The **stakeholder-entrepreneur value-cocreation pyramid** in wine tourism: Taking supplier collaboration to the next level

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Abstract | Wine tourism represents a complex ecosystem combining distinct sectors: grape production, wine making and tourism. Innovative wine tourism must understand the dynamics of the wine tourism ecosystem, specifically regarding entrepreneur-stakeholders' value-cocreation, and its capacity to unlock significant sources of new value, with benefits for all. By proposing a stakeholder-entrepreneur value-cocreation pyramid, the present study aims to explore how wine tourism companies model their own value constellation and what perceived benefits make them invest in partner/relationships yielding a win-win value cocreation, beneficial to all stakeholders involved. A qualitative methodology helped validate the proposed model, with data from wine tourism agents of the Bairrada wine route in Portugal, collected through 44 in-depth interviews. Content analysis was performed using NVivo12. From the stakeholder-entrepreneur view, interview results unmask a rather individualist and functional/ transactional attitude towards partners, revealing little relational/ truly collaborative/ societal engagement, hardly stimulating partners' co-creative potential. The proposed model provides an analytical framework for assessing the degree of cooperation and potential of innovative value-cocreation within the wine tourism ecosystem, thus reflecting stakeholders' relational maturity, and their ability to boost sustainable regional development through value-based and value-producing network dynamics.

Keywords | Wine tourism, entrepreneurial ecosystem, Bairrada/Portugal, stakeholder-entrepreneur value-cocreation pyramid, collaboration

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1. Introduction

Wine Tourism (WT) represents a complex ecosystem combining the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors, involving distinct business strategies. This tourism product has emerged as an important area of tourism in many countries worldwide (Hall & Mitchell, 2000).

WT is viewed as a market niche (Getz, 2000) or a complementary activity to the wine-making sector (Inácio, 2008; Scherrer, Alonso, & Sheridan, 2009), where value is generated by interaction amongst a set of entities, in an articulated win-win strategy. In this vein, innovative trade models, based on a collaboration-oriented **stakeholder-entrepreneur dominant view** may help achieve business competitiveness (Getz & Brown, 2006), sustainable rural development (Kastenholz & Carneiro, 2021) and extraordinary experiences for visitors (Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011).

Considering the emerging vision of value-cocreation among stakeholders and their contribution to both territory and all firms' strategic management decisions and respective success, this research will contribute to highlight the importance of stakeholders' collaboration for mutually beneficial value creation. Grounded in Almquist, Senior and Bloch's (2016) model, a stakeholder-entrepreneur pyramid of value-cocreation is suggested revealing the benefits obtained through collaboration in the entrepreneurial ecosystem (EE), specifically in the context of wine tourism. Based on data collected from wine tourism agents in the Bairrada region in the centre of Portugal, the present study aims to explore how wine tourism companies model their own value constellation and what benefits they perceive associated with diverse relationships within the WT EE, possibly yielding a win-win value-cocreation for all stakeholders involved.

2. Conceptual framework: WT & partnership strategies

2.1. Stakeholders' value-cocreation in WT

When firms and partners bring together resources (including skills, talents and competences) and take joint actions that leave one another better off, effective **value-cocreation** occurs (Vargo et al., 2008). Norman and Ramirez (1993) consider that value results when multiple entities work together to create mutual benefits, emerging through the orchestration of stakeholder relationships. Assuming the service-dominant lens (Vargo & Lusch, 2004), the service system can be understood as the basic abstraction of value-cocreation amongst business partners (Maglio, Vargo, Caswell, & Spohrer, 2009). According to this perspective, the collective resources available may include people, technologies, organizations, and information, which are shared amongst all. However, failure to identify the interest of even a single primary stakeholder group could result in the failure of the whole process (Clarkson, 1995).

Byrd and Gustke's (2007, p.188) study on tourism stakeholders' viewpoints, stress the importance of informed stakeholders: "if the stakeholders perceive that a tourism development plan is sustainable, they will generally support the plan and the development". The stakeholders' inclusion in the business planning process gives them the opportunity to manifest their interests, before proceeding with development efforts (Hardy & Beeton, 2001; Sautter & Leisen, 1999; Vincent & Thompson, 2002), which may reduce conflicts in the long term (Yuksel et al., 1999) and thus enhance sustainable territorial development (Hardy & Beeton, 2001 apud Byrd & Gustke, 2007) and Markwick (2000).

Hjalager and Richards (2002) and Carlsen and Charters (2004) explain that traditional wine producing companies view other companies as rivals, not as potential partners, thereby ignoring the

potential and relevance of articulated destination approaches, particularly in tourism. Similarly, a recent study by the Portuguese national tourism agency showed a fragile **stakeholders' cooperation strategy** within the WT sector (Salvado & Kastenholz, 2017; TP, 2015), revealing a weak business relation with "extended business", because only "57% of the units claim to have partnerships with other companies and entities. Partnerships with tourist entertainment companies (30% of cases) and travel agencies (29% of cases) stand out. The number of units establishing partnerships with tourist enterprises is not so significant (14%)" (TdP, 2014, p.14). Only 9% were connected to entities categorized as "WT interest-based organizations", which correspond to the "the wine tourism eco-system model's" fourth level (Salvado & Kastenholz, 2017, p.1928), including entities playing a complementary, however often relevant, role, supporting and conditioning the core or extended WT businesses, such as local communities, social associations, cultural entities, universities and other cooperation members. In Portugal, these organizations refer mostly to wine routes, regional wine-producing commissions and municipalities.

Banathy (1996) highlights that **value-cocreation among stakeholders** can cover a range of interpersonal relationships, and Qudrat-Ullah and Kane (2010) suggest the following factors as critical for successful collaborative stakeholder value-cocreation: a) **interdependency** (creating value for one stakeholder is often dependent on how others perform); b) **mixed-tangibility** (stakeholder values are both tangible and intangible); c) temporality (values bear a temporal and cultural dimension) and d) **commitment-intensity** (requires the continuous lens of stakeholder value-creation in a win-win perspective).

Additional co-creative business drivers can benefit the WT sector, such as:

I. **Collaborative strategies implementation** defended by Getz (2000), Wargenau

and Che (2006), Telfer (2001) and Simpson and Bretherton (2004) with focus on vertical and cross-sectorial interactions, alliances and networking (public and private), contributing to economic, social and environmentally sustainable development of rural regions (Alonso & Liu, 2012);

II. **Community value constellation**: Ward (2000) points at communities as important stakeholders, forming a complex, informal network of relationships, experience- and knowledge-sharing, that can be combined into a powerful strategic fabric, with the right kind of leadership, thus forming a valuable "community-constellation". Ward (2000, p.5) stresses that "communities, like gardens, must be cultivated and gently nurtured if they are to thrive and multiply", rather than commanded and controlled. The author distinguishes four types of community-constellation relationships: a) based on a common group of activities; b) yielding development and articulated management of common resources (material or immaterial); c) based on boundary cultural heritage (tangible or intangible); and d) based on a common broad interest, cause or point of view. Their collective power would be reflected in "doing more with less" and capacity of building bridges even between territories. The last point seems particularly relevant in WT, where mobility within larger territorial entities may add significant value to the experience (Caldeira et al., 2021);

III. **Individual Stakeholders' value elements**: Almquist, Senior and Bloch (2016) presented "30 elements of value" consumers derive from products and services, rooted in Maslow's "hierarchy of needs", which they categorized in a pyramid according to four kinds of needs (in ascending order): "functional", "emotional", "life

changing" and "social impact". This model is transposed here to stakeholder relationships, motivated by a similar hierarchy of values - the "*Wine tourism stakeholder-entrepreneur value-cocreation pyramid*", as presented next.

2.2. The Wine Tourism Stakeholder-Entrepreneur Value-Cocreation Pyramid

The WT stakeholders' value should be examined not only from the perspective of the individual firms' performance but also considering the EE "win-win" potential, as advocated by Salter (2006), shifting from "provider" to a "collaborative partner" rationale, requiring individual skills, dedication, persistence, flexibility, emotional enga-

gement, well-designed collective action and long-term vision, as underlying the hierarchy shown in Figure 1. This model aims to help analyse partners' behaviours and relationships, associated to the four identified benefit levels, in a win-win perspective, grounded on the stakeholder-entrepreneur dominant view, where value is derived from the use of **extended capabilities** afforded by **interaction with other players**. Specifically, if the companies aim at working together to create mutual benefits, they need to plan several steps, such as: agreeing on the terms of cooperation; establishing a shared vision; building a team; defining task forces to implement common action; measuring success and agreement on corrective action. All these actions require the motivation to collaborate and strive together for common benefits and a successful EE.
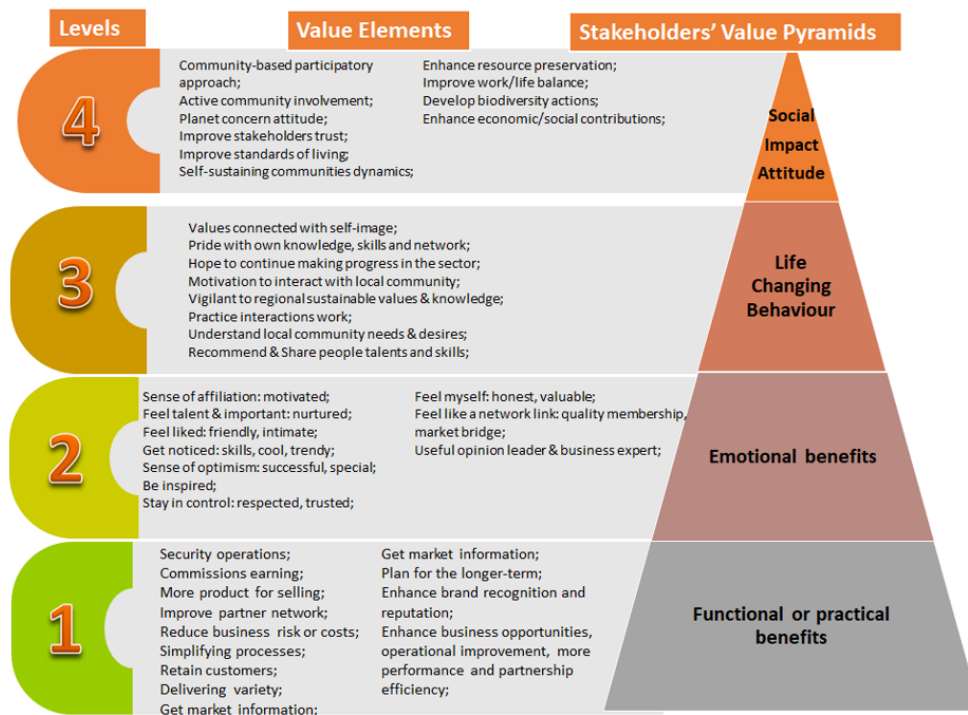

Figure 1 | Tourism Stakeholders-Entrepreneur Value-Cocreation Pyramid
Source: own elaboration, inspired by Almquist, Senior and Bloch (2016).

Here, Almquist, Senior and Bloch's customer-based value-cocreation model (2016), is transposed to a pyramid reflecting stakeholders' needs/business motivations, highlighting the following

types of benefits sought by all and potentially driving them to win-win-yielding collaboration:

Level 1 – (bottom-level) **"Functional or Practical Benefits":** As a result of partners' resources, skills, networks, value-cocreation may be enhanced regarding: portfolio development; partner network improvement; business risk or costs reduction; processes simplification; customer retention; market information access; longer-term planning; brand recognition; new business opportunities; operational improvement; performance and efficiency gains.

Level 2 – "Emotional Benefits": companies with closer stakeholder relationships can provide partners with: sense of affiliation (partners feel more motivation); talent recognition (partners feel nurtured); sense of friendship; perception of optimism (make feel partner successful and special); inspiration (accepting innovative ideas); feeling of control (respect and trust); sense of acceptance (honest and valuable); feeling like a valuable network link; feeling valued as opinion leader or business expert.

Level 3 – "Life Changing behavior": companies with a broader knowledge of stakeholders' value can empower partners: self-image; pride about one's own knowledge, skills and networks; hope to continue making progress; motivation to interact with local community; vigilance of regional sustainability and traditions; motivation to collaborate; understanding local community needs and desires; recommending and sharing peoples' talents and skills.

Level 4 (top-level) – **"Social Impact":** companies and their partners are embedded within local communities through: a community-based participatory approach, improved stakeholders' trust, community well-being and sustainable development (evolving self-sustaining communities dynamics, resources preservation; work-life balance; enhanced economic/social/ecological contributions).

Studies in the field of entrepreneurship have recently shifted their focus from entrepreneurs and ventures to Entrepreneurial Ecosystems (EE). These may be defined as "sets of actors, institutions, social networks and cultural values that produce and sustain entrepreneurial activity" (Roundy, Bradshaw, & Brockman, 2018, p.1), with every ecosystem being specific to its geographical boundaries and, accordingly, presenting distinct opportunities for entrepreneurs as well as culturally specific, distinct entrepreneurial spirits. These ecosystems are embedded in national culture, legal and institutional environments, and marked by their own micro-culture (Maroufkhani, Wagner, & Ismail, 2018).

Despite the undeniable impacts of digitalization and globalization on todays' businesses, with some questioning the importance of the local dimension of entrepreneurship (Autio, Kenney, Mustar, Siegel & Wright, 2017), territorial embeddedness is still considered relevant to entrepreneurship (Acs, Stam, Audretsch & O'Connor, 2017) and should be even more for territory-grounded tourism experience businesses (Kastenholz, 2018), particularly in WT (Getz & Brown, 2006; Kastenholz et al., 2022a).

Among the key components of EEs, authors refer to venture capital, support organizations, human capital, existing markets, and connections among the system components (Isenberg, 2011; Spiegel, 2017). Some authors stress the heterogeneous nature of ecosystems that need deeper focus (Acs et al., 2017). One fundamental aspect of EE variation is resilience, or the degree to which EE can continuously recover from and adapt to exogenous shocks and pressures (Cadenasso, Pickett, & Grove, 2006). Resilience can determine if an ecosystem is able to respond to disruptions, depending on a balance between diversity and coherence of EEs´ components, reflecting a kind of paradoxical tension. Diversity across EEs reflects industry variety, types of ventures, business models, support organizations, and participants' characteris-

tics (investors, customers, entrepreneurs) (Roundy, Brockman, & Bradshaw, 2017).

Tourism, as a highly complex sector, often conceptualized as a system (Gunn, 1994), with particular physical and human geography shaping unique tourist experience opportunities (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999; Kastenholz, 2018; Kastenholz et al., 2022a), presents a context where diverse EE elements and dynamics can be clearly observed. Here, the quality, engagement and collaboration amongst entrepreneurs are central elements of successful destinations (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015; Pato & Kastenholz, 2017; Skokic, Lynch, & Morrison, 2019). Tourism entrepreneurs play an important role as "network architects" in overcoming the challenges of increasing competitiveness and limited scale, especially in rural contexts, where WT tends to occur (Kastenholz et al., 2022a; Mottiar, Bolluk & King, 2018; Skokic et al., 2019). The ecosystem perspective recognizes that social context plays a fundamental role in both stimulating and restricting entrepreneurship, without discarding the role of the single entrepreneur (Cavallo et al., 2019).

In this approach, entrepreneurs are very important players in developing the ecosystem, although not doing it alone (Stam, 2015). This author highlights the interdependence of the multiple actors of EE, underlining that individuals and organizations must operate according to some common vision, shared values and intentions, to achieve a certain coherence, which in turn creates the structure that gives solidity to the EE. Roundry et al. (2018) stress the role and intentionality of entrepreneurs as the force that motivates the emergence of an EE. These EE are also and particularly relevant to the complex WT activity, calling for active collaboration amongst all for enhanced value-cocreation, which requires an understanding of the value that they all, individually and together, derive from a well-articulated system (Salvado & Kastenholz, 2017).

3. Methodology

Based on Miles et al. (2014), this study's fieldwork involves semi-structured interviews of Bairrada WT agents, with content analysis, supported by NVIVO. Discourses were analysed based on the previously suggested *Tourism Stakeholders-Entrepreneur Value-Cocreation Pyramid* (Figure 1), applied to WT. In order to explore how WT companies model their own value constellation and what perceived benefits make them invest in value-cocreation relationships, the following questions guided the research:

> I. *Do WT stakeholders help the EE of a wine destination to compete in today's changing business landscape through effective collaboration and how do benefits perceived by WT stakeholders condition their collaborative engagement?*
>
> II. *Considering the emerging vision on stakeholder value-cocreation as driver of firms' success, how is entrepreneurs' collaborative engagement incorporated into firms' and EE's strategic actions (WT experience development, innovation, and market decisions), conciliating business competitiveness, experience differentiation, destination success and sustainability?*

This study thus considers two main goals:

> I. Assessment of stakeholder motivations associated to network collaboration, according to the four levels of stakeholder benefits, proposed in the 'tourism stakeholder-entrepreneur value-cocreation pyramid', based on 44 semi-structured interviews of wine tourism agents in the Bairrada region;
>
> II. Assessment of the collaborative quality and corresponding strength, competitiveness and sustainability of the Bairrada WT EE.

Based on results of this assessment, recommendations for developing a more efficient value co-creating WT EE are discussed.

3.1. Data collection and analysis

Integrated in a broader 3 years' research project[1] (see Kastenholz & Carneiro, 2021). This study uses the stakeholder- entrepreneur as unit of analysis of the Bairrada WT ecosystem. The wine route is located in the Centre Region of Portugal, between Aveiro and Coimbra (Figure 2).

Figure 2 | The Bairrada Wine route
Source: Clube de Vinhos Portugueses (sd)

The route exists since 2006, being one of the most developed territorial (i.e. not exclusively winery-focused) routes in Portugal. The 44 Rota da Bairrada stakeholders interviewed[2] for this paper included wine producers, accommodation unit owners, restaurant managers, tour operators/ agents, municipalities and other associative or governmental entities.

In total, 44 interviews were undertaken, including questions about the business development, its dimension and other organizational features as well as respondents' sociodemographic profile. More specifically, the answers to the questions about wine tourism stakeholder-entrepreneurs' business motivations were assessed and categorized as: 'functional or practical benefits', 'emotional benefits', 'life-changing' and 'social impact'.

The content analysis followed an interpretative perspective, with overlapping content observable and the same comment possibly being coded into more than one category. Finally, results are presented and discussed using examples of narratives extracted from the discourses, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity.

4. Results

4.1. WT stakeholders' profiles

The participants' profile is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 | Sample profile

N = 44 participants	
Gender	
Male	28 (63.6%)
Female	10 (22.7%)
Age	
< 35	3 (6.8%)
35-45	8 (18.2%)
46-55	11 (25%)
56-65	8 (18.2%)
>65	6 (13.6%)
Missing values	5 (11.4%)
Education	
With a degree or higher	30 (68.2%)
No degree	3 (6.8%)
Missing values	5 (11.5%)
Business	
Wine Producers	23 (52.3%)
Accommodation unit owners	5 (11.4%)
Restaurant managers	5 (11.4%)
Tour operators/ agents	3 (6.8%)
Municipalities	2 (4.5%)

The sample consists mostly of male individuals (63.6%), between 35 and 65 (61.4%) years and of people with a degree in higher education

[2]https://www.rotadabairrada.pt/irt/caves-e-adegas_pt_1#&&concelho=0&PageIndex=5

(68.2%). About half of the sample are wine producers (52.3%), followed by accommodation unit owners and restaurant managers.

4.2. WT stakeholder relations

4.2.1. Partnerships in Bairrada Route

The results showed the important role of WT stakeholders' working together to compete in today's changing business landscape. Many participants report the existence of partnerships and/or good relationships with **route members and/or other entities** (47.7%) (see table 2):

> .... I now have a good relationship with several entities, with whom I share a lot of information, other producers with whom I share and discuss a lot of day-to-day topics. (Producer) As for our partners in Bairrada, we work more with wine producers; they are very friendly people and very open to interpersonal relationships. (Tour operator)

Being more individualist and possibly considering other members as rivals rather than partners may be an explanation for those who are more reluctant to establish partnerships, although only one agent openly admitted the latter.

Table 2 | Partnerships in the Bairrada Route

N = 34 participants	
Existence of partnerships/ good relationships with route members and/or other entities	21 (47.7%)
Weak or non-existent (with no explanation)	12 (27.2%)
Weak due to competitive/ rivalry perspective	1 (2.3%)

Globally, **interviewees are satisfied** with the work developed by the Bairrada route (80%), pointing out as main advantages: dissemination of information (23%) and attracting customers (25%).

> The Bairrada Rota (route) makes a difference to me, because they promote the region's products. But I think the Rota has already done a lot, they are professionals, they know how to do it and they promote Bairrada a lot in terms of wine, but not only, they also promote gastronomy. (Producer)

Most associates (members of the Bairrada route) identify with the **route organization as a territory route** (43%), and only three associates criticize this structure, defending a wine route (product). In this sense, 24 respondents (55%) stress the benefits of the route including other partners, beyond wine producers:

> Trying to capture as associates cultural institutions such as the Anadia theater, the Aveirense theater, the Águeda arts and events center. ...(that) also end up being an offer given to wine tourists. It is easier for a wine tourist to go to the Rota page than to the municipality's page. I would also associate with the spas and Caramulo [mountain destination]. I would look for everything possible to attract tourists...[to integrate the route] (Municipality).

Amongst suggestions **for improvement**, the following aspects stand out most: **Communication**, both amongst associates (16%) and with potential customers (25%):

> Without any doubt a lot more investment in marketing and promotion [is needed] much more vehemently and constantly. We have to talk more about ourselves, otherwise people forget. (Producer)

Product development: offer of wine **tourism packages** (9%);

> ... the only thing I would add are programs, ..., (with) the services that the [WT] companies offer and to collaborate to create their own programs, other programs, at lower prices, so that Rota could reach several [segments]. (Tour operator)

Internationalization (9%).

> Perhaps in the near future there will also be the capacity ...to work internationally. Very important for our Bairrada. (Producer)

4.2.2. Stakeholder-entrepreneur value-cocreation pyramid

This section aims to characterize the Bairrada WT sector in terms of partners' engagement and corresponding benefits derived, according to the four stakeholder-entrepreneur value-cocreation pyramid levels. Content analysis, aided by NVIVO permitted codification inside each level (see figure 1, table 3).

Table 3 | Partnerships levels

Level 1	Functional or practical benefits (69 references)
Level 2	Emotional benefits (29 references)
Level 3	Life changing behaviour (80 references)
Level 4	Social impact (116 references)

The fact that a given level is more representative than another may also be related to the very structure of the interview, with concrete questions to assess certain management dimensions, while the four partnership levels were not specifically asked to be commented on. Apart from the numerical importance of each level, the content of these quotes needs additional analysis, since some were triggered by specific questions (in case of sustainability issues, falling into Level 4), while other levels were consistently present in the spontaneous discourse regarding more open questions about partnership collaboration (e.g importance attributed to trust in well-functioning partnerships, highlighting the role of Level 1 in making stakeholders collaborate).

Level 1 - Functional or practical benefits

Regarding the base of the pyramid, a considerable proportion of the participants refer to establishing some type of **partnership** for certain operations (39/69 – number of sub-category references/ total number of references within 'Level I'),

> Strong: I work with very exclusive suppliers, ahn, namely for my products, my suppliers are all locally based, here in the Bairrada area, organic farmers. (restaurant)

However, these are mentioned in a superficial way or even accompanied by the note that true **partnerships are rare and/or difficult** (24/69)

> Difficult: It's always difficult, it's a difficult job, because I always try to partner with the winery. I work a lot with the cooperative winery, I have already proposed them that wine tourism service [catering]...could provide the services in the cellars/cellars (restaurant)

Sales (3/69)

> My wife says she is surprised by the level of sales of the store (of the Rota da Bairrada association), but that's all. ... I have never made any commercial contracts through the store, so I have little experience to speak of. (producer)

Share ideas (1/69)

In terms of the business itself, I now have a good relationship with several entities, with whom I share a lot of information, other producers with whom I share and discuss a lot of day-to-day topics. If I have any question, I look for some wineries that I identify with more to take decisions, they listen to what I say and that helps me take a decision. That's what I miss a little bit. I feel alone taking decisions. This process is a little bit solo and that's why I feel this need to share information and support the decision and contact with friends, but nothing in a formal way. (producer)

Training (2/69)

...[I see benefits] in training, in the promotion of internships, there are many schools here that bet on tourism courses, table service courses, bar service, kitchen... and the fact that we also provide these to students, ...through a protocol. Within our region, Águeda, Oliveira do Bairro, the professional school in Mealhada... all these schools have a course in hotel management and this is the case of the hotel school in Coimbra, so we also provide these internships; this is also a contribution that we make for the promotion of the hotel industry, courses and training of people, I think that this is also a good contribution that we make... (accommodation)

Level 2 - Emotional benefits

Emotional benefit is often referred to as a feeling of pride, respect, a feeling of being a valuable

network element (13/29), and of being proud and happy to contribute to a region they identify with, as visible in this excerpt:

Our winery is considered a company that is able to show that Bairrada, i.e, the region, has national and international quality, adds reputation, prestige and subsequent economic activity, and has, therefore, been, in our opinion, a significant contribution to regional development. (producer)

Level 3 - Life changing behaviour

In terms of life changing behaviour, there is still a sensitivity to **regional sustainability values, social responsibility and knowledge transfer** (31/80),

We live in the region and we try to fit in, in environmental terms, in social terms, in economic terms. And we try to help as much as possible with results that are favourable to the people (around us) or to other associations ... showing solidarity... for example, [Bosch] developed a project for the Rotary Club here in the region, in which the entire cost of ... logistics ... was (discreetly) invested by us - five thousand euros. (producer)

Understanding of local community needs and desires (27/80) is also present in discourses, often with some emotional connotation and revealing a strong local identity, sometimes presented as antithesis to the urban areas attracting the younger population and most investment:

Now in the village I see the other side, the sentimental part, that I was born there, and in the village, there were two or three shoemakers, a pharmacy, [some producing] arts and

crafts, there was a doctor and today there is nothing! If we are all doing the same, moving to Aveiro and Coimbra, one day there is nothing, we create a museum in each village. That's why I think, we have to make a dynamic that gives [back] some life to these smaller places. Then you have a job and you don't all have to go to work in Coimbra. Coimbra also only has the University and the Hospital, besides, Coimbra is worse than [our village].(accommodation)

Also, the **motivation to interact with and be part of the local community** (22/80) is present in many discourses showing a strong local connection, also enhancing a certain sense of realisation.

I'm a slave to this hotel and I think: why did I make this hotel if I'm a slave to it? And then, I settle for the idea that it's not for me, it's for others. It is beneficial for the area because everything I can buy here, I buy and [local] suppliers benefit from it. (accommodation)

Level 4 – Social Impact

'Social impact'-reflecting discourses were already quoted within previous categories and are intertwined with a sense of local identity and social values. In this vein, several stakeholders refer to the importance of setting community knowledge into value and working with locals or enjoying/using the community knowledge/practices in terms of social sustainability concerns, while also aiming at economic well-being of the regions' population. Also, environmental sustainability concerns, naturally impacting community and society at large, are identified in participants' discourses.

Sustainability (50/116)

All interviewees reported some kind of concern with **sustainability**, in its diverse dimensions, with **environmental issues** standing out (the topic was particularly addressed in one question).

Three levels of involvement with environmental issues may be distinguished:

I. Those who express concern only at a broader, strategic level (e.g., municipalities) (n = 8.18%);

We have our own environment office, there was a large distribution of recycling bins throughout the city. The … wine fair itself… is an ecological event. We have the ECO21 flag, we were considered a municipality with environmental quality, with responsibility and that's why we got the flag for consecutive years and keep it. (Municipality representative)

II. Those who describe concrete actions (n = 33.75%), specifically mentioning what is presented in table 4.

Table 4 | Sustainability actions in the Bairrada Route

separate waste and/or recycling	n = 13,39%
use less chemicals or even biological production	n = 12,36%
option for environmentally friendly materials or machinery	n = 10,30%
investment in solar panels	n = 10,30%
waste treatment	n = 8,24%
waste reduction	n = 4,12%
save water	n = 5,15%
comply with legal requirements	n = 5,15%
save on transport	n = 2,6%

III. Those most engaged with ecological business development, whose differentiating business image, their DNA as a brand and organizational culture is precisely defined by environmental sustainability (n = 3.7%). Despite their small number, these stakeholders' holistic engagement in all facets of the wine and WT business make them stand out, as visible in these excerpts:

[Environmental responsibility]. . . is also part of our communication and the way we sell our wines and to whom we sell our wines. This is a very big concern and a point of differentiation. . . . all our vineyards are being converting to organic farming, we already have integrated production . . .; currently we still buy some grapes, . . . from organic production or eventually even biodynamic. . . .we also have a great concern regarding packaging, which we also make a point of communication. Normally, when talking about environmental sustainability, people think that it is at the level of grape production, but there is a great impact on the wine production process itself, the amount of water we use, what type of packaging we use. . . So we use bottles of 400g, which is the minimum amount of glass that we can safely transport, . . . , all our corks are natural from REC production, our boxes are cardboard boxes and, therefore, without any varnish. We have that concern and it's all built into our communication. (Producer)
We have solar panels, we have 55 hectares, we don't buy grapes and we don't use any herbicide. We have maybe four times more work or more. We have lower profitability, because we are environmentally conscious. This year . . .our biggest investment is on the environment. We only have electric cars, so we are becoming quite environmentally conscious, I think. In fact, it is the environmental conscience that moves us. My father now bought some aluminium capsules in Sweden because when we have lunch there, we use up Nespresso,

and now we don't even have Nespresso anymore, we use up the metal capsules, they are reusable. (Producer)

As barriers to investment, only aspects of a financial nature were pointed out (n = 3.7%).

There is some sense in taking advantage of rainwater, but it's just that these investments require very large amounts. (Producer)

Still, some suppliers intend to invest in this aspect in the future (n = 4.9%).

But there are more things that we have to deal with, for example, we have a diesel truck that we want to switch to electric later. (Producer)

Economic and social sustainability concerns (31/50) are also largely present, revealing a concern regarding the well-being of local community members and regional prosperity:

We. . . our employees here are all more or less from the area, so we help a lot of people, as we are a very large restaurant. . . and then we are always very careful with what we buy, we try to make what we buy from the area whenever possible. (Restaurant)

Although the following three topics (accessibility of business, improve work/life balance, community-based participatory approach) can be integrated into economic and social sustainability concerns, from a conceptual/theoretical point of view, it was decided to treat this information separately, both due to their high representation in the participants' discourse and their theoretical relevance.

Accessibility of the business (28/116) may be considered a particular social sustainability concern, moving beyond local community and integrating visitors with disability conditions.

In general terms, 75% of respondents describe some type of current investment in issues related to **accessibility**, such as ramps, adapted bathrooms, ground floors. However, participants restrict their perspective on this subject to **physical accessibility**, denoting little knowledge about accessible tourism and its diversity:

> Yea. With access ramps for people with limited mobility. We work on the ground floor and therefore all people have access to things, the doors are big, we can receive large groups. I don't know what else to say... For people with motor difficulties, (...), we have an elevator (...) and ... parking for people with disabilities, (...) direct access, platforms. (...) There is not much more investment to be made in this regard, of course, there may be problems that arise, but at the moment I don't see any. (Producer)

However, this perspective is almost always related to complying with legal requirements and not so much as a business ideal.

> This is mandatory, we have to have ramps for the wheelchairs that never come. (...) We have ramps, vertical displacements of elevators, we are perfect (...). (producer)

The intention to **improve work/life balance,** especially in terms of **gender issues (27/116)** is also observable, with the presence of women in WT reported as quite common:

> We have women in administrative roles, production, laboratory, they are in

all sectors. Men here are in the minority. (producer)

Despite this apparently natural integration of women in the WT business sometimes, between the lines, a lack of sensitivity to the subject becomes clear:

> Usually women fight for equality, but when they are put on a tractor for 4 hours where they sweat a lot in the middle of a vineyard, they no longer want this job, most of them, but there are exceptions. Then, I don't discriminate, for me the question is that I have the skills to do that, I don't care about gender. (producer)

Community-based participatory approach (11/116).

The concerns/sensitivities about this issue are reflected by a smaller portion of the interviewees, in terms of a proposed more active involvement with the community and local culture (11/116).

> I'm remembering the harvests. Last year when we did the harvest program, [including] ...our harvest party, the folk group participated that represents the region's ethnography and culture; so we tried to gather and show all that the region has to offer. We are present in various events, whether in the "festival of the vineyard and wine" or ... in festivities in Aveiro and, therefore, we joined. We need to be present to show ourselves, but we also need to collaborate with the Bairrada events, we have to be reciprocal. (Producer)

All in all, one may stress a series of sustainability concerns, which are mostly related to socio-economic aspects, but also embrace, both truly felt

and legally enforced, environmental responsibility and action, as well as investments in accessibility, while involvement with local community or gender and life-balance issues seem to be less present.

5. Discussion

The interviewees' narratives on business motivations reveal a strong perception of individual contributions to "social Impact" (116 references), "life changing behaviour" (80 references), "functional benefits" (69 references) and "emotional benefits" (29 references) (Figure 3).

Opinions emphasize mostly the view of a rather one-way interaction (the company benefitting the collective). Respondents do not highlight to the same degree benefits they recognize they obtained (or expected) from the community and regional partners, regarding knowledge, experience or skills exchange, or their awareness of a need to intensify commitment and improve articulated action to improve the WT experiences.

The interview results showed that WT entrepreneurs:

> I. Need other stakeholders to develop their work, but focus in their collaboration on exchanging services and/or goods (transactional logic);
>
> II. Express confidence in their own value contribution to the region and to other wine route members (quality of their services or products, honesty in the production process, among others);
>
> III. Reveal limited, but effective collaborative networking. In other words, each supplier tends to maintain a small network of partners, strictly necessary for operations, lacking integration in a wider, also more strategic network, such as envisioned by the Bairrada Route Association.

Iv. Demonstrate recognition of the role of regional cultural identity, interest and concern about valuing local resources, involving the community in WT activity, and promoting a sustainable development on both the economic and social level, but this awareness does not always result in concrete actions.

In this context, it seems WT organizations realize the importance of collaboration to improve their organizational work and outcomes, as well as to strengthen the EE they belong to. However, the (not too many) existing relations are mostly superficial, while all partners and the ecosystem itself would benefit from deeper and stronger interaction. The concern about sustainable development has apparently not yet led to a stronger joint effort in building a more competitive, sustainable and resilient WT ecosystem.

There appears to be a need for deeper and more intense connections between a larger and possibly more varied group of entrepreneurs and regional actors, which may be enhanced through some initiatives suggested as *best practice* by Ward (2000): the development of an effective governance model, with common goals and strategies, implementation of project teams and concrete task forces to define and implement innovative projects, while also developing efficient (digital) communication and interactive intelligence tools, measuring ongoing results through well-defined indicators and making adjustments as necessary.

Some conditions are indispensable to operationalize this overall beneficial network-framework and each 'step' has to be perceived as relevant and useful for each partner, making all engaged in trying to achieve the highest level. By understanding the interconnected nature of the multiple actors of the WT EE, individuals and organizations may develop a stronger interest to operate according to a common vision, culminating in articulated behaviours to achieve consistency, essential for a sustainable EE (Stam, 2015). In this regard, the

role of *Rota da Bairrada* as a focal regional governance institution appears quite important, with the potential to create and strengthen this necessary vision and alignment, developing mutual trust among all network elements. Other partners, together with entrepreneurs may bring an important input to the successful implementation of Ward's general ideas.

A broader view of collaboration within the existing network could help achieve a more strategic level of the activities performed by many partners in a poorly articulated manner. Considering, for example, the need of a common vision, the importance of clarifying common interests to build trust and gain insight on what actions are more valuable for all parts involved, the creation of a "discussion forum" would certainly bring together interesting

ideas, aspirations and sensibilities and could result in concrete initiatives (such as training, events, digital marketing investment), which in turn would help improve the EE's dynamics. Defining the most adequate governance model, adapted to the specific WT context, developing effective communication channels and leadership structures, as well as innovative projects and initiatives, may be better accomplished if I&D Institutions (e.g. Universities) are additionally involved as active partners of the network.

Given the complexity of the tourism system, the interrelated nature of all operations and activities, this collaborative approach seems most appropriate to enhance overall results, competitiveness, but also resilience in times of crisis (Kastenholz et al., 2022b) and sustainability.
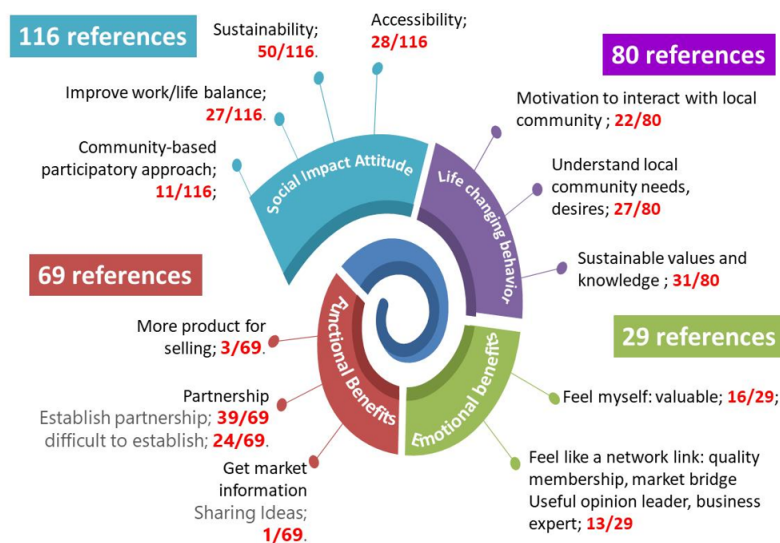

Figure 3 | Benefits perceived by WT stakeholders in Bairrada
Source: Own elaboration

6. Conclusions

To design a more efficient stakeholders' value constellation, innovative WT companies must understand the dynamics of the stakeholders' value-co-creating system. The contribution to both the territory's and all firms' strategic goals, as well as the specificities of the entrepreneurial WT ecosys-

tem, may unlock significant new sources of value with benefits for all (Byrd & Gustke, 2007; Norman & Ramirez, 1993; Salvado & Kastenholz, 2017).

Most respondents in this study recognize that they need other stakeholders to develop their work, but practices show a rather transactional logic, where exchanging services or goods is the main focus. While most entrepreneurs show confidence

in their own value contribution to the region and the wine route (e.g., quality of their services or products), there is a widespread perception of the absence of an effective, strategically-focused collaborative network, truly enhancing value for all. There was, however, no clear effort of collaboration beyond traditionally related activities visible, with many stakeholders not going beyond their usual geographically and sectorial limited approach.

Nevertheless, strengthening bonds amongst more and diverse regional stakeholders would contribute to more resilient EE (Kastenholz et al., 2022b; Stam, 2015), where community knowledge, diverse competences and resources could be shared, with all benefitting from diversity and inclusion. In an experience-dominant view (most adequate to WT), value is co-created by interaction between local actors and visitors, in an articulated network of value-constellation (Carvalho et al., 2021). Similarly, according to Norman and Ramirez (1993), the stakeholder-entrepreneur dominant view suggests value as co-created by interactions among a constellation of entities, where business strategy implies the art of continuous design and redesign of complex business systems to connect knowledge, resources and relationships. So, establishing a system of interacting stakeholders – rather than establishing a position along a value chain – will leverage each actor's and the entire system's connected resources, resulting in enhanced value through the use of extended capabilities afforded by interaction with others.

Despite the gaps identified here at the relational level amongst WT businesses in Bairrada particularly regarding effective collaborative action, belief and engagement in a more far-reaching, sustainability-enhancing networking, interestingly the societal development dimension seems to be quite relevant to most participants, who show interest and concern about setting local resources into value, involving and benefitting the community and promoting economically and socially sustainable development. However, stakeholders seem to

underestimate the power of collaboration and thus need to: 1) understand the partners' (and community's) roles and their (potential) importance inside the ecosystem, and 2) step up in the proposed stakeholder pyramid model (from level 1-functional/transactional to 4- effective social impact enhancing networking), building more intense and effective ties and working together towards a common goal: co-creating innovative WT and territory experiences, increasing business competitiveness and territorial sustainability.

6.1. Implications, limitations and future research

The proposed model may serve as a framework to analyse and reflect on stakeholders' collaboration maturity and motivation at a WT destination, permitting the evaluation of networks from a business and sustainability perspective. The WT sector should benefit from critically evaluating the state of its regional network, leveraging the destination and its resources and trying to engage stakeholders more effectively in all experience co-creation phases.

The present study is limited to the view of a group of stakeholders within a particular wine region, the Bairrada, and is not generalizable to other territories. Another limitation is the interview context, since it had to accommodate several goals, within the objectives of a larger research project, not permitting the in-depth discussion of all elements of the suggested model.

Future research should include approaches that would permit a more systematic identification of specific stakeholder groups within the wine destination, with sufficient numbers also permitting the assessment of group-specific views on the here-discussed topics. Additionally, other stakeholders, not formally integrated in a WT route but possibly valuable in the broader WT ecosystem, could add distinct value contributions that may enrich the

network's value constellation and enhance results of effective collaboration. Research on specific elements of WT EEs could be of interest to complement the understanding of the particular entrepreneurial milieu. Several authors identified the importance of diverse variables (e.g. support organizations, human capital, or marketing) in creating and maintaining healthy entrepreneurial environments (Schmeer, 1999; Stein et al., 1999; Wargenau & Che, 2006), which should also be analysed in the WT context.

Last but not least, an analysis of not only entrepreneurial actors within the WT EE, but also of distinct other stakeholder groups, relevant for an EE's success, as identified in Payne, Ballantyne and Cristopher's (2005) 'six markets stakeholder model' (considering the importance of relationships not only to/ within suppliers/ alliance markets, but also customer, internal, referral, influence and recruitment markets), should permit valuable insights into a quite complex, dynamic relationship reality, which is not easy to assess and evaluate, nor to manage, posing multiple challenges but also opportunities to researchers and practitioners alike. The contributions draw attention to possible ways of developing the activity of single actors and the entire sector, which can result from strong and collaborative relationships, as Payne, Ballantine and Christopher (2005) state in their model, in the creation of greater value to their diverse markets.

Studies considering diverse actors, elements, as well as the governance structure, leadership, and evolution of the WT EE, and particularly on the role, potential and types of collaboration for leveraging actors and resources, would add most relevant insight, contributing both to theory development in the field, and to potentially more successful and sustainable WT destinations.

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