

# WINE TOURISM AND ECO-FRIENDLY DEVELOPMENT

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## *Abstract*

In the set of transformations that, over the past two decades, have affected tourism demand, an aspect of paramount importance involves its “experiential” nature, which is increasingly determining the choice of tourism type and destination. This trend translates into significant growth in certain types of tourism, first and foremost those focused on natural attractions, on the territory and the cultural and material traditions of its populations. As far as Italy is concerned, the wine sector represents an interesting industry for the tourism connected to it. The main reason behind the increasing import of the phenomenon lies in the vast competitive potential of the spread and development of the wine-growing area over the entire national territory. Its expansion on so vast a scale enables the country to offer a wide range of destinations to potential customers. These tourist sites are characterised by distinguishing features both in terms of landforms and agricultural management models as well as top-class entrepreneurial experiences. Starting from these premise, the paper intends to reflect on the opportunities that “wine tourism” represents for Italy as a competitive tool that would allow new tourist destinations, such as those in the inland areas, to emerge. In this perspective, the paper also investigates the impact of this new tourism segment as a development opportunity based on eco-sustainable factors, and in terms of pervasive communication for the benefit of companies in the area, especially of small enterprises.

*Keywords:* eco-friendly development, wine tourism, inland areas

## 1. Introduction

In the set of transformations that, over the past two decades, have affected tourism demand, one aspect of paramount importance lies in the intrinsic “experiential” nature of the motivations that drive tourists when planning their travel. What emerges in the most recent literature in the field and in the evaluations of the main bodies that devote primary attention to tourism (Di Vittorio, 2010; Gulotta, 2019; ISMEA, Qualivita, 2021) is a more responsible and informed motivational research

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in the choices underlying the tourism demand as a clear factor of consumers' preference. It is possible to pinpoint a more heterogeneous tourism demand that contrasts the typical standardisation of globalizing scenarios. Subjective evaluation factors reveal major expectations inspired by an extraordinary interest in authenticity and a constant pursuit of getting to an "elsewhere" that thrills tourists and fosters their knowledge of foreign realities. Therefore, uniqueness and unrepeatability of the expected experiences represent the main motivation behind the choice of destinations characterised by strong local identity values as crucial factors in orienting the tourism promotion policies.

The data collection, spread at different scales by the main industry observers (UNWTO, EUROSTAT, ISTAT), aims at investigating the motivations behind travellers' expectations. Furthermore, it highlights how, since the early 2000s, the luxury travel demand has been shrinking, mainly because it addresses only few people with a high purchasing power. Meanwhile, most tourists have been turning their attention not only to the most popular destinations of the traditional receptive areas, but also to some unusual ones, whose uniqueness is linked to their geographic specificity (Buonincontri et al., 2017; Sharpley, Stone, 2010). In other words, the necessity to discover an "extra-ordinary" place is recognised as pivotal, since it represents a section of territoriality still untouched by the forced modernisation process, thus preserving its transitional environmental and social features. As a result, all those resources that are poorly rooted in the geographical context of reference significantly lose their attractiveness. In the meantime, the expectation of an experience linked to the temporary immersion in the locals' everyday life increasingly drives a demand to characterise the destination choice and even the type of accommodation preferred for one's stay. On the one hand, this trend results in an increase in certain types of tourism, first and foremost the forms focused on the enjoyment of natural resources and interactions with the territory, and its related cultural and material traditions. On the other hand, it leads to the increasing competitive benefit gained by all those accommodation facilities that, beyond the hotel industry and through forms of "family" hospitality, allow to foster the experiential value associated with travel. As is widely known, this need has become more intense over the past few years. It is fuelled by an ever-increasing concern for the environment, which, in terms of tourism consumption, implies a reshaping of the ways of travelling toward models of receptivity allowing for a reduced impact on local communities. In this perspective, an emerging additional attractive factor can be detected in tourists' participation in the improvement process, which constitutes a full experiential value. This aims at the reduction of the ecological footprint strictly linked to the territory (Montella, 2017). It is thus evident how, thanks to the combination of these factors, both the most widespread segments of the tourism industry and the nature-based tourist experiences have become responsible and eco-sustainable. Among them rural and food-and-wine tourism are certainly in a frontline position, precisely because of their unrepeatability and undisputed bond with the territory (Santos, 2022).

The emergence of these tourism sectors are of great interest for Italy, which, thanks to the fame of its wine and gastronomic resources, represents an extraordinary attraction for tourists, especially as regards the international demand<sup>2</sup>. Consequently, this may constitute a particularly interesting tool of competitive differentiation for some destinations located in inland areas and in unique topographical contexts, within a settlement model of productive management based on eco-sustainable factors for local companies. In fact, it is evident that wine tourism in particular does not only represent a specific type of product consumption and an opportunity for sustainable economic development for the related destinations, but also a business opportunity for wine companies (Getz, 2006). During the visit they can promote their products to an international audience with interesting commercial implications. For this reason, entrepreneurs of the wine supply chain along the national territory are increasingly expressing a strong inclination to invest in the growth of their activities. At the same time, wineries could also retain the tourism flow through a secondary activity linked to the real tourist fruition, thus determining significant spin-offs towards the same territorial communities. From Franciacorta to Sicily, in addition to cellars guided tours and wine tastings, new accommodation facilities, born from the conversion of disused buildings, are being built among the vineyards. Far from taking on the features of an agritourism structure, in many cases they are labelled as luxurious “wine resorts” often provided with innovative personal care and well-being services, which may trigger a real virtuous circle for the eco-sustainable development of such territories. For instance, grape pomace is employed in healthy treatments based on vinotherapy.

In fact, the examination of the literature in the field reveals the multidimensional nature of wine tourism (Cambourne, Marcionis, 2003; Beverland et al., 2001; Williams, 2001, Getz et al, 1999) as a conceptual category. Depending on the perspective it is analysed from, wine tourism can be considered as a development strategy of tourism destinations in those areas characterised by a significant production of wine. However, at the same time it may represent an opportunity for wineries to promote and sell their products (Getz and Brown, 2006). Therefore, wine tourism will increasingly play a central role in the sustainable development of territories (Hall, 2000) through the preservation and enhancement of economic and social resources, and consequently of the surrounding environment.

## **2. The Wine Industry in Italy**

As mentioned earlier, the significant competitive potential of Italy, as concerns the development of wine tourism, derives first of all from the remarkable

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<sup>2</sup> The top five source markets generating the highest revenue as for wine-and-food vacations in Italy are: the United States, the United Kingdom, Austria, Switzerland and France. Together they account for 55.2 percent of the total (Enit, Istat, 2021).

characterisation that the wine sector is taking on in recent years. With such growth Italy ranks first on a global scale as the largest wine producer (OIV, 2022), followed by France, which instead exceeded our country in wine production until 2014, and Spain. These are Italy's main competitors in Europe in terms of tourist flows, too.

*Table 1: Wine Production in the main countries of the world (in Mil. Di hl)*

<b>COUNTRIES</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>%WORLD 2021</b>
<b>ITALY</b>	42,5	54,8	49,1	50,2	19,3%
<b>FRANCE</b>	36,4	49,2	46,7	37,6	14,5%
<b>SPAIN</b>	32,5	44,9	40,9	35,3	13,6%
<b>USA</b>	24,5	26,1	22,8	24,1	9,3%
<b>AUSTRALIA</b>	13,7	12,7	10,9	14,2	5,5%
<b>CHILE</b>	9,5	12,9	10,3	13,4	5,2%
<b>ARGENTINA</b>	11,8	14,8	10,8	12,5	4,8%
<b>SOUTH AFRICA</b>	10,8	9,5	10,4	10,6	4,1%
<b>GERMANY</b>	7,5	10,3	8,4	8,0	3,1%
<b>PORTUGAL</b>	6,7	6,1	6,4	7,3	2,8%
<b>CHINA</b>	11,6	9,3	6,6	5,9	2,3%
<b>RUSSIA</b>	4,5	4,3	4,4	4,5	1,7%
<b>ROMANIA</b>	4,3	5,1	3,8	4,5	1,7%
<b>BRAZIL</b>	3,6	3,1	2,3	3,6	1,4%
<b>TOT.</b>	219,9	263,1	234,2	231,6	89,3%

*Source: ns elab.su dati OIV (2022)*

However, if relevant production data cannot be undisputed, the most interesting aspect derives from our distinctive ampelographic heritage, precisely due to the impact it determines as far as tourism supply. The latest estimates reported by Istat in 2022, through the 7th General Census of Agriculture, show that in Italy as many as 636,000 hectares are intended for the vineyard. Nonetheless, these data especially highlight how in our country the utilised agricultural area, which equals the 5% of national territory, is widespread along it, despite different concentration in the various regions. On the contrary, in France and Spain, our main competitors, the phenomenon assumes the features of a prevailing geographical concentration. Due to its pedoclimatic conformation, Italy emerges for its largest and most diversified wine production around the world. At the same time, this aspect establishes the conditions under which the grape varieties may present features of top-quality products. As a result, each Italian region can boast a variety of products that are easily recognisable by labels DOC, DCG, IGT (Controlled Designation of Origin, Controlled and Guaranteed Designation of Origin, Typical Geographical Indication), also identified

on a European scale as PDOs/PGIs<sup>3</sup>(Protected Designation of Origin/Protected Geographical Indication). This does not only regard Piedmont, whose identity is grounded on wine culture, with its 19 top-class varieties, but also Veneto and Tuscany that count 14 and 11 PDO grape varieties, respectively. In regions such as Abruzzo, Sardinia, Sicily and more recently Campania wine production has greatly increased, although with fewer PDO varieties (Federvini, 2022).

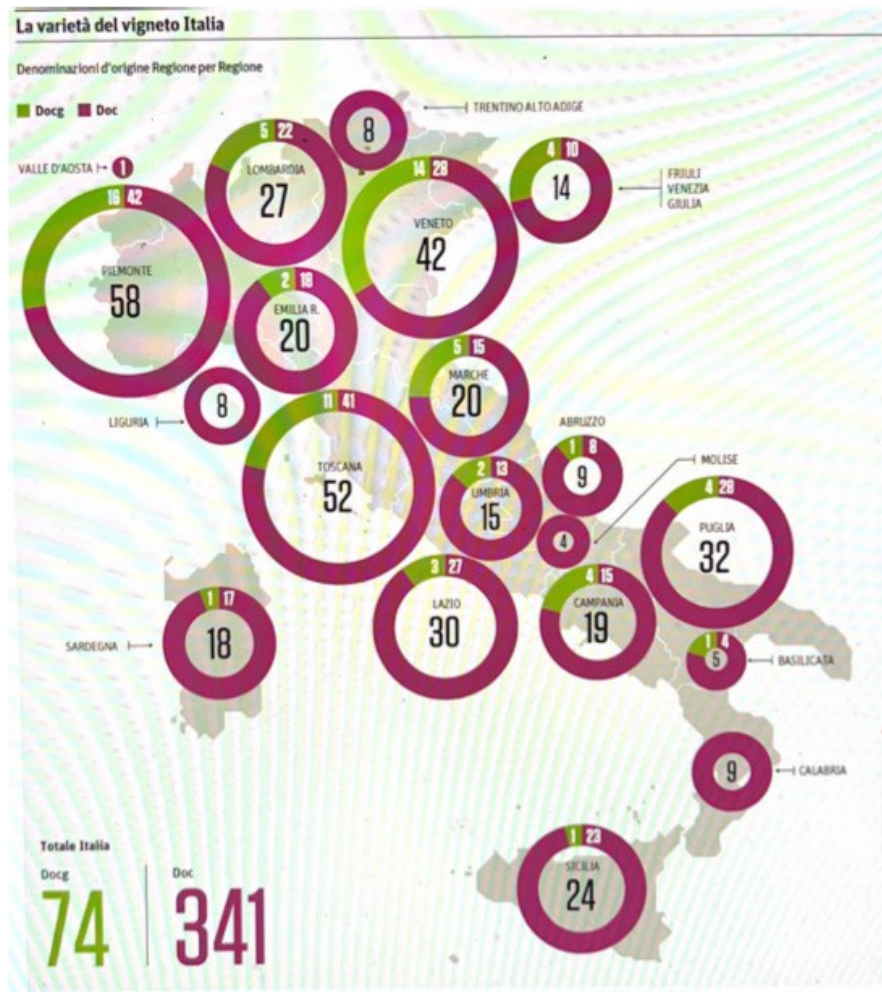


Figure 1: DOC and DOCG labels in Italy. Source: Sole 24ore infodata

3 The DOP/IGP regulations are a key point of the Common Agricultural Policy aiming at promoting and preserving quality and authenticity of food and wine production. The existing legislation for wine production expressed by the Law 12/12/2016 of the so-called Wine Consolidated Act emphasises the relationship between wine and its geographical origin through three principles: 1) the explanation of the elements linked to the territory in the Production Regulations; 2) the obligation to make the areas of vinification coincide with those of bottling; 3) the loss of the right to claim a given name for must and wine intended to become PDO or PGI in case they should fall outside the specific production area, other than specific exceptions expressly provided in the production regulations (Qualivita Foundation, 2021).

It is therefore clear how such a broad combination of oenological features, climatic and environmental varieties, local realities, landscapes and ethnological and gastronomic traditions may have a beneficial impact on tourism supply. In this way, our country may easily offer a wide variety of destinations to potential demand when choosing places with suggestive experiential appeal factors. This does not concern exclusively those territories that thanks to their wine landscape have recently been inserted in the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites, such as Langhe, Roero, Monferrato (2014), and the celebrated Prosecco hills of Conegliano and Valdobbiadene (2019). However, it would be advisable also to consider other territories, which have already gained recognition for the uniqueness of their own landscape as well as their historical and architectural resources. At the same time, all these territories consist of evocative wine-growing areas, as in the case of Castel Del Monte in Apulia, the Amalfi Coast and even the Val D'Orcia (OIV, 2021). These geographical realities are particularly suited to wine tourism because of their complex set of appealing factors. In such territories wine production, along with diverse experiences and services, could constitute an additional source of innovation. For instance, both collective harvesting and bicycle tours among vineyards present a strong appeal since they are strictly intertwined with food and wine, and also similar to well established forms of tourism, which have already proved to be successful in the leading regions for the wine industry (Garibaldi 2022).

### **3. Constraints and opportunities of wine tourism in Italy**

The increasing prominence that wine tourism is assuming in our country clearly emerges when considering the analysis of the most recent data carried out by the WTO. According to these data, in 2021 about 14 million individuals, including tourists and excursionists, visited vineyards and wineries for a value of about 2,6 billion € in turnover of the overall wine tourism chain. The significance of this result is unquestionable, considering that, despite the restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, figures have almost returned to the extraordinary levels of 2019. Indeed, before pandemic “food and wine” tourism had attracted 15 million individuals, according to the same source. The main reason behind this rapid phenomenon was that some of the characteristics of this type of tourism were completely coherent with the needs of the demand in the immediate post-pandemic phase. In particular, consumers demanded short and very short distance travels primarily to outdoor and uncrowded spaces, such as the vineyards indeed, thus revitalising what has been

called “proximity tourism”. The term “slow”<sup>4</sup>, now widely used to refer to the set of these new tourism experiences (Demma, 2021), well summarises this innovative conception of travel. Food and wine tourism could unfold its greatest potentials precisely in relation to minor destinations, such as those in the inland areas. At the same time, this type of tourism might contribute to rebalance the Italian tourism system in terms of the geographic distribution of flows, which is excessively influenced by the hegemonic attractiveness of the historical centres of large urban areas and cities of art, especially those in the North of the country, and also in terms of seasonality, still markedly concentrated from April to September. Therefore, less frequented inland hillside areas in particular might become new tourist destinations for the entire autumn season. The potentials of food and wine tourism could be beneficial not only to those regions in our country with a strong orientation to this type of tourism such as Tuscany, the most attractive region for the international demand of wine, followed by Piedmont, Veneto and Trentino Alto Adige (OIV, 2022), but also to the southern regions. Although the latter are certainly less advanced in wine tourism, it would be important, as mentioned, to leverage the other context-related factors of attractiveness such as culture and art or the landscape to promote among foreign tourists the quality and notoriety of local wines, which are often unknown to them. As a result, a new motivation for travelling might arise, which will induce tourists to extend their stay towards the more internal areas, therefore stimulating tourism in the off-season.

However, numerous constraints still prevent the full development of wine tourism, terribly limiting its potential and reducing the possible positive effects that its expansion could have on the entire national tourism system. From the most recent report of the “Cities of Wine” association<sup>5</sup> some of the main critical issues related to this important tourism segment emerge clearly. The detection was conducted directly by means of two surveys on the offer aimed at wineries in the strict sense and wine cellars open to the public and another survey for a sample of consumers of the Italian wine tourism market. The first element limiting the full development of the sector is undoubtedly the reduced accessibility of the supply centres. They exceedingly lack both the physical infrastructure, which means that inland areas cannot be easily reached, and the digital infrastructure itself, since for market reasons a significant

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4 To this extent, in 2021 the association “Slow Tourism Italia” ([www.slowtourism-italia.org](http://www.slowtourism-italia.org)) was established along with a brand. It consists of a network of businesses in the sector, from accommodation businesses to tour operators and local operators of another kind, whose main purpose is to offer a slow, sustainable and responsible tourism experience in direct contact with the nature and the local communities. This goal is achieved through the organisation of tours and itineraries in the various Italian regions, including in particular little-known areas, in order to make them high-quality tourism destinations.

5 The “Cities of Wine” association, which has 493 member municipalities in Italy, was founded in 1987 (with only 39 municipalities) with the aim of supporting (through the direct involvement of its service company Ci.Vin srl) the growth of activities and projects devoted to local wine and food products to allow a better quality of life, sustainable development and more job opportunities.

level of "digital divide" persists at the expense of peripheral and sparsely populated territories. In fact, most municipalities, which could be involved in this form of tourism, are located in rural areas or, at any rate, in areas that are marginal to large urban centres and to the main infrastructures. Therefore, the effective interconnection of inland areas with the rest of the national territory results being limited. In addition, it should be noted how, despite a still weak demand, no adequate stimuli for the development of complimentary services, such as receptivity, have emerged at all. The only exception concerns emerging initiatives implemented by local companies, which have tried to set up attractive accommodation facilities with successful economic outcomes.

These are territories that, especially those in the South, are too often lacking adequate infrastructural facilities. The main reason for this is because, as shown in a recent research (D'Aponte, 2022) aiming at the examination of proximity tourism, these territories are not only marginalised by a poor development of functions, but they are also often abandoned by the younger population. As a matter of fact, young people are attracted by leisure possibilities incompatible with the structure of minor localities where wine tourism, acting as a driving force of cultural tourism, could represent a fundamental lever of local development.

In addition to this undoubted shortcoming, which concerns both this particular tourist segment and the entire sector, there is a pressing need to strengthen public/private collaboration networks in order to come up with more innovative organisational models of promotion and development. This could result in a strategic agreement between institutions and private stakeholders that would certainly stimulate an increase in flows even on a national scale, thus enhancing the potentials of the growing rate of proximity tourist flows. The role of the public sector appears to be crucial, as demonstrated by the launch of effective initiatives such as the case of the Cuneo area. The promotion of "Barolo Italian City of Wine 2021" conceived by the "Cities of Wine" association in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture managed to enhance the valorisation of wine tourism destinations through the annual awarding of a title to an Italian municipality or network of municipalities.

A recent step forward for the support and the development of the sector has certainly resulted from the amendment specifically on wine tourism introduced by the 2018 Budget Law. In fact, prior to this new law, the entire sector relied only on the "Wine Streets" project, which in 1999 allowed territories with a significant wine production to be publicised, marketed and enjoyed as tourist attractions. Additionally, special road signs were installed across the entire national territory to promote signposted routes to wine-growing areas to tourists (Festa et al., 2020). On the other hand, the Italian Parliament has recently approved a law that defined the term "wine tourism" for the first time. With this law the category of "wine tourism" has been effectively established in the Italian regulatory framework as a form of tourism of its own. Furthermore, the tasting of wine within wineries has been legitimised. Another aim of this law consisted in promoting the installation of road signs to direct visitors along routes devoted to wine tasting.



At the same time, the National and Regional Wine Tourism Observatory has been established to verify and ensure adequate quality standards. Finally, the Ministerial Decree 12/03/2019 no. 2779 has intervened to supplement and complete the aforementioned law. The Ministerial Decree has recognised the importance of the origins and the potentials of wine tourism as a cultural and economic phenomenon and the enhancement of the wine-producing areas in the national territory. Moreover, “Guidelines and trends regarding the requirements and the minimum quality standards for wine tourism” have been established, therefore providing a very important tool for the future development of the sector.

#### **4. Conclusions**

If considered within its specific geographical framework, wine tourism represents an invaluable resource for the development of Italy on the national scale. In every Italian region, from North to South and from East to West, major and minor islands included, wine tradition is intertwined with other tourist attractions. Specifically, it is believed that an appropriate series of measures incentivising private initiative, if properly coordinated, would allow the sustainable development of tourism in many Italian regions, particularly in the South. Moreover, in addition to the remarkable strengths we have highlighted, it should not be overlooked how there are no less significant weaknesses, which act as obstacles to effective development. Literature (Azzariti, 2002; Bianchi, 2019; Butera, 2013) has already highlighted these constraints due to a lack of entrepreneurial initiative stemming from a widespread structural weakness of the risk appetite model distinctive of most private stakeholders. At the same time, instead of installing a systemic form of collaboration, old and consolidated forms of individualism are perpetuated within the agribusiness supply chain so that operators in the rural and the wine sector do not cooperate. For that matter, an additional friction factor to the good functioning of a ductile and smooth system of effective cooperative value stems from a misunderstood propensity for innovation of tour operators. In this way, they specialise in promoting traditional tourism products and are rarely careful in formulating integrated tourism offerings, including destinations referred to wine tourism. However, such situations and behaviours would find reasons for a progressive realignment on collaborative positions. This occurs when policymakers make plans to improve the infrastructure and means of transport that enable accessibility to “wine routes”. A set of multiple initiatives is aimed at requalifying inland areas, especially the southern ones, whose economic conditions have been long characterized by marginalization and depopulation. The goal to be pursued, therefore, is the effective integration of rural municipalities in inland areas, where there is a high concentration of innovative wineries also capable of attracting tourists. Furthermore, this result may be achieved with the use of digital technologies promoting visibility in tourism. The inclusion of

the activities and geo-environmental specificities of the territory in consolidated systems of local tourism would also have the additional effect of simultaneously valorising local products. This might advantage the competitive capacity itself of our wine-producing companies towards their main competitors. For instance, if we compare the quantity of wine produced in Italy to France, the latter achieves a significantly higher turnover than Italy precisely as a result of the higher competitiveness of its companies, which relies on factors of communication and integration of the related supply chains. As a result, there is an urgent need to implement a strategy focusing on the communication of supply. Therefore, it could benefit not only the most famous regions with an ancient oenological tradition, but also the territories that have recently opened to the wine market. In such territories tourism and entrepreneurial dynamism will mutually contribute to create an innovative model of sustainable development, significantly characterised in terms of geographic impact on the environment, landscape and society.

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