

Sustainability interpretation and impacts of luxury tourism in Douro

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Objectives | The aim of this research is to identify the main impacts of climate change in the Douro region and how they are likely to affect tourism in the region, particularly luxury tourism. The project ends by highlighting one of the region's traditional products that everyone appreciates - wine. It became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2001. Already feeling the effects of climate change, the Douro is one of the hottest and driest regions in the country. For its landscapes, but also for its history, the Douro is an outstanding region. This work is also in recognition of the fact that luxury tourism is an emerging market in the region. Luxury tourists are looking for unique and personalized experiences. They are also increasingly interested in and concerned about the sustainability of the region. In this way, luxury and sustainability can complement each other. Companies have increasingly tried to focus on the quality and sustainability of their products, using local suppliers wherever possible. Unfortunately, the sustainability of the vineyards and the landscape remains a concern.

Methodology | It was decided to conduct a qualitative study to understand how people in the Demarcated Region of the Douro perceive the issue of sustainability and climate change. Through the main objective of the study and the initial questions, it is possible to identify the target population, the main study variables, and the type of research to be carried out. The final stage is to analyze all the information gathered to provide answers to the research questions and, consequently, suggestions for future research. Respondents are national companies involved in luxury and sustainable wine tourism in Douro demarcation area. Seven organizations involved in wine tourism in the Douro, one organization that teaches and co-ordinates wine courses, one organization involved in wine tourism in La Rioja, Spain and one hotel in the study region were interviewed.

Main results and contributions | In terms of production, Alonso et al. (2022) argue that the companies have a combination of tradition and innovation. Traditional production and maturing methods can still be found, while other innovative measures using new technologies, such as temperature control during fermentation, also help to improve the quality of the final product. However, to combat seasonality, it is necessary to create measures such as attractions for the region - which according to the interviewees include gastronomy, open-air cinema, museums, events, health, and wellness activities - but also public measures to help the region overcome economic crises, seasonality, and other problems. The analysis of the interviews shows that the focus is on the need for the creation of more conditions and attractions in the inland territory, but also on the need for more cooperation between local authorities. In this way, the sustainable development of tourism will be promoted, providing greater social development, economic opportunities, environmental protection, and political stability. Interviewees noted that climate change may require greater hydration of the vines and a reduction in the use of chemicals, thus promoting more ecological treatment of vineyards. All these effects ultimately affect the grapes, as they can increase sugar concentration and affect flavor, color, and price. In addition to the risks and impacts of climate change, market pressures, new environmental policies and reduced available inputs, Trigo and Silva (2022) argue that the wine industry is beginning to recognize the benefits of promoting sustainable ideas and realizing its competitive factor. Respondents highlighted their preference for reducing production in terms of quantity but prioritizing quality; adopting water, energy, and carbon efficiency measures; promoting voluntary action and supporting local communities and associations; seeking to regenerate ecosystems by reducing carbon emissions; seeking to use local products and suppliers and communicating this preference through storytelling. Those interviewed see luxury tourism as seeking something authentic, of high quality, offering privacy and exclusivity. There is also a belief that luxury tourists have a greater financial capacity and are therefore more concerned about paying more for more sustainable attitudes where they can enjoy high quality local products. Achieving luxury and sustainability certifications can have a positive impact on customer behavior. This increases the desire to visit and pay more for a particular product/service.

Limitations | It focused on a lack of answers from various wine-producing organizations. Initially, the aim was to interview only luxury organizations in the Douro. The difficulties of research in the Douro are mainly due to the time of year when the interviews take place. Harvesting is a time of great responsibility for companies. This prevents or limits their availability for participation in the proposed research. It was mainly their visibility and strong presence in the wine tourism market that led to the choice of organizations, namely the large companies. However, it was important to obtain the perspective of smaller organizations to make the study more comprehensive.

Nevertheless, despite the difficulties, the practices in question have given us an understanding of the impact of luxury tourism in the Douro and an idea of its degree of sustainability.

Conclusions | According to Bouchard (2020), in the case studied, Porto and the Douro Demarcated Region are characterized by their landscapes, but also by their unique products, traditions and tourist activities. Rachão (2020) also points out that products with a specific geographical indication have unique characteristics that guarantee an authentic tourist experience, moving away from a perspective of globalization of the service provided. The Douro is a diamond that needs polishing," said one of the interviewees. It is undoubtedly a unique and special region where you can combine food and wine with the landscape and have an immersive experience in the region. In addition to these points, the organizations also said that for the Douro to be perceived as a luxury destination, it is necessary to promote more handicrafts; have more seasonal offers that attract tourists all year round; customize experiences and make a difference; have trained and welcoming staff that make tourists feel like "one of us". The Douro has very specific characteristics. However, it is a region that is not only sought after for its gastronomy and wine tourism. It's not a region where only the luxury niche is the focus. The Douro is not a holiday destination, it is a complete experience. In this way, it is possible to find a segmentation of practices associated with luxury tourism and experiential tourism. According to the interviewees, the two can coexist.

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