

Olive oil tourism in southern Europe: Proposals for **tourism development** of olive grove *rural areas*

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Abstract | For many European destinations the binomial ‘typical product-tourism’ is becoming a trigger tool for rural development. This work focuses on highlighting the tourist potential of the olive oil. This product boasts a strong cultural identity that can be exploited for tourism diversification of the olive grove rural areas. The objective of this work is to put forward a proposal for the development of these areas from an integral, sustainable and participative perspective. A tourism management model that can be applied to the olive groves areas of southern Europe is proposed. The foreseeable results would allow the improvement of local economy, agricultural sector and tourism, as well as other indirect benefits associated with the enhancement of the quality of life of the local community.

Keywords | Olive oil tourism, Olive grove areas, Tourism economics, Tourism marketing, Rural development.

Resumo | Para muitos destinos europeus, o binómio ‘produto típico-turismo’ está a tornar-se um fator estruturante do desenvolvimento rural. O presente trabalho centra-se em salientar as potencialidades turísticas ligadas ao azeite. Este produto conta com uma forte identidade cultural que pode ser explorada para a diversificação do turismo nas zonas rurais olivícolas. O objetivo deste estudo é a proposta de desenvolvimento destas zonas sob uma abordagem turística integral,

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sustentável e participada. Trata-se de sugerir um modelo de gestão turística que pode ser aplicado nas zonas olivícolas do sul da Europa. Os seus previsíveis resultados reverteriam numa melhoria da economia local, do setor agrário e do turismo, bem como outros benefícios indiretos associados à melhoria da qualidade de vida da comunidade local.

Palavras-chave: Turismo do azeite, Territórios olivícolas, Economia do turismo, Marketing turístico, Desenvolvimento rural.

1. Introduction

The use of the gastronomic heritage for tourist purpose is taking a leading role in the socioeconomic development of rural environments (Marsden, Banks & Bristow, 2000). For many European destinations the binomial 'typical product-tourism' is becoming a structuring factor of rural development (De Salvo, Hernández-Mogollón, Di-Clemente & Calzati, 2013). This paper focuses on the potential offered by high quality olive oil for rural areas of south European countries.

In countries such as Spain or Italy, olive oil has been part of agri-food tradition for centuries. It has given birth to a complex culture which affects landscapes, architecture and idiosyncrasies of the inhabitants of the olive grove areas (Loumou & Giourga, 2003). Around the olive groves, along the centuries, it has been developed a network of infrastructures that is attractive for tourism, such as mills, often located in places close to water resources and creeks, so that ethnographic heritage joins impressive landscape. Olive oil has the capability of becoming an important element for the diversification of tourism in the rural olive grove areas. In addition, there exists an emerging tourist demand that values local gastronomy as one of the main motivators of the trips and that appreciate the new olive oil heritage (Millán, Morales & Agudo, 2010).

The aim of this work is to put forward a proposal to identify the potential of the olive oil for encouraging new tourism initiatives and their implementation and management under a comprehensive, sustainable and participative approach. That will offer to these areas a tool for identifying new opportunities of implementing tourism activities around the olive oil

and of enhancing local economy. Those activities should be sustained by various agents who work together in order to strengthen a product with a deep cultural identity such as olive oil.

The interest on the study of olive oil tourism is supported by a long list of antecedents coming from both the scientific and the economic field (Loumou & Giourga, 2003; Aybar, 2004; Millán & Agudo, 2010; Millán et al., 2010; Millán, Agudo & Morales, 2011; Molina, Quesada & Ruiz, 2011; Ruiz, Martín & Molina, 2012). From a scientific perspective, this work is justified by the need to contribute to the knowledge of this new market opportunity. Current studies and researches are still incipient and lack of a strong methodological approach. By the other side, from an economic point of view, olive oil adds value to image, local products supply, activities and market position at a national and international level.

One of the main problems faced by rural areas is their potential for achieving a competitive position into the tourism market. The majority of the destinations offer a very similar proposal which make it difficult to stand out in the market. Moreover, local communities often see tourism as a harmful activity, which jeopardises local and endogenous resources.

In order to carry out the present work, an exploratory approach was adopted. A specific literature revision was implemented, applying the technique of content analysis. That was supported by the analysis of secondary datasets about the olive oil sector from official sources. These tasks have allowed outlining a new proposal for the development of innovative initiatives around olive oil in southern Europe.

Once the objective of this research and the justification of its interest have been explained, it is

Table 1 | Ranking of European countries by hectares of olive cultivation.

Country	2005	2007	2010
Country	2005	2007	2010
Spain	2.131.820	2.208.040	2.153.730
Italy	996.600	1.019.000	1.123.330
Greece	806.390	830.230	705.960
Portugal	317.050	292.160	335.840
France	15.130	15.100	17.690
Croatia	-	11.450	17.100
Cyprus	13.080	11.640	11.640
Slovenia	780	600	890
Montenegro	-	-	300
Malta	90	100	140

Source: Own construction, adapted from EUROSTAT (2014).

presented the olive oil tourism theoretical context. In turn, a new model for the identification, implementation and management of olive oil related initiatives is proposed. Finally, the main conclusions are presented.

2. Olive oil tourism as an enhancer element for rural economies

2.1. The agri-food heritage as a tourism resource: The case of olive oil in southern Europe

The current tourism market is experiencing several substantial changes, from the point of view of supply and demand. Nowadays tourism is considered an activity that provides to traveller an opportunity for personal and cultural enrichment (Ávila & Barrado, 2005). Resources with a strong linkage to territory begin to perform an important role, as they have the capability of highlighting the authenticity of places and of defining new complex products (De Salvo et al., 2013). However, Slee (1993) notes that the estimation of local typical products is considered a complex task that goes beyond their simple commercialization, because involves the activation of endogenous, integrated and sustainable actions.

Table 2 | Producer countries of certified olive oil.

Producer country	Number of olive oil certifications
Italy	42
Spain	24
Greece	16

Source: own construction, adapted from EUROSTAT (2014).

Rural areas are those that most take advantage of establishing development enhancers based on local agri-food products, turning them into appreciated gastronomic and tourism attractions (Marsden et al., 2000). The countries of southern Europe count on a unique resource as Mediterranean diet is, especially since its declaration as Intangible World Heritage by UNESCO in 2013. Olive oil can be considered the *conditio sine qua non* of Mediterranean diet. Beyond its nutritional properties, this product is associated with a multiplicity of cultural aspects: knowledge, craft traditions, celebrations, stories, legends, songs and sayings that turn olive oil into something more than just a condiment, as the UNESCO official web site states.

The typical food product plays a determinant role in tourism development and in the definition of the destination image, especially when labelled with seals of quality as the 'Protected Designation of Origin' (PDO). De Salvo et al. (2013) recognize that valuing this products have positive repercussions in a number of ambits: i) in agriculture, generating additional incomes; ii) in social welfare, offering the possibility of creating qualified employment; iii) in heritage, favouring its preservation; and iv) in image, facilitating the affirmation of the territory around a gastronomic tourism proposal. Several studies demonstrate that gastronomic tourists constitute a gold segment, because their expenditure levels are above the average (e.g. Fox, 2007; López-Guzmán & Sánchez-Cañizares, 2012).

Data provided by EUROSTAT (2014) show that the major producers of olive oil are located in southern Europe. Table 1 presents the ranking of European countries by hectares of olive cultivation.

In the first four positions are Spain, Italy, Greece and Portugal. Table 2 collects the number of PDO recognized in the three main producer countries. Although Spain is the country with the highest number of hectares cultivated, Italy has got more certifications. Data give both countries a dominant position in olive oil production in the international context. According to Loumou & Giourga (2002), olive groves occupy the ground of the Mediterranean countries since the time of the Roman Empire, being the olive tree an element that characterizes economically and socially the countries of southern Europe, defining their particular rural landscape.

From a tourism perspective, olive oil culture represents an important opportunity to diversify supply. Spain, a country with abundant production of certified olive oil, has already begun to structure tourism initiatives around this product. Mainly, it deals with thematic routes that are developed in territories with an economic and cultural tradition closely linked with olive oil production (Millán & Agudo, 2010).

Regarding tourism demand, nowadays it is characterized by the search for the authentic, unique and participating experiences, full of cultural contents that contribute to increase knowledge and personal enrichment (Cánoves, Herrera & Villarino, 2005). The actual tourist is characterized by choosing destinations and holiday stiles that allow him to slow down and to get in contact with the destination spirit, local life and people (De Salvo et al., 2013). Having an authentic experience related to the tastes and knowledge of local agri-food culture requires the respect of times of nature and man.

Under these considerations, it seems evident the relevance of implementing this types of initiatives in areas prone to them. It would be interesting to carry out studies that identify the development itineraries and territorial policies and plans capable of enhancing the olive oil local resources. Collective efforts should result in a coherent model of development that benefits all territory in a transversal way, namely, in economic, social, agricultural and tourism sector.

2.2. Olive oil tourism: A review of the theoretical and practical background

To have a clear understanding of the starting point of this research it is necessary to conduct a review of the theoretical and practical background of olive oil tourism. This knowledge must support the model proposed and aimed to identifying, implementing and managing these initiatives in the producing areas of southern Europe.

Regarding the theoretical background, table 3 presents the most significant examples of the scientific production related to the olive oil culture. These publications were classified into three thematic blocks: i) agriculture, rural development and agrotourism; ii) gastronomic tourism; iii) olive oil tourism. On the basis of previous literature, it can be observed that researches specifically focused on olive oil from a touristic point of view are still scarce and need bettering methodological approach and practical implications. The majority of works analyses olive oil productions and areas within an agricultural context or in relation with its implications with gastronomy (see block 1 and 2, Table 3). Tourism recently has recognised this resource as an effective tool for achieving an integral development, not just for one sector but for the whole socioeconomic background of production areas (see block 3, Table 3). Results and conclusions of previous research suggest the need of deepening into the study of olive oil as an enhancer resource on its own and of analysing the practical paths to follow in order to translate olive oil touristic potential into concrete initiatives, activities and products.

On a practical level, it is important to analyse the weight that European Union (EU) recognises to the olive oil resource. Table 4 shows the main policies, directives and objectives that generally underline the importance of implementing actions and of taking advantage of the synergies linking agriculture and tourism. Initiatives specifically aimed to enhance olive oil tourism have been implemented by few projects, like the ones financed by INTERREG IIIC (see Table 4). Considering the potential of this product

Table 3 | Scientific-academic background.

Approach	Title	Authors/year	Journal/Editorial
Agriculture, rural development and agrotourism	Linkages between tourism and food production	Telfer and Wall (1996)	<i>Annals of Tourism Research</i>
	Food supply chain approaches: Exploring their role in rural development	Marsden et al., (2000)	<i>Sociologia Ruralis</i>
	Sviluppo rurale e prodotti tipici: Reputazioni collettive, coordinamento e istituzionalizzazione	Belletti (2002)	<i>Sviluppo rurale: società, territorio, impresa, FrancoAngeli, Milano</i>
	Olive groves: The life and identity of the Mediterranean	Loumou and Giourga (2003)	<i>Agriculture and Human Values</i>
	A typology for defining agritourism	Phillip, Hunter and Blackstock (2010)	<i>Tourism Management</i>
	Agricultural diversification and the sustainability of agricultural systems: Possibilities for the development of agrotourism	Hernández-Mogollón, Campón-Cerro, Leco-Berocal and Pérez-Díaz (2011)	<i>Environmental Engineering and Management Journal</i>
	Investigación e innovación en el sector del aceite de oliva en España	Sanz, Hervás, Sánchez and Coq (2012)	<i>ALENTA, Plataforma Tecnológica del Olivar</i>
Gastronomic tourism	Defining agritourism: A comparative study of stakeholders' perceptions in Missouri and North Carolina	Arroyo, Barbieri, and Rozier (2013)	<i>Tourism Management</i>
	Bienes públicos ambientales en el olivar español de montaña ante de la reforma de la PAC	Sanz and García (2013)	<i>Fundación de Estudios Rurales, Anuario</i>
	Gastronomy: An essential ingredient in tourism production and consumption?	Richards (2002)	<i>Tourism and gastronomy, Routledge, London</i>
	Local food and culture	Roden (2003)	<i>Proceedings of Research and Academic Papers of Local Food & Tourism International Conference, November 9-10, 2000, Lamaka</i>
	Patrimonio alimentario y turismo: Una relación singular	Espeitx (2004)	<i>Pasos, Revista de Turismo y Patrimonio Cultural</i>
	Towards a structural model of tourist experience: An illustration from food experiences in tourism	Quan and Wang (2004)	<i>Tourism Management</i>
	Tourism and gastronomy: Gastronomy's influence on how tourists experience a destination	Kivela and Crotts (2006)	<i>Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research</i>
Olive oil tourism	Reinventing the gastronomic identity of Croatian tourist destinations	Fox (2007)	<i>International Journal of Hospitality Management</i>
	Análisis de la demanda de turismo enogastronómico en España	SEGITTUR (2010)	<i>Ministerio de Industria Turismo y Comercio, Madrid</i>
	Turismo gastronómico. Estrategias de marketing y experiencias de éxito	Flavián and Fandos (2011)	<i>Prensa Universitaria de Zaragoza</i>
	Informe de visitantes a bodegas asociadas a las Rutas del Vino de España. Año 2011	ACEVIN (2012)	<i>Ministerio de Industria Energía y Turismo e Instituto de Turismo de España, Madrid</i>
	Culinary tourism in Córdoba (Spain)	López-Guzmán and Sánchez-Cañizares (2012)	<i>British Food Journal</i>
	Globalisation and food consumption in tourism	Mak, Lumbers & Eves (2012)	<i>Annals of Tourism Research</i>
	Proyecto Oleoturismo: Una red europea para la promoción de la cultura del olivo	Aybar (2004)	<i>Diputación Provincial de Jaén</i>
El turismo gastronómico y las Denominaciones de Origen en el sur de España: Oleoturismo. Un estudio de caso	Millán and Agudo (2010)	<i>Pasos, Revista de Turismo y Patrimonio Cultural</i>	
El oleoturismo como motor de desarrollo rural: La Denominación de Origen de Montoro-Adamuz	Millán et al. (2010)	<i>Mundo Agrario</i>	
Analysis of supply and demand of oleoturismo in southern Spain: a case study	Millán et al. (2011)	<i>Cuadernos de Desarrollo Rural</i>	
Potencial del oleoturismo como diversificación económica del sector cooperativo agrario: el caso español	Molina et al. (2011)	<i>Revista de Ciencias Sociales</i>	
Los intangibles del aceite de oliva como ventaja competitiva	Ruiz et al. (2012)	<i>Intangible Capital</i>	

Source: own construction.

Table 4 | Technical-practical background in Europe.

Document/ initiative	Interest
<i>Council regulation (EC) No. 1698/2005</i> (Council of the European Union, 2005, p. 9)	<i>Three priority objectives:</i> “(a) improving the competitiveness of agriculture [...]; (b) improving the environment and the countryside by supporting land management; (c) improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging diversification of economic activity.”
<i>Council decision 2006/144/EC</i> (Council of the European Union, 2006, pp. 26-27)	“i) raising economic activity and employment rates in the wider rural economy [...] contributes to a better territorial balance [...] <i>Tourism, crafts and the provision of rural amenities [...] offer opportunities [...];</i> iii) putting the heart back into villages [...]; v) training young people in skills needed for the <i>diversification of the local economy [...]</i> can tap into demand for tourism [...] and quality products; viii) <i>encouraging the development of tourism. [...] [Increasing the] use of ICT in tourism for bookings, promotion, marketing [...] [etc.]”</i>
<i>Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 2012</i> (European Commission, 2012)	“Farming is the principal economic activity in most rural areas of the EU [European Union]. However, many farmers carry out additional activities, <i>such as food processing and providing accommodation for tourists.</i> This diversification of the rural economy is a source of strength which the EU supports and encourages through its rural development programmes” (p. 9). “[...] the CAP gives farmers financial assistance to ensure that they continue working the land and to create additional jobs [...] [in the context of <i>villages’ renewal, landscape preservation or cultural heritage projects</i> and many other tasks directly or indirectly associated with farming and the rural economy” (p. 9). It considers <i>quality food</i> (Protected Designation of Origin – PDO, Protected Geographical Indication - PGI) a key for success (p. 13).
<i>Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Reform 2013</i>	In their <i>new statements it proposes that:</i> <i>Rural development must become the second mainstay of the CAP.</i> Moreover, [agriculture] has to be <i>capable to preserve landscapes, maintain natural spaces, contribute essentially to the vitality of rural world,</i> and responds to the concerns and exigencies of consumers in quality, food safety, environmental protection and animals’ welfare.
<i>Horizon 2020</i> (European Commission, 2014)	In the priority line of <i>social challenges:</i> The financing will focus on the following challenges: – “ <i>Health, demographic change and wellbeing;</i> – <i>Food security, sustainable agriculture [...], marine and maritime [...]</i> research, and Bioeconomy; – [...] <i>Climate action [...], resource efficiency and raw materials;</i> – [...] <i>inclusive, innovative [...] [and] secure societies [...].”</i>
<i>INTERREG III C</i> (Millán et al., 2010)	It has financed several initiatives at different territorial levels related to the enhancement of the olive oil resource and its potential exploitation: ex. <i>Oleoadapt, Oleoyouthstart, Oleointegra, Oleointerprise, Oleolife, Oleoturismo.</i>

Source: own construction.

and the growing scientific literature that bear it out, more efforts should be done in order to outline practical proposals.

According to the background considered, it is necessary to achieve a multifunctionality of olive groves in order to maximise their profitability and to promote socioeconomic development. A strong necessity is detected to establish the most effective way of interlacing the olive oil sector with other sectors of the local economy, experiencing new networks that benefit territories in a transversal way. Therefore, olive oil tourism shows up as an

opportunity capable of ensuring the survival of small olive oil productions, originating new tourism products with multiple purposes.

3. Proposals for the development of rural areas through tourism activities based on olive oil

Tourism development projects, aimed at highlighting the local gastronomic heritage are attracting the interest of public decision-makers,

tourism operators and academics due to the important implications for modern consumers' satisfaction, supply diversification, sensoriality and authenticity of the proposal and destination image.

In order to have a complete comprehension of what is considered to be a development model of tourism initiatives based on olive oil as a structuring resource, figure 1 is presented.

After reviewing the background of this topic, it has been realized the important role played by

gastronomic heritage in the development of a new tourism product, such as the one structured around olive oil. It is necessary to consider that we are facing new competitive environments. On one hand, the crisis of agriculture in rural areas promotes the need of seeking economic activities that support additional incomes for agricultural agents. On the other hand, tourism needs to diversify its proposal in order to adapt to the new desires of the demand that recognises a great

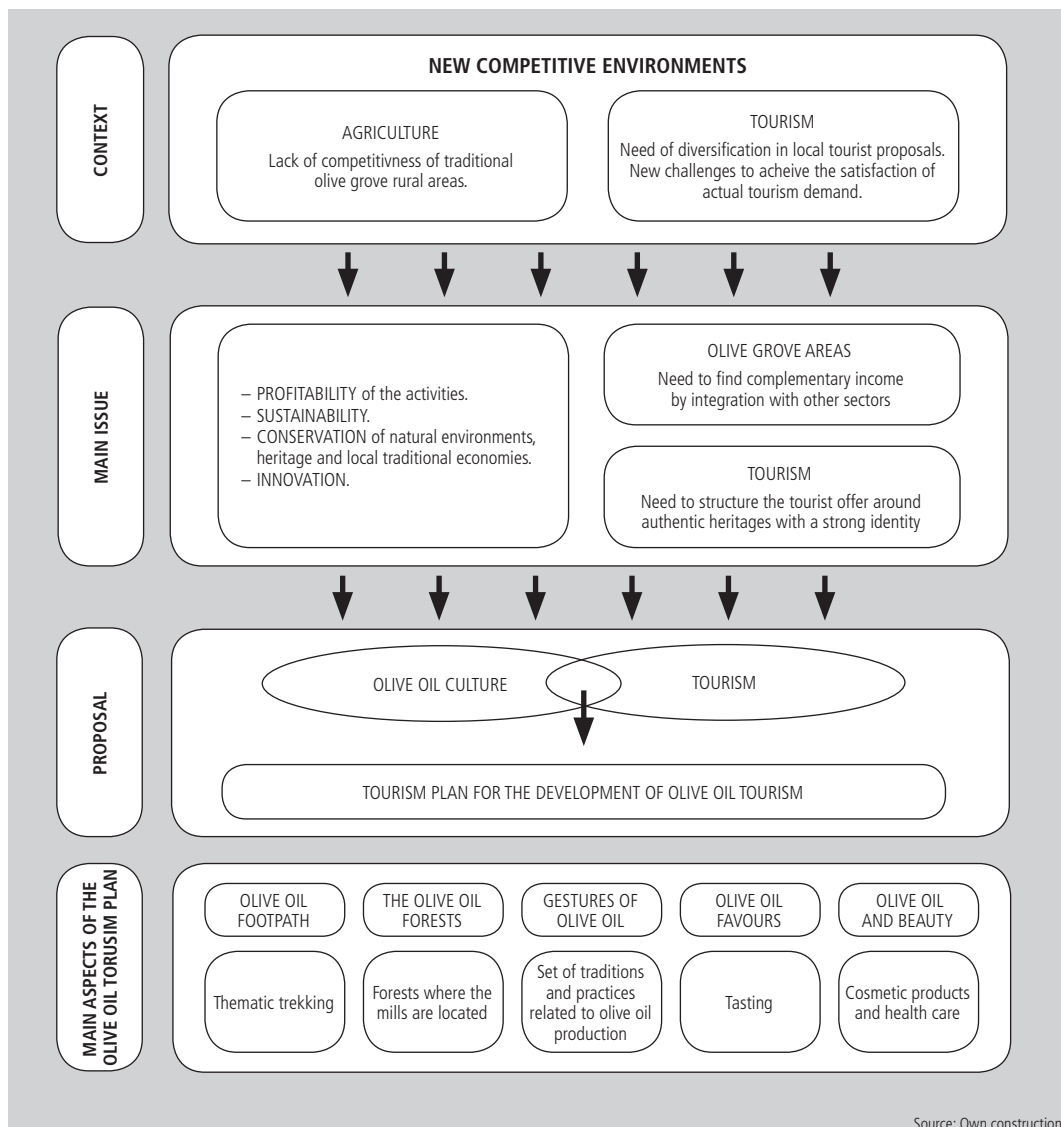


Figure 1 | The initial approach to a development model.

interest in the countryside and its natural, cultural and gastronomic heritage.

Of particular importance are the linkages between agriculture and tourism, as a new opportunity for diversifying rural areas touristic offer. In that environment olive oil can be considered a fundamental resource and an effective tool for new initiatives of local development. Thus, improvements in the economic efficiency of agriculture, conservation of natural environments and innovation, necessary to rural environments, have to be achieved.

The tourism sector finds in this kind of products a suitable tool for diversifying its proposal, linking it to an authentic heritage with a rooted identity in places, which also impacts on the destination image. The link between olive oil culture and tourism seems to reveal an interesting proposal for the tourism development of the olive grove zones. Thus, a new model is put forward in order to develop an integral, territorial plan for olive oil tourism, which could be applied to those regions of southern Europe that stand out for their olive oil production, landscapes and culture.

In order to get started with a tourism plan based on the enhancement of the olive oil resource, it is necessary to take an initial picture of the area where the plan is meant to be implemented and to explore its potential. The first step would be to analyse the local socioeconomic context and give a diagnosis about the olive oil and the tourism sector of the study area.

In order to achieve this initial goal, it will be necessary to collect all the existing information. Secondary datasets, as well as, qualitative (focus groups, personal non-structured interview with local agents) and quantitative (survey to residents, tourists and entrepreneurs) research tools should be used.

Once the initial situation has been known, it will be interesting to develop activities such as seminars to disseminate results and extend them to stakeholders. Its purpose is to refine the initial analysis report made and begin to put forward concrete proposals for their implementation.

The information gathered so far should allow the development of a comprehensive tourism development plan based on olive oil, generating positive externalities that would affect, to cross-level, the local economy, agriculture, tourism and local community.

The plan should provide recommendations, actions and guidelines to follow in order to convert the results achieved in the original investigation into real and tangible benefits for the economy and social welfare of the local community. Some of the initiatives proposed in the plan could be developed around tourism products that incorporate the different elements of interest in relation to olive oil, as could be 'Olive oil routes' (walking activities), 'Olive oil forests' (visits to forests where mills are located), 'Olive oil gestures' (knowledge of the traditions and craft practices), 'Olive oil flavours' (enjoy the gastronomy and tasting) or 'Olive oil and beauty' (cosmetic products and health care).

Since the proposal has a clear practical and territorial application, the agents called to engage in these activities are entrepreneurs in the olive oil sector, tour operators, local communities, political and administrative institutions of the locality, restaurants, packers and processing olive oil enterprises, schools and recreation centres. They all are the protagonists of a potential tourism development plan settled on olive oil resources and, as such, should be part of it. That is why it is also important to open channels of communication with them.

To this extent, meetings should be developed with the purpose of informing and involving local agents with a direct or indirect interest in the success of this kind of activities. Also, marketing seminars and scientific international symposiums will be useful in order to deepen into the knowledge of this kind of tourism activities, as well as, to create a European network of cooperation among similar areas and programmes in southern Europe. This last initiative will favour the projection of an integral image of gastronomic and cultural European destinations linked to olive oil, at an international level.

The implementation of tourist models of development, settled upon initiatives which enhance endogenous products, such as olive oil, may return the following benefits: i) it favours the recovery of traditional olive oil cultivation, which could make a significant socioeconomic revival of the production areas; ii) cross benefits for various sectors of the local economy; iii) structuring a European network of olive grove areas as gastronomic destinations in a context of quality and experience tourism; iv) the participation of local community in endogenous development strategies.

Predictable results of the model point to the assertion of a territorial and tourism development, based on endogenous resources of great economic, cultural and identity value, as it is the olive oil. Positive externalities and innovative initiatives encompass multiple areas of human activity such as agriculture, tourism, heritage conservation, environmental protection or preservation of habits and traditions of the local community.

4. Conclusions

Olive oil provides an important asset for producing areas, not only from an agricultural or a nutritional perspective due to its linkages with the renowned Mediterranean diet, but also, in relation to a cultural and identity heritage, which typically characterizes the countries of southern Europe.

Olive oil culture and production have an impact on the idiosyncrasies of local communities, on lifestyles and landscapes. All this represents a valuable starting base for the activation of touristic dynamics based on the culture of olive oil. Around this product it can be developed a tourism proposal, in line with the new desires of a specific tourism demand and that, at the same time, can benefit a plurality of actors of the local area.

Therefore, a new proposal has been put forward in order to develop such initiatives in southern Europe.

From an integral and comprehensive perspective it has been outlined a tourism model which considers the endogenous resources of olive oil as the necessary and effective liaison between agriculture and tourism. The relevant element of the proposed model is that it integrates all the local stakeholders and residents. In addition, it is convenient to apply this model in the olive grove areas of southern Europe, trying to establish a cooperation network in order to positioning this geographic area as an international olive oil tourism destination.

Based on previous results of scientific literature and practical background considered, the main conclusions of the present work can be summarized as follow:

- i) Olive oil culture offers a wide range of opportunities that both tourism and agriculture sectors, as well as local societies, can take advantage of;
- ii) Structuring the local tourism development on the basis of the enhancement of endogenous resources (olive oil in this study) means to put forward qualitative patterns of growth which can simultaneously benefit various sectors and agents;
- iii) Olive oil tourism strategies have to be conceived as a whole and do not have to be analysed and limited by a single, one-dimensional perspective;
- iv) The actual tourism demand for tourism experience based on agri-food products is considered to have high income level so that returns higher benefits to destinations.

Moreover, it is worth noting that considering the new competitive environments of the tourism sector and the need of defining new sustainable and effective models of development, olive oil tourism is an emerging field of study and an entrepreneurial opportunity which deserves more attention from both an academic and practical perspective.

Limits to the present work have to be seen in the youth of olive oil tourism as a research field and in the scarcity of entrepreneurial initiatives. Thus, it is necessary to assume major scientific efforts in order to achieve a deeper knowledge of this kind of tourism and, then, to develop effective actions that will

improve the socioeconomic welfare of the study area, as well as, the satisfaction of a new tourist demand, increasingly interested in rural endogenous heritages.

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