

Olive oil Tourism as a vehicle for Rural Development in the Province of Cordoba

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Abstract | Food plays an important role in rural development through tourism, especially food routes. Tourists' demand for discovering regional food is increasing. This paper focuses on olive oil tourism since olive oil is more than a mere product, it is a true culture. A case study analyses three olive oil routes linked to Protected Designations of Origin in the province of Cordoba: Baena, Montoro-Adamuz and Priego de Cordoba. From field work, the supply and the demand for olive oil tourism is analysed. The olive oil routes are not as well known or as frequently visited by the gastronomic tourist as the wine routes and the oil tourism consumer profile is different from the wine tourism consumer profile. However, the olive oil tourism is undoubtedly an opportunity to promote rural development in these areas.

Keywords | Food Tourism, Food Routes, Olive Oil Tourism.

Resumo | A gastronomia e, em particular, as rotas gastronómicas desempenham um papel importante no desenvolvimento rural. A procura turística orientada para a descoberta da gastronomia regional está a aumentar. Este artigo foca-se no turismo associado a rotas do azeite, considerando o azeite não apenas um mero produto, mas uma verdadeira cultura. O estudo de caso analisou três rotas do azeite associadas a Denominações de Origem Protegida na Província de Córdoba: Baena, Montoro-Adamuz and Priego de Córdoba. No trabalho de campo foram analisadas a oferta e a procura do turismo associado a rotas do azeite. As rotas do azeite não são tão conhecidas ou tão frequentemente visitadas como as rotas dos vinhos e o seu perfil de consumidor é diferente do perfil de consumidor das rotas dos vinhos. Contudo, as rotas do azeite são, sem dúvida, uma oportunidade para promover o desenvolvimento rural dessas áreas.

Palavras-chave | Gastronomia, Rotas Gastronómicas, Rotas do Azeite.

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1. Introduction

Food plays an important role in rural development through tourism (Hall and Sharples, 2003; Plummer *et al.*, 2005), especially food routes (Briedenhann and Wickens, 2004). The promotion of food tourism results in a symbiosis between the agrarian sector and the tourism sector. High-quality agricultural products take shape as a resource that makes possible the development of tourism. At the same time, the tourism turns into a promotional and marketing tool of high-quality agricultural products (Armesto and Gómez, 2004; Kivela and Crotts, 2006). Because food can be branded by region, the opportunity exists to create a positive association between food and a destination (Okumus *et al.*, 2007). In addition, consumers are increasingly concerned to know where products come from and how they are produced, not only for health and safety reasons but also in terms of satisfying a current nostalgia which harks back to a perceived time of real and wholesome foods (Gilg and Battershill, 1998). The existence of such trends within consumer attitudes prompted the European Union to implement regulations (2081/92 and 2082/92) to protect food and drink products which have either special character, such as being produced with traditional raw material and/or a traditional mode of production, or a recognisable geographic origin (eg. Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) or Protected Geographical Indication (PGI)) (Ilbery and Kneafsey, 2000).

The development of food routes forms an integral part of the food tourism industry. In fact, they are the roadways to the core attraction in food tourism (Bruwer, 2003). In less developed areas, the promotion of a clustering of activities and attractions stimulates cooperation and partnerships between communities in local and neighbouring regions. (Briedenhann and Wickens, 2004). In addition, since tourists are dispersed along the length of the trail, management of carrying capacity is facilitated, negative environmental impacts reduced, and

economic benefits more evenly distributed (Hill and Gibbons, 1994). Likewise, many food routes are characterised by a bounded space in the form of an often officially demarcated food region or geographical indication that has an identity in the form of a (branded) descriptive name such as Champagne (wine route, France) (Bruwer, 2003).

On the other hand, tourists' demand for discovering regional food is increasing (Bessiere, 1998; Hall and Sharples, 2003; Long, 2004). Today there is a growing number of people who want to invest part of their money and spare time in getting to know the world of wine, olive oil, etc: its history, its countryside, its elaboration, the people who care for it... At the same time, reserved spaces, wineries, olive oil mills, etc. are slowly beginning to open their doors to tourists in the light of this ever increasing demand (Melian *et al.*, 2008).

This paper focuses on olive oil tourism. Olive oil is more than a mere product to the peoples of the Mediterranean, it is a true culture (Regional Government of Andalusia, 2006). It has been medicinal, magical, and endless source of fascination and wonder and the fountain of great wealth and power.

In the area of food tourism most of the work that has been done relates to wine tourism. A definition of olive oil tourism can be created based on the definition of wine tourism by Hall (1996). Olive oil tourism can be defined as visitation to olive groves, olive oil mills, olive oil festivals, and olive oil shows for which olive oil tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of olive oil region are the prime motivating factors for visitors. But, olive oil tourism also involves destination planning and marketing strategy (Getz *et al.*, 1999). So, another definition based on the Western Australian Wine Tourism Strategy (2000) (cited in Charters and Ali-Knight, 2002) can describe olive oil tourism as travel for the purpose of experiencing olive oil mills and olive oil regions and their links to lifestyle, and as encompassing both service provision and destination marketing.

As olive oil tourism is an industry concentrated outside metropolitan area it can play a vital role in rural development. Olive oil tourism can have the potential to provide a strong competitive advantage for regions with an olive and olive oil industry, and to generate profitable business for olive oil mills, other oil-related products and for visitor services, with the provision that tourism does not take over as the primary source of income in rural areas or flood the area, but constitutes a supplementary source of revenue for the inhabitants of the area (Millan and Agudo, 2006).

The aim of this paper is to identify the profile of the tourists who would be attracted to the olive oil routes and analyse the existing supply in the province of Cordoba. Both these factors are key to achieving supplementary revenue and to positioning their olive oil on the market. So, in section 2 the olive oil tourism in Spain is presented to put the province of Cordoba into context, section 3 analyses the case of three olive oil routes linked to PDOs in the province of Cordoba: Baena, Montoro-Adamuz and Priego de Cordoba; and, finally some conclusions are drawn in section 4.

2. Olive oil tourism in Spain

In Spain, the olive oil has not been oblivious to the “boom” experienced in quality rural tourism in recent years. An interesting niche is now opening up for olive oil tourism in the wake of the wine tourism boom. Old oil mills are converting into luxury restaurants and hotels, and farm buildings are being transformed into museums and tasting sheds. Olive oil tourism is thus emerging as a new niche market where there are already more than 30 prestigious rural establishments offering diverse olive oil themed proposals. These extend from Cordoba to Caceres and Badajoz, including Jaen, Malaga or Seville, and from Teruel and Toledo to the Balearic Islands, even Navarre.

The olive grove is the most important agricultural subsector in Spain, both in terms of production and geographic extent and from the historical and cultural point of view. Spain is the world’s leading producer with an output of between 1 and 1.5M tonne of olive oil in recent years and with 2.5M ha under olives.

The Spanish producers create extra virgin olive oil of extraordinary quality, mild or intense,

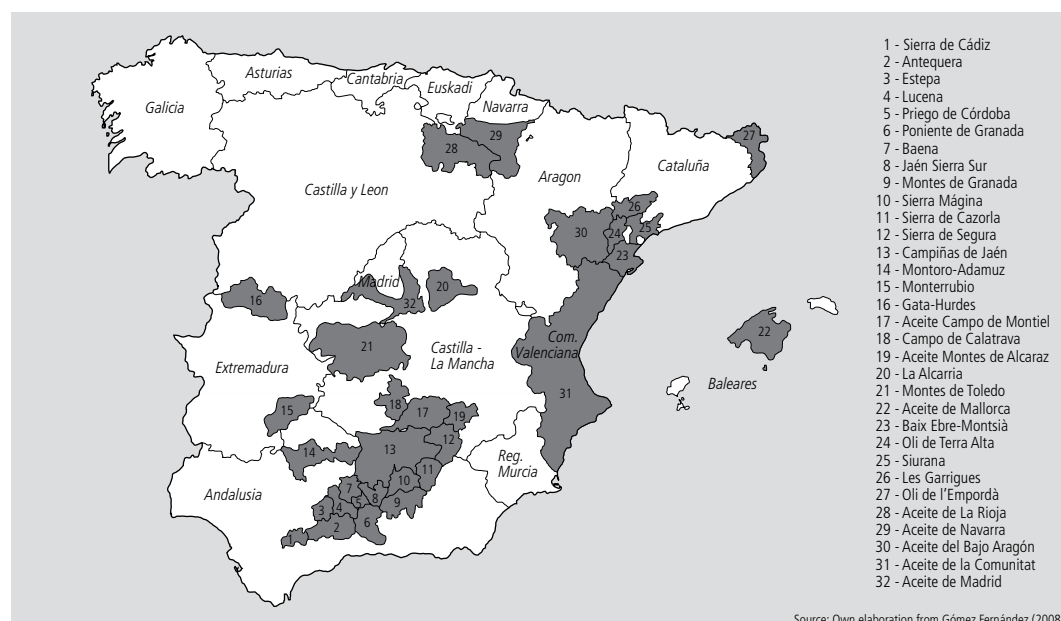


Figure 1 | Geographical localization of the extra virgin olive oil PDOs in Spain.

fruity or ripe... The extra virgin olive oil quality is guaranteed with PDOs and PGIs (for PDOs, products must have quality or characteristics essentially due to the local area, whereas for PGIs, products have a specific quality or reputation attributable to the local area). Specifically, there are 31 extra virgin olive oil PDOs in Spain (Figure 1), fourteen of them in Andalusia. Andalusia not only houses the largest olive plantation area and registers the largest production of extra virgin olive oil but they also consume more olive oil than any other region in Spain. Andalusia is connected to the culture of olive oil since its most remote origins, and enjoys an extraordinary social influence. An endless number of literary and folkloric references links Andalusia with the olive tree, its precious fruit and its delicious oil (Regional Government of Andalusia, 2006).

In the next section a case study analyses the olive oil routes linked to PDOs in the province of Cordoba, in Andalusia (Figure 2). Olive culture has brought great wealth to Cordoba as it has to the rest of Andalusia where landscapes, history, lifestyle or gastronomy are steeped in the tradition of olive oil. This province is therefore in a position to offer visitors a premium tourist product with a high value added experience: the olive oil routes. These routes provide the opportunity to promote a high quality product, working with available local resources to offer a differentiated tourist proposal.

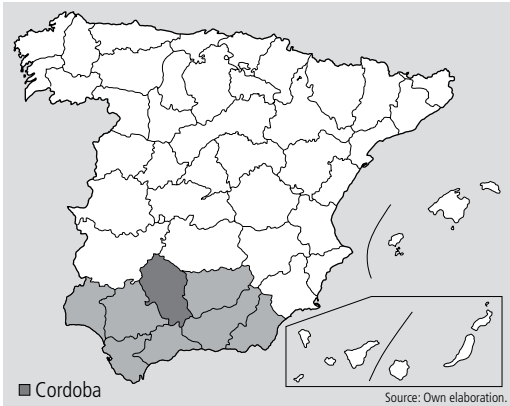


Figure 2 | Geographical localization of the province of Cordoba.

3. Olive oil routes linked to PDOs in the province of Cordoba

Cordoba, with 184 olive oil mills, is the province with the second largest olive growing area in Spain with 325,000 ha under olive and the second largest producer of olive oil in the world with 250,000 tonne (Statistical Institute of Andalusia, 2007). The province has become the leader of the largest cooperative group in the sector in Andalusia (*Hojiblanca*) and it also operates the most advanced olive factory in Spain (*SOS-Carbonell*).

Cordoban olive oil has been acclaimed worldwide, noted for the prizes it has been awarded, principally for its quality. This has made the production of olive oil an increasingly popular tourist attraction. Consequently, the Tourist Promotion Board of Cordoba has taken the initiative to promote olive oil culture with the creation of eight olive oil routes (Figure 3). Three of these routes are related to PDOs: Baena, Montoro-Adamuz and Priego de Cordoba.

The PDO Baena includes the municipalities of *Baena, Cabra, Castro del Río, Doña Mencía, Luque, Nueva Carteya* and *Zuheros*. The PDO Montoro-Adamuz includes *Adamuz, Espiel, Hornachuelos,*

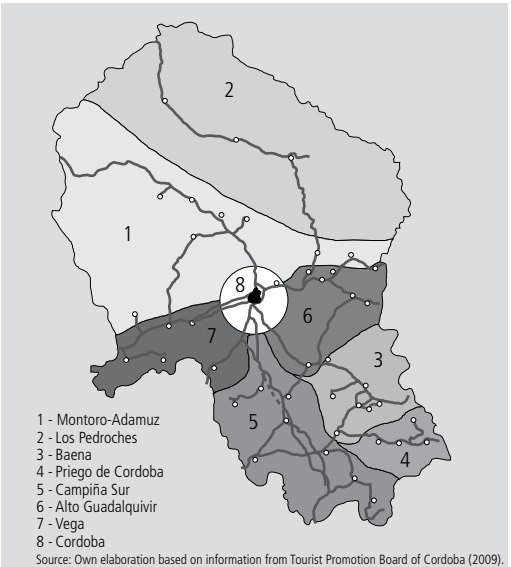


Figure 3 | Olive oil routes in the province of Cordoba.

Montoro, Obejo, Villaharta, Villanueva del Rey and Villaviciosa de Córdoba. This area is also the location of several nature reserves, such as the *Sierra de Cardena Montoro Natural Park*. The PDO Priego de Córdoba is situated in the heart of the *Sierra Subbetica Natural Park* and covers four municipalities: *Almedinilla, Carcabuey, Fuente Tojar and Priego de Cordoba*.

Table 1 shows information relating to the three PDOs. The PDO Montoro-Adamuz is the most recent and is also the best unknown. The PDO Baena is the oldest (in fact, it was the first designation of origin to appear in Spain within of the food and agriculture sector, in 1981) and is also the most important and internationally acclaimed thanks to the prizes it has been awarded for the quality of its oils. It is the PDO Priego de Córdoba, however, that receives the most visitors since it has the most developed accommodation infrastructure (hotels and country cottages) stemming from the growth in rural tourism. The cultivated area in Montoro-Adamuz (60,000 Has) and Baena (54,340 Has) is almost double that of Priego de Cordoba (29,628 Has). Nevertheless, the average annual oil production in Priego de Cordoba is relatively high (at 17,000 t compared

with 19,000 t for Montoro-Adamuz and 7,000 t for Baena) (Statistical Institute of Andalusia, 2008). Additionally, in Priego de Cordoba and Baena there are a large number of olive oil mills, bottling plants and registered trademarks.

3.1. Methodology

We analyse the oil tourism consumer profile and the existing supply in the area of the three routes linked to PDOs: Baena, Montoro-Adamuz and Priego de Cordoba. To do this, field work has been carried out based on two kinds of questionnaires (Table 2):

- A questionnaire aimed at businesses (olive oil mills, restaurants, hotels, souvenir shops selling typical olive oil...) making up the olive oil routes and to all the institutions through which extra virgin olive oil is promoted. In order to gather information on the existing tourism supply in the area a survey was conducted consisting of 22 questions grouped into three blocks¹ (personnel - production, involvement in the food route, actions undertaken to promote tourism).
- A questionnaire aimed at tourists over 18 years of age who have spent at least 6 hours in the area getting to know the production process, the thousand-year-old olive groves, extra virgin olive oil, etc. To explore the socio-economic profile of the effective demand, 35 questions grouped into six blocks² were conducted (socio-demographic profile, economic profile, profile of the potential tourist, reasons for travel, description of the visit and opinions about the route).

¹ The nature of the variables analyzed has varied from quantitative variables as "number of employees", "amount of investment", "production" and so on, or nominal qualitative variables such as "membership of the business to the olive oil route" or variables measured on Likert scale with 5 possible categories as, for example, "the level of involvement in the olive oil route".

² In this questionnaire were quantitative variables (e.g. "age of the tourist", "income level"...), qualitative variables measured on Likert scale (e.g. "level of satisfaction", "repetition of the journey"...) or open-response questions as the variable "view on the route"

Table 1 | Olive oil PDO technical data in the province of Cordoba

| PDO (start) | Montoro-Adamuz (2007) | Priego De Córdoba (1995) | Baena (1981) |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|
| Controlled olive cultivated area | 54,340 Has | 29,628 Has | 60,000 Has |
| Annual average oil production | 19,000 t | 17,000 t | 7,000 t |
| Annual average olive production | Almost 100,000 Tm. | Between 80,000 & 100,000 t. | — |
| Oil mills | 14 | 17 | 19 |
| Bottling plants | 6 | 15 | 18 |
| Registered trademarks | 8 | over 30 | over 30 |

Source: Own elaboration based on data from Statistical Institute of Andalusia (2008).

Table 2 | Experimental design

| | Survey of supply | Survey of demand |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Population | Businesses making up the olive oil route* | Tourists over 18 years of age who have spent at least 6 hours visiting the Baena, Montoro-Adamuz and Priego de Cordoba PDO** |
| Sample size*** | 56 valid surveys | 2,324 valid surveys |
| Sampling error | ±4,1 % | ±3,2% |
| Confidence level | 95% | 95% |
| Sampling system | Simple random | Simple random |
| Date of field work | September 2007 – October 2008 | September 2007 – October 2008 |

Source: Own elaboration.
* Surveys were sent by letter to the companies associated with PDOs.
** Personal interviews were carried out at strategic locations along the route (olive oil mills, restaurants...).
*** A total of 62 supply surveys and 2400 demand surveys were carried out, but incomplete surveys (with less than 60% of the questionnaire responded) were rejected.

The statistical tools used were univariate analysis and bivariate analysis to study the independence between variables. The chi-square test of independence for contingency tables evaluates the general hypothesis that the two variables analysed are independent of one another. If dependence between two variables is detected, then the Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient or the Pearson’s correlation coefficient is used to measure the degree of dependence between two qualitative or quantitative variables, respectively.

3.2. Results of supply

Of the 56 valid surveys in Baena, Montoro-Adamuz and Priego de Cordoba, it was evident that the supply is made up of small family businesses. 38.46% of the businesses (olive oil mills, hotels, restaurants, souvenir shops...) have less than 5 workers, 43.18% between 5 and 10 workers and

only 18.36% have more than 10 workers. The olive oil mills, whose business organisation is usually as a cooperative, are those that have the highest amount of workers.

The principle attraction of the routes was the visit to the olive oil mills. Of the olive oil mills surveyed, 42% are only open in the mornings, whereas 23% do not open to the public (Figure 4). The latter concentrate mainly on exports and do not consider olive oil tourism to be an additional source of income.

The table 3 shows results of the bivariate analysis between oil mill variables. The analysis has produced the following conclusions:

1) There is a relationship between *investment in training by the oil mill* and the *level of training of its employees* (the chi-square statistic $\chi^2 = 28.63$ with 4 degrees of freedom indicates dependency between these variables with a confidence level of 95%). The higher the level of training there is among the staff the greater the investment in training (Spearman’s rho, $r_s = 0.81$). The oil mill set up as public limited

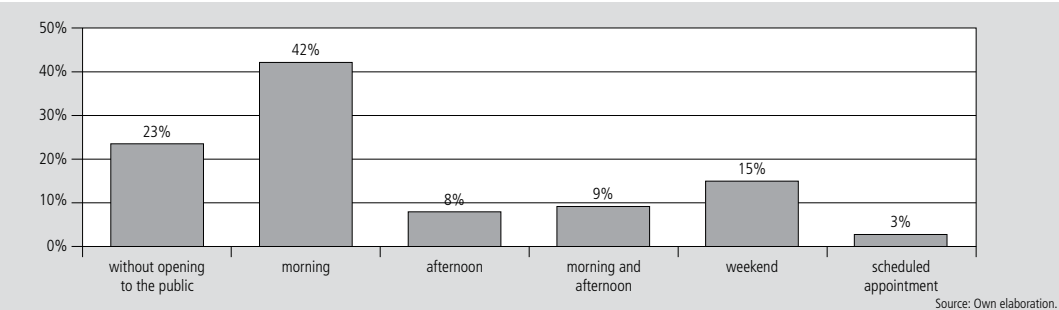


Figure 4 | Olive oil mills opening times for visits by the public in Baena, Montoro-Adamuz and Priego de Córdoba.

Table 3 | Results of the bivariate analysis between oil mill variables in Baena, Montoro-Adamuz and Priego de Córdoba

| Dependent variables | Chi-squared statistic (χ^2) | Degrees of freedom |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Investment in training / level of training of employees | 28.63 | 4 |
| Amount invested in the oil mill / opening of the oil mill to visitors | 43,21 | 10 |
| Methods to promote the oil mill / opening of the oil mill to visitors | 28.47 | 15 |
| Level of satisfaction of visitors / opening of the oil mill to visitors | 79.45 | 10 |
| Tourist's place of origin / maximum demand of visitors | 84.78 | 16 |
| Situation of the PDO / level of satisfaction of visitors | 36.45 | 4 |
| Number of employees / amount invested in the oil mill | 53.99 | 10 |

Note: Dependent variables with a confidence level of 95%.

Source: Own elaboration.

companies are the ones which invest more in training their staff, whereas the private or cooperative oil mills rarely or never invest in training. The former due to their reduced size and sometimes because of lack of resources and the latter because of the lack of awareness amongst the cooperative members that well educated workers will lead to an increase in economic performance (Schugurensky, 2006).

The results of the survey on staff training reveal that 48.17% have secondary education, 25.48% have primary education and 14.49% have a university degree. It also showed that 17.4% of the oil mills operate a continuous staff training programme to adapt to the new technologies, 73.2% invest in training only occasionally and without an established programme while 9.4% provide no training at all. It was also observed that the older the oil mills are the less they invest in staff training and the lower the level of automation.

2) The *opening of the olive oil mill to visitors* and the *amount invested in the olive oil mill* are two associated variables ($\chi^2 = 43.21$). The longer the oil mill opens (days) to visitors, the greater the investment is made by the oil mill owners to adapt olive oil mills to tourism.

3) There is dependency between the *methods they use to promote their business* (own website, presence at trade fairs and exhibitions, leaflets, others) and the *extent to which they are open to the public* ($\chi^2 = 28.47$ with 15 degrees of freedom and a confidence level of 95%). 71.3% of the oil

mills use the aforementioned methods (website, presence at trade fairs and exhibitions, and leaflets), 18.7% employ just one of these methods and 6.2% use other means while the rest (3.8%) do no promotional activities at all.

4) There is dependency between the *level of satisfaction of tourists* and the *opening of the oil mill to the public* (the statistic $\chi^2 = 79.45$ with 10 degrees of freedom is significant). The longer the oil mill opens (days) to visitors, the greater the level of customer satisfaction appears to be in the eyes of the oil mill owners (Spearman's rho, $r_s = 0.69$).

5) The variables *tourist's place of origin* and *maximum demand of customers visiting oil mills* are associated ($\chi^2 = 84.78$ with 16 degrees of freedom). The tourist's place of origin influences the seasonal variation in demand. Therefore, it would be possible to make the demand less seasonal if new markets opened up and, more specifically, neighbouring regional markets (currently, 66.34% of the visitors are tourists residing in Andalusia).

6) The *level of satisfaction of tourists* and the *situation of the PDO* are associated ($\chi^2 = 36.45$ with 4 degrees of freedom). On the other hand, the univariate analysis showed that 22.33% of oil mill owners think that the level of customer satisfaction is medium whereas 77.67% consider it to be high.

7) The *amount invested in the oil mill* is connected to the *number of employees* ($\chi^2 = 53.99$ with 6 degrees of freedom). Investment in an oil mill depends on its size. The higher the number of

employees, the greater the investment in the olive oil mill (Pearson's r , $r = 0,69$). As discussed above, in the routes analysed, those small oil mills with between 1 and 4 workers predominate.

3.3. Results of the demand

The demand for olive oil tourism is seasonal with the high points during Christmas, summer (July and August, principally), Holy Week, weekends and long weekends (Figure 5). At these times, hotel occupancy in the area is at an average of 83.2%, reaching 100% in during the Christmas period (especially New Year's Eve). At Christmas time, a large part of the demand not is met due to a lack in the supply of accommodation.

Of the 2,324 valid surveys, it was found that 60.4% of clients only visit one olive oil mill (Figure 6). They tend to be tourists on an organised package holiday. Tourists travelling by private car are those who usually visit more than three oil mills. In this

case, they plan their itinerary being interested in olive oil culture, but they only are 4% of the olive oil tourists.

Analysing the level of income, 4.3% have a monthly income greater than €2500, 13.5% have a monthly income of €2500, 36.8% between €1500 and €2500 and the remaining 45.4% have an income of less than €1500.

The variables of *reason for travel* and *level of education* are associated ($\chi^2 = 62.56$ with limit probability equal to 0). 64.8% have average studies (Figure 7) and their main motivation for visiting an oil mill is the olive oil tasting. In contrast, 8.1% of visitors have completed higher education and their main motivation is to learn about the oil production process.

On the other hand, 5.43% of tourists made the journey alone, 34.67% as a couple, 47.65% as a family and 12.34% with friends. And with regard to age, most of the tourists are between 50 and 59 years old (39.37%), followed by those between 40 and 49 years old (24.16%) (Figure 8).

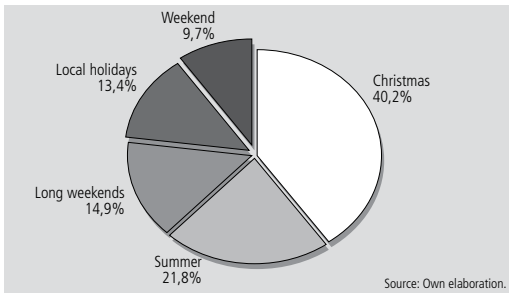


Figure 5 | Maximum demand for olive oil tourism in Baena, Montoro-Adamuz and Priego de Córdoba.

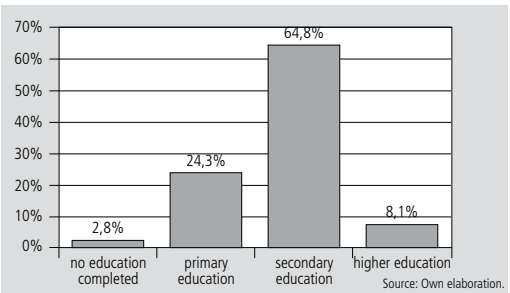


Figure 7 | Level of education of olive oil tourists in Baena, Montoro-Adamuz and Priego de Córdoba.

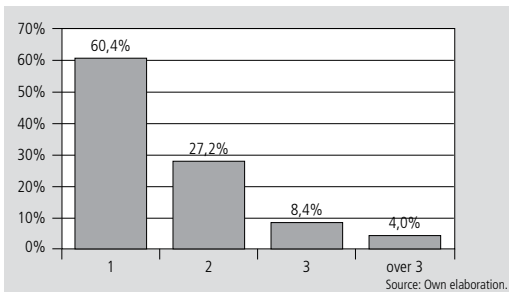


Figure 6 | Number of oil mills visited in Baena, Montoro-Adamuz and Priego de Córdoba.

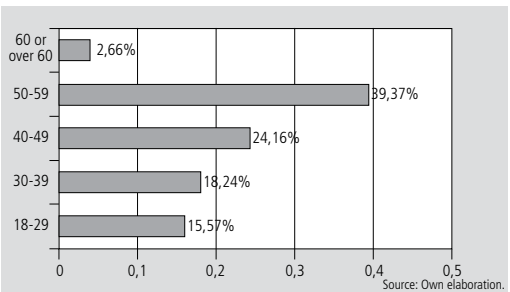


Figure 8 | Age of olive oil tourists in Baena, Montoro-Adamuz and Priego de Córdoba.

Therefore, the profile of a typical tourist visiting the olive oil routes of the Baena, Montoro-Adamuz and Priego de Córdoba PDOs is a person with an average income of between €1001 and €1500 with a medium level of education. A difference has been observed between the profile of the Montilla-Moriles tourist (wine route) and that of the Baena, Montoro-Adamuz and Priego de Córdoba tourist (olive oil route), both food routes belonging to the province of Córdoba. The tourist visiting the PDO Montilla-Moriles has a greater purchasing power (average monthly income of around €1800) and tends to be older (60 years old) (Millan *et al.*, 2008).

Olive oil tourists who have done the routes have shown their satisfaction, but have highlighted certain deficiencies, such as a lack of complementary activities and the high price of the journey. A lot of olive oil tourists also intend to repeat their visit.

4. Conclusions

The olive oil PDO routes are not as well known or as frequently visited by the gastronomic tourist as the wine PDO routes. The results of the survey reveal that 75% of tourists knew of (had heard of or visited) the PDO Montilla-Moriles (wine route) whereas only 12% had heard of the PDOs Baena, Montoro-Adamuz or Priego de Córdoba (olive oil routes), both of which are in the same province.

On the olive oil routes analysed, the number of olive oil mills open to the public is still scarce, especially during weekends and long weekends. In this area, the oil tourism supply does not adequately meet the current (nor potential) demand. So that this demand does not shift to other olive oil or even wine destinations, it is imperative to position this tourist destination clearly so as to create a unique trademark image for the routes (Williams, 2001).

The demand for olive oil tourism in the province of Córdoba is growing, according to managers, and a lot of olive oil tourists also intend to repeat their

visit. Therefore, there is a minimal demand for olive oil tourism so that different businesses, especially those already in existence, may invest in the area in order to satisfy the needs of this tourist segment.

The seasonality of demand could be reduced by exporting the routes to other Spanish regions and to other countries, taking the opportunity to travel on different dates, given the diversity of local holidays. Thus, existing resources would be better used in the area.

On the other hand, as tourists complain about the lack of other complementary activities and the olive oil tourist is usually of a mature age with a medium-high level of income, the creation of complementary activities, such as cultural or gastronomic festivals, would possibly generate more income for the area. The creation of olive oil museums could also be interesting. Only in the PDO Baena there is an olive oil museum, but it should be promoted more, since over 72% of tourists visiting olive oil mills in Baena not go to the museum.

Tourism could therefore provide the opportunity to develop complementary economic activities in the area of the routes analysed. For example, in the municipality of *Priego de Córdoba* there is a strong demand for rural tourism through which olive oil related tourist activities could be channelled as an additional activity. Similarly, *Almedinilla*, known for its archaeological remains of ancient Iberian settlers, or the area of the Montoro-Adamuz PDO, known for its nature reserves, could promote olive oil tourism as a second source of revenue. For example, in Montoro-Adamuz, tourists visiting the *Sierra de Cardeña Montoro Natural Park* complain about the lack of other complementary activities (Millán and Agudo, 2006). So, olive oil can act as either a primary or secondary trip motivator that adds value to the image of the destination.

In short, as the routes of Baena, Montoro-Adamuz and Priego de Córdoba have great potential with the tourists that visit the area for other motives (rural, archaeological, etc.), the different organizations should also channel these tourists

towards olive oil. If it is done in a rational way, this area could benefit greatly, not just economically, but also interculturally.

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