

## **The role of gastronomy in the co-creation of visitors' experience in wine regions: the case of Bairrada and Dão**

### **O papel da gastronomia na cocriação da experiência turística do visitante em regiões vitivinícolas: o caso da Bairrada e do Dão**

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**Keywords** | Gastronomic experiences, wine regions, experience co-creation, visitors, qualitative approach

**Objectives** | The main aims of this study lie in recognizing the importance of gastronomy, with diverse contents and experience facets, when visitors co-create food & wine experiences in wine regions and understanding how exactly value was co-created in these experiences, in two Portuguese wine regions.

**Methodology** | To address this exploratory study, a qualitative approach was implemented, comprising content analysis of 32 semi-structured interviews that were applied to visitors of two Portuguese wine regions – Bairrada and Dão. The analysis of the relevance of gastronomy in the co-creative food & wine experiences visitors were part of in both regions was based on interviews with both visitors and six supply agents (namely a wine producer, the owner of a wine farm, winery staff, a rural accommodation director and the owner of a travel experience company) from the referred regions. The latter allowed the understanding of the perspective of those who design and deliver food & wine experiences integrating local food. Nvivo 12 was used to support content analysis.

**Main results and contributions** | The results of this study show that gastronomy is of fundamental importance in both wine regions, considering the visitors' perspective that clearly reveals how it adds value to the tourist experience when travelling to these areas (Carvalho et al, 2021a). Gastronomy was not identified exclusively as the main motivation to travel by the interviewees of these wine regions. Visitors of Bairrada also wanted to explore the natural context of the region (nature walks), have thermal treatments and cycling. In Dão region, visitors revealed interest in getting to know the destination (natural, cultural and historical traits) and socializing. Having the opportunity to taste wine and regional gastronomic products was identified as important in both wine contexts. Indeed, most participants expressed their appreciation of the contact with and enjoyment of local food products in experiences like food & wine pairing, wine

tasting with food pairing and in a culinary workshop, and stressed the positive impact these experiences had on their cognitive (e.g. when learning about cultural features of the regions associated local food peculiarities) and sensorial engagement with the visited place (e.g. smell of local fruits, grape varieties, and local dishes). Through local food products, visitors were exposed to typical flavours of the regions like the suckling pig and the desserts from Bairrada or the roasted goat from Dão region. Visitors considered that experiencing gastronomy in wine regions is also an opportunity to live enriched and multisensory experiences, which combine perfectly with wine tasting. A large proportion of those interviewed mentioned their potential interest in gastronomic experiences when travelling, namely interest in food tours, culinary workshops or tasting experiences. This fact can be a relevant insight to foster co-creative experiences for visitors in wine regions. Particularly in the Bairrada, visitors who were in the region for cycling and for having close contact with nature recognised the importance of gastronomy in the overall experience, without having had any expectations previously regarding this destination dimension. However, few learning opportunities and little sensory involvement was remarked in this group, and no reference was made to experiences of food& wine pairing, which underlines the relevance of fostering co-creation contexts in this field, enhancing the potential of promoting a more participative role of visitors. Even so, the interviewees were unanimous when recognising that the regular tasting experience of local gastronomy was a key element to the overall satisfaction with the experience in the wine destination. For the supply agents interviewed, gastronomy is a fundamental part of the experiences they facilitate, most of the time paired with the wines of the regions. These experiences also highlight the unique character of the local products, contributing to fostering the visitors' interest in the acquisition of food products or wines, i.e. to extend the experience over time, when returning home, and eventually sharing these products and stories regarding their experiences with others (Bernardo, et al, 2023). Besides facilitating co-creative experiences, supply agents also recognize the importance of the wineries' and restaurants' staff to promote interactive and valuable experiences. This qualitative study also adds value to the literature and may contribute to complementing quantitative studies in the field, given the relative recent nature of food & wine tourism research and the need of empirical evidence to gain in-depth understanding of this special-interest tourism.

**Limitations** | The primary limitation identified is the number of interviews conducted, which could have been higher. These interviews were carried out between May and June 2019, a period that restricted the availability of the stakeholders. Conducting additional interviews during the low season could provide insights into potential differences in behavior.

**Conclusions** | Understanding the relevance of gastronomy in wine regions is of crucial for appealing and distinct tourist experience and destination development. Visitors' central role was

identified, when food & wine experiences enabled greater involvement of the traveller (e.g., in the culinary workshop), which can be relevant in wine regions, given the growing interest visitors reveal in this domain. These experiences also enhance destinations' authenticity and may contribute to their competitiveness as well as to sustainable, local resource-based development of respective territories. For supply agents, the key role of local products in the experience co-creation opportunities they provide is recognised combined with wine experiences (Carvalho et al, 2021a), as visitors have the opportunity to learn about the region and its products through the understanding of the regional cuisine, of which wine is an essential part and through interaction with the staff, the chef at a winery restaurant or/ and the winemaker and enologist at a winery (Carvalho et al, 2021b).

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