

## **How heterogeneous are visitors of wine regions?**

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**Keywords** | Wine Regions, Visitors' Heterogeneity, Motivation, Experience, Loyalty Towards the Destination

**Objectives** | The relevant role of wine tourism in the development of territories is highly recognised worldwide (Kruger & Viljoen, 2021). However, while some people already visit wine regions due to wine motivations, for many other visitors of these destinations wine is not so important. Therefore, it is widely important to understand: (i) how distinct wine-motivated visitors are from other visitors of wine destinations, (ii) how valuable this segment is regarding loyalty towards the destination and (iii) which kind of experiences should be designed to increase this loyalty. Acknowledging that visitors of wine regions are distinct from each other, some researchers began exploring the heterogeneity of this market. Nevertheless, some only compare visitors of a specific wine attraction such as a winery, whereas few analyse the heterogeneity of the market of a whole wine region, and even some of the latter (e.g. López-Guzmán et al., 2014) do not provide insights on the value of the wine motivated visitors. Some previous studies already compare visitors of wine regions with different levels of involvement with wine or living distinct experiences (e.g. Cunha, 2023; Hernández et al., 2022), but they offer an incomplete perspective on the link between motivation related to wine and various other important issues to the competitiveness of the destination, such as experiences lived, satisfaction and loyalty towards the destination. The present study aims to fill this gap by comparing wine-motivated visitors (interested in tasting or learning about wine) with non-wine-motivated visitors, to understand how they differ concerning sociodemographic characteristics, travel motivations not related to wine, experience lived, satisfaction level, loyalty towards the destination and travel behaviour.

**Methodology** | A questionnaire survey was carried out among visitors of three wine regions of the Central Region of Portugal – Bairrada, Beira Interior and Dão – that encompass wine routes. The questionnaire included a question about the main motivations for visiting the region, as well as various other questions on the experience lived, level of satisfaction, loyalty towards the destination, travel behaviour and sociodemographic profile. The core questions were developed based on previous literature and were answered using 7-point Likert type scales. Respondents

were selected using a cluster approach based on place and time. The survey was conducted from August 2019 to June 2022 and 1530 complete questionnaires were obtained. The questionnaires were thus administered in different places such as tourism accommodations, museums, wineries, parks and other tourism attractions, during various months of the year, in weekends and working days. Data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 29. Independent samples t-tests were undertaken to compare wine-motivated visitors (those motivated, among other aspects by tasting or learning about wine) with non-wine-motivated visitors (who did not refer any of these two wine motivations).

**Main results and contributions** | Many statistically significant differences were found between wine-motivated and non-wine-motivated visitors. Wine-motivated visitors reveal to be more highly motivated, not only regarding wine, but also to socialise, be physically active and experience something new. Although the two groups of visitors became positively impressed by aesthetic issues of the destination, wine-motivated visitors were more active during the visit to the destinations, lived more sensory-appealing, educational and immersive experiences. They participated more actively in activities and had a higher interaction, not only with staff of visitor attractions, but also with local residents and other visitors. Moreover, wine-motivated visitors also became more satisfied with the visit to wine related places and were more loyal towards the destination, particularly regarding recommending it to their friends and relatives. The group of wine-motivated visitors is also distinct regarding travel behaviour (e.g. means of transport and information sources used) and socio-demographics (e.g. revealing a higher educational level). Despite the positive issues found about these destinations, some critical points are also noted, namely, the low level of appreciation of some sensory experiences (e.g. tactile), the little interaction with other people (residents, wineries' staff and other visitors) in general, and the considerable amount of visitors (more than 40%) for which the destination under analysis is not the most important of the trip.

**Limitations** | Despite being carried out in three wine regions this study was undertaken in only one country. Extending this research to other countries with different contexts regarding wine tourism and comparing wine-motivated with non-wine-motivated visitors on other constructs (e.g. sustainable behaviours), would be extremely valuable. The study also took place during the COVID-19 pandemic period, being important to repeat it in a non-pandemic period.

**Conclusions** | The present research reinforces the existence of different tourism market segments at wine regions, deserving different approaches. It highlights the value and relevance of wine-motivated visitors to wine regions revealing, not only, their high likelihood for becoming good promoters of these regions, recommending them to others, as also their potential to boost

dynamics at the destination level, due to their higher likelihood to actively engage in activities in the destination and to interact with residents, wineries' staff and other visitors. Nevertheless, it also reveals the importance of improving the competitiveness of these regions adopting a wide range of strategies such as increasing the attachment of visitors to them, appealing to more senses in multisensory experiences, boosting more social contacts with other people.

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