects and elements of this typology of tourism. Therefore, an association has been detected between the gender and tasting different kinds of oil (Pearson's Chi-square coefficient = 7.541;  $p = 0.090$ ) and between the country of origin and the entertainment (Pearson's Chi-square coefficient = 126.122;  $p = 0.000$ ).



On the other hand, and with respect to the consumption of olive oil, 51.9% of tourists surveyed admit they consume this product every day, while 24.6% do so regularly. An association was detected between the country and the daily consumption of olive oil (Pearson's Chi-square coefficient = 211.448;  $p = 0.000$ ). Therefore, we believe it would be necessary to reinforce the research to check if foreign tourists who have visited olive oil production areas have further strengthened their consumption of olive oil of these areas in their countries of origin.

As for the main ratings of different variables related to the tourist destination where the survey takes place, the main results are set out in table 5, measured on a Likert 5-point scale, with 1 being very little and 5 very much, and with a reliability index according to Cronbach's Alpha of 0.899. The high rate of reliability obtained reinforces the validity of the research work carried out (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994).

**Table 5: Rating of different variables related to the tourist destination**

Variable	Rating	Std. deviation
Hospitality	4.18	1.05
Conservation of the environment	3.84	1.12
Cultural activities and entertainment	3.82	1.27
Restaurants	3.82	1.16
Cleaning	3.80	1.18
Citizen Safety	3.70	1.06
Accommodation	3.69	0.93
Olive oil mills	3.66	1.11
Information and signage	3.52	1.12
Price of the trip	3.51	1.14
Ecology	3.50	1.03
Communications	3.35	1.08
Telecommunications	3.33	1.01
Shopping area	3.01	1.27
Sports activities	2.56	1.31

Source: Own elaboration

According to Table 5, respondent tourists mostly valued hospitality, environmental conservation, cultural activities and restaurants. This implies that this type of tourism, in addition to being closely related to rural tourism, also has a significant cultural component, consistent with the conclusion of Ruiz Guerra (2010), given that, in addition, the geographical area under study, as we noted above, is located near three World Heritage cities. Therefore, we consider it important to strengthen the cultural aspect of olive oil as a tourist experience, as occurs with gastronomic tourism and its relationship to culture (Lee & Scott, 2015). An association has been detected between the age and the shopping area (Pearson's Chi-square coefficient = 38.979;  $p = 0.007$ ) and between the country of origin and the hospitality (Pearson's Chi-square coefficient = 119.070;  $p = 0.000$ ).

With reference to the level of satisfaction, measured on a Likert 5-point scale (1, very dissatisfied, 5 very satisfied), its rating is 4.19. Furthermore, 41.7% of respondent tourists are very satisfied with this trip and 42.2% are satisfied. In addition, 85.7% of respondents would recommend visiting this geographical area and they would like to return to it.

## CONCLUSIONS

The consolidation of wine tourism, both in businesses and its demand for it, has enabled use of this experience to develop other related agriculture and food products. These products include olive tourism, consisting of knowing the geographical areas where olive oil is produced, as a basic ingredient of the Mediterranean Diet. In fact, the Mediterranean countries are precisely the most relevant olive oil producers in the world.

This paper shows the results of research on the demand for olive tourism in the provinces of Jaén and Córdoba in the region of Andalusia (Spain), the main producing area of olive oil in the world. This research aims to provide one of the first responses of the scientific literature regarding the socio-demographic profile and the motivation of tourism demand in this field. Thus, the socio-demographic profile of tourists visiting places related to olive oil (such as olive oil mills, museums and research centres) is an adult, with a significant level of education and upper middle class. Furthermore, the importance of the motivation of tourists both to get to know the rural geographical area and to learn about the world of olive oil is reinforced. It has also been found that this tourism product is associated with both the world of agritourism and, perhaps because of the importance of historical heritage, in the analysed geographical area, to cultural tourism. That is to say, tourists consider visiting these sites related to olive oil as part of their cultural trip.

We consider that the principal application of this research is to contribute to defining the socio-demographic profile and the motivations of the tourists that visit the geographical areas related to olive oil. Furthermore, the assessments of the attributes related to this destination made by the visitors are presented. This information can be very useful for the public administrations and private companies with the objective of creating tourism and cultural products that better satisfy the needs of the tourists and that, at the same time, are compatible with the sustainable management of the geographic area.

The main limitation of this research is that most of the tourists surveyed came to survey points through organized groups, due to the underdevelopment of this tourist product and where it is quite difficult to locate tourists who organize their trip individually, since most of them visit the area through groups who are managed by receiving tourism businesses.

As future lines of research, we propose studying to see if visiting these olive oil places has changed the behaviour of tourists in their place of origin with respect to consumption of olive oil and, above all, the purchase of olive oil that comes from the places they have visited.

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