

OLIVE OIL TOURISM IN THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN AREA

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This paper explores Extra Virgin Olive Oil (EVOO) as a common example of Euro-Mediterranean heritage and its potential in promoting innovative tourism development initiatives and cooperation in producing areas. The main aim of the work is to highlight the existing initiatives based on the olive oil heritage of the Euro-Mediterranean producing countries, including Spain, Italy, Greece and Portugal as EU member states, and Tunisia, Turkey, Morocco and the Syrian Arab Republic as non-EU states (International Olive Oil Council 2018) with the additional consideration of Lebanon for its solid reputation as an olive oil producer. Through investigative research, this work tries to demonstrate the most outstanding initiatives, products and events related to olive oil and aimed at giving more visibility to its heritage and culture in the Euro-Mediterranean area. The initiatives found show new inputs for the modern tourism systems of the olive-growing areas. The initiatives also point



to EVOO being a common heritage that can offer important opportunities to inspire innovative proposals, capable of connecting the Mediterranean countries and of enhancing their common olive-growing identity with suggestive proposals addressed to modern tourists, increasingly interested in getting in contact with authentic heritages and the typical food of the destination they visit.

Key words: Olive-oil tourism, olive-oil culture, tourism management, sustainable tourism development

INTRODUCTION

Extra Virgin Olive Oil (EVOO) is a distinct product for Euro-Mediterranean countries with both material and immaterial value. Euro-Mediterranean gastronomy is usually identified within the general context of the Mediterranean diet, where EVOO plays a distinctive role. Olive oil is a product resulting from the collective work of multiple agents and ancient techniques. Its cultural content is wide and includes ethnography, agronomy, chemistry, biology and gastronomy. Its value exceeds the culinary aspect until the point that, together with other important ingredients, EVOO featured heavily in the acknowledgement given by UNESCO in 2010, of the Mediterranean diet being an ‘Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity’.

Due to its significant market value and distinctive utilitarian dimensions, olive oil is also increasingly appreciated in markets outside the Euro-Mediterranean. According to a report by the European Commission on the market situation of olive oil published in November 2020, EU27 exports of olive oil to third countries increased by 16% in 2019/2020 (European Commission 2020). The United States are the major recipients of these exports, accounting for 33% of the total, followed by Brazil (11%), United Kingdom (9%), Japan (8%), China (6%), Canada (4%), Australia (4%) and Others (24%) (European Commission 2020, 13).

Like the divisions of the county itself, the music of Croatia was subject to two major influences: Central European, predominant in central and northern parts of the country, and



Mediterranean, prevailing in the coastal regions of Dalmatia and Istria. The versatility of the musical culture of the broader Dalmatian area is a reflection of centuries of well-groomed and widely influenced folk, church and artistic musical performance. In order to clearly identify this complexity, it is necessary—besides recording and examining the spoken and live musical tradition—to collect and interpret the tangible musical heritage stored in churches, monasteries, museums, private or archival cultural institutions across the coast, which contain a large number of musical manuscripts and prints, as well as musical instruments and books about music that have been completely unexplored to date and are unknown to the public.

The focus of this paper will be on the representation of musical artefacts throughout the territory of Croatia today, and particularly in the historical province of Dalmatia. It will further analyse, as a case study, musical instruments kept in Dalmatian museums, aiming to discover new, previously completely unknown information about Dalmatian musical heritage, but also European musical heritage preserved in Dalmatia, which testifies to centuries of continuity of musical culture in the region and to the connection of Croatian musical sources to Central European and Mediterranean musical and cultural circles. As examples of intercultural interactions, instruments will be analysed in the broader cultural context of Croatian and European musical history.

However, olive oil is not just a product, but the full expression of a specific territory and an associated emblem of the producing community. This identifies as an intangible heritage made of tastes, techniques, customs and traditions, which characterizes communities and territories, thus encouraging a vibrant culture, deeply rooted in the Euro-Mediterranean areas (Papa 2000; Sanità 2016). Therefore, EVOO is not only suitable for fostering local economies and rural productive systems, but is rather a functional tool, inspiring a new tourism practice (Folgado-Fernández et al. 2019; Campón-Cerro et al. 2017). The rich heritage that EVOO boasts is a significant attraction for all those tourists who travel with a culinary motivation, and has now given birth to a new tourism typology known as oleotourism,



or olive oil tourism (Hernández-Mogollón et al. 2019; Pulido-Fernández et al. 2019; D'auria et al. 2020). Oleotourism is identified as a practice involving the visit to olive groves, olive oil tasting and cooking experiences the themes of which are based on the uses of olive oil, visits to olive oil museums, ancient and modern mills, and in general, everything that encourages a better knowledge of the olive oil culture- from landscapes to production processes, and tastings (Pulido-Fernandez et al. 2019).

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Olive oil tourism has initially been identified within the context of rural tourism or, more specifically, agritourism (Pulido-Fernández et al. 2019). However, the recent rise of gastronomic tourism, and its affirmation as an independent tourism typology, has offered the perfect conceptual background for oleotourism, which can be considered as a thematic expression of the broader category of “food and drink” tourism. The foodie travelers are those who want to grow acquainted with local cultures through tasting traditional ingredients, typical products and local cuisine, usually being the expression of the peculiarities of a certain territory: its geography, climate, economics, faith and beliefs. Olive oil tourism offerings are considered educative experiences which, beyond delighting tourists with pleasant flavours, inform them about the benefits of olive oil consumption on human health and educate consumers who already have an awareness. The educational component of oleotourism is an important strategic component of this practice, as it can be the starting point of a long-lasting commercial relationship between tourists and local producers (Hernández-Mogollón et al. 2020).

Therefore, olive-oil-based experiences set out to accomplish two goals: i) to offer rural olive-growing regions the chance to increase their profitability through tourism practices which, moreover, can give room to new market opportunities in the long term; ii) to harness the educational component of oleotourism to contribute to the safeguarding of the authentic and age-old heritage of Mediterranean people and thus disseminate the Euro-Mediterranean identity forged by olive cultivation and olive oil production.



The aim of this review is to show that together with the relevance that olive oil tourism is gaining in academic literature, there is a strong proliferation of practical initiatives defining a new scenario for olive growing areas. This implies, for many rural destinations, the chance to engage tourists and prolong their stays with several proposals, which are capable of adding value to the local tourism sector and providing more benefit for local economies and communities. Accordingly, the overall objective of this review is to highlight the most outstanding experiences, initiatives and institutions working around olive oil tourism development in the Euro-Mediterranean area.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

According to Alonso and Krajsic (2013), in Western Europe, food is an institution that is deeply linked with social, cultural and traditional values. Visiting the destinations of this area provides tourists with the chance to get in contact with local cultures through food consumption.

Olive oil production is a peculiar activity, which strongly defines the olive growing areas at different levels. through landscapes, architecture, lifestyles, traditions and cultures that represent a distinctive footprint of a centuries-old practice (Martín-Vertedor and López-Caballero 2016). This aspect turns olive oil production and associated culture into a significant example of heritage for tourism development and for the preservation of a unique identity (López-Guzmán et al. 2016; Folgado-Fernández et al. 2020). Even if some other geographical areas worldwide are succeeding in importing olive-oil production, its natural environment is still clearly rooted in the Mediterranean basin. According to Sabbatini et al. (2016), the Euro-Mediterranean countries are responsible for almost the 90% of global olive oil production. Spain, Italy, Morocco and Turkey are the largest producers, with Spain producing the major part of the world's olive oil (D'auria et al. 2020).

From a tourism perspective, these data highlight the potentiality of the European countries in developing tourism proposals focused on products based on olive oil. However, it



has to be specified that the Euro-Mediterranean region has in olive oil a particularly valuable tourism potential due, not just to its leading position in global production, but rather, to the fact that olive oil production is a central activity for the economies and idiosyncrasies of Mediterranean communities since pre-Roman times (Martín-Vertedor and López-Caballero 2016). Considering this, in the Euro-Mediterranean area, this product can be considered “heritage”. According to Van Esterik (2006, 105), ‘heritage foods become the commodities through which national and regional traditions are identified and preserved’. Centuries of history in production techniques have determined that olive-oil growing areas of the Mediterranean basin see olive oil production as a core activity, defining the economic, social and environmental attributes that make this part of the world unique in comparison to others with historical and natural heritages of similar value (Paquete 2013).

This complex cultural background turns Mediterranean olive oil into an inimitable product which, beyond its outstanding organoleptic qualities, is enriched by the additional scent of passion employed by local communities in producing it from ancient olive groves that are more than a living resource, and rather, represent a human legacy (Kizos and Varoufakis 2013). Together with its uniqueness, olive oil products and production methods are particularly suitable as a backbone for innovative tourism systems in the Euro-Mediterranean region, as it enables tourism initiatives to be put forward and products to be placed in line with new trends in tourism consumption and the desires of modern travellers (Bezerra and Correira 2018).

Tourists are increasingly attracted by authentic and unique proposals, and a generalised *interest has been detected towards food and drinks as major attractions for an increasingly large portion of tourism consumers (Sanchez-Pereira et al. 2017)*. *Wine tourism is probably the most common example of this new tourism fad (Alonso and Krajsic 2013; Moral-Cuadra et al. 2017)*.

With the rise of this new tourist interest, it can be said that food, in whatever form it is produced, sold, consumed at the destination or taken home as a souvenir, plays a special role for tourists who are beginning to associate local cuisine consumption with a way to absorb



the culture and the identity of the destination visited (Altintzoglou et al. 2016). According to Tsai (2016), in recent years, culinary cultures and typical cuisines have been widely promoted using different communication means, such as TV programmes, magazines, blogs or social media. This exposed consumers to a large degree to gastronomic topics. It may have intrigued them and fostered their desire to enjoy local delicacies as a central activity in their holiday-time. Mason and Paggiaro (2009) argued that travellers see in local food a means to feel authenticity and have unique experiences. Therefore, authenticity and culture are central issues in culinary tourism (Long 2004) and define what foodies are looking for in a gastronomic trip/holiday, which draws on a higher level of requirements for food-based holidays.. Culinary experiences are expected to be tasteful and, at the same time, filled with cultural content. The tasting experience alone is not sufficient to satisfy the expectations of modern foodie tourists, who look for a deeper contact with local foodstuffs, which necessitates first-hand knowledge of producers, information about economic, social and environmental implications of the production, local communities, culinary cultures and cooking techniques, etc. (Di-Clemente et al. 2020).

Therefore, not all food and drink are suitable resources for tourism use, but only those boasting a wide cultural context and authentic history. Euro-Mediterranean olive oil accomplishes this requirement and, together with new curiosity of tourists for traditional products, can be considered as a strategic common element for tourism revitalization in many rural areas within the Euro-Mediterranean region. Olive oil tourism is a way to add value to a unique resource, which can benefit the tourism sector, by diversifying its offerings and the fragile rural economies, thus presenting a business opportunity for producers to market their olive products directly to consumers (Alonso 2010; Alonso and Northcote 2010).

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Based on the outstanding significance that olive oil production has carried for many Euro-Mediterranean countries, from both



an economic and cultural perspective, it seems important to look in detail at the actions that have been put forward with the aim of enhancing the value and profitability of olive oil groves and products by means of tourism initiatives. The present work aims at presenting a general report of the actual interest existing around olive oil tourism development in Euro-Mediterranean countries, which is made clear by the policies and projects undertaken to reach this goal.

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In this study, the geographical scope of the research has been limited to those producing countries that are responsible for the major part of global production. This includes EU and non-EU countries within the Mediterranean basin. According to data provided by the International Olive Council (IOC), these are: Spain, Italy, Greece and Portugal, among the EU member states, and Tunisia, Turkey, Morocco and the Syrian Arab Republic, as non-EU countries (International Olive Oil Council 2018). According to these data, this review defined the aforementioned countries as its geographical focus, with the addition of Lebanon due to its olive growing reputation among the Middle-Eastern countries.

The methodological approach of this review is exploratory and descriptive. Investigative research has been carried out using selected keywords such as “Olive oil tourism” “Olive oil tour”, “Olive oil experience” and “Olive oil tourism in (name of the country)”. From a first search, the most relevant references to institutions, entities, public and private initiatives related to the olive oil world were identified in the selected geographical area. The relevant references were obtained among the first results appearing on the web and later, for the range of their actions and effectiveness in improving the olive oil culture at national or international level. The selection of the most significant results has been made considering the following criteria: i) the direct linkages of the institution/association/initiative with olive oil tourism promotion; ii) its relevance for the preservation of the environment of olive-growing areas and their economic well-being.



RESULTS

Based on a web enquiry, it is possible to identify the most active agents safeguarding olive oil heritages as a germane expression of Euro-Mediterranean culture, history and economics. Results have been organised into three categories: Transnational projects and institutions; National initiatives; and Thematic products, events and experiences.

At a European level, a strong interest has been detected regarding the preservation of olive oil culture. Several projects and institutions have gained strength in the last decades in Europe; however, it is worth noting that the recent interest gaining momentum in fostering the importance and value olive groves carry for the sustainable development of European regions is not a recent phenomenon, and in fact, dates back to the middle of the XX century.. In addition, some initiatives have been observed beyond European boundaries, pertaining to the following other Mediterranean countries: Lebanon, Morocco, Turkey and Tunisia.

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Table 1: Most relevant projects, institutions, initiatives and products related to olive oil tourism development

	Name	Brief description
Transnational Institutions and Projects	International Olive Council (IOC)	Intergovernmental organization, which aims at bringing together the olive oil and table olive producing and consuming stakeholders.
	OleoLife (1999-2002) ECOIL (2004-2006)	European projects focused on identifying production models aimed at reducing the negative environmental impacts of olive cultivation and making olive-farming more profitable and efficient.
	Oleoturismo (2003-2007)	European project with the objective of fostering an interregional network for the preservation of olive oil culture.
	Life. Olivares vivos (2015-2020)	A European project based in Spain whose main goal is to qualify olive oil products and educate consumers.
	Well-O-Life. The road to wellness (2016-2017)	European project with the aim of diversifying the overall EU tourism offer by means of thematic tourism offerings focused on wellness and wellbeing across the Routes of Olive Tree.



	Name	Brief description
National initiatives about olive oil in Euro-Mediterranean countries	CROATIA, Croatian Cities of Olive Oil; ITALY Italian Olive oil Towns Association; SPAIN, AEMO, Spanish Olive Oil Towns Association; PORTUGAL, ADEMO, Associação para o Desenvolvimento dos Municípios Olivícolas Portugueses.	National associations, which aim at fostering the olive oil sector's interests by means of fruitful unions and partnerships. Members are identified in municipalities, provinces, commerce chambers, mountain communities and local governments.
	ITALY, Olive oil and tree academy.	A scientific and cultural academy whose main goal is to support the research and diffusion of knowledge about olive-farming and olive oil production, in general.
	GREECE, Cultural foundation "The routes of the olive tree"	A non-profit NGO, which defends olive oil culture, traditions and heritages from technological advances, globalization and oblivion.
	SPAIN, Olearum. Olive oil Culture and Heritage Association.	Its main purpose is to encourage research on and the dissemination of knowledge of the olive oil culture. Among its action lines, tourism occupies a central role as the association puts forward several activities of olive oil tourism, including conducting an inventory of heritage in order to figure out which resources can be of potential use for tourism strategies.
	SPAIN, Olivar y Aceite (Olive grove and Oil)	Interpretative centre offering several activities around olive oil, from a simple visit to a thematic museum, to unique participative experiences and tastings.
	MORROCO, Plan Le Maroc Vert	Plan Maroc Vert, launched in 2008, is a project with the aim of reinforcing the Moroccan agri-food sector, in which olive production plays a central role. The Project achieved the enlargement of the area dedicated to olive groves, modernising the sector, improving the quality of the product and its position in international markets.
	MORROCO, Agro-pole Olivier	An innovation centre specifically focused on the olive oil sector and its promotion at local and national level. Even if tourism is not its main goal, it can be considered as an indirect push for the development of the Moroccan olive oil sector and a support for future tourism initiatives.

	Name	Brief description
	TUNISIA	FOPROHOC is a governmental organisation with the aim of enhancing Tunisian olive oil production and exportation. Within its programme, it foresees oleotourism actions as a driving force to support the image of Tunisia in the tourist and agri-food markets.
Thematic Products/Events/Experiences	“Routes of the Olive tree” - (Greece and Mediterranean countries)	An intercultural itinerary on the themes of the Olive Tree and the Mediterranean crossing different countries, acting as a cultural bridge between Greece and other Euro-Mediterranean countries with an olive oil identity.
	Thematic museums (Euro-Mediterranean area)	There is a conspicuous number of thematic museums dedicated to the olive oil culture in Euro-Mediterranean countries, which represents a network of resources for olive-oil-based potential tourism proposals.
	Frantoi aperti (Italy)	A local initiative in the Umbria Region of Italy, held from October to November every year. Olive oil mills remain open to the public, showing the process of olive oil extraction from the fruits, and other educative and leisure activities.
	Girolio tour (Italy)	Italian tour from April to December. It intends to be an educative and enjoyable initiative aimed at bringing the olive oil culture closer to consumers.
	Green ways of olive oil (Spain)	128 km route crossing the provinces of Córdoba and Jaén in Southern Spain.
	Olive oil Tours (Spain)	Specialised tour operator in olive oil experiences in the province of Granada. It offers a complete tour among olive groves and mills, which represents a perfect chance to introduce the olive oil culture and increase awareness about consumption.
	Zejd (Lebanon)	A production enterprise, which offers olive-based tourism experiences such as: the Olive oil trail, olive oil tasting, cooking classes, etc.
	Olive Oil Harvest (Lebanon)	They offer the “Tour Lebanon” product, which is focused on knowledge and tastings of local olive oil.
	Monumental Olive Oil Trees (Mediterranean/ Argentina/Mexico)	A list of 66 century-old olive trees spread out all over the Euro-Mediterranean area. Beyond the Euro-Mediterranean, some examples can also be identified in Argentina and Mexico.
	Sa. (Tunisia)	A production and mill enterprise with a clear focus on olive oil tourism. It offers harvesting experiences, picnics among the olive groves, tastings, etc...



	Name	Brief description
Thematic Products/Events/Experiences	Kırkpınar Oil Wrestling Tournament (Turkey)	Declared as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2010, it is a traditional wrestling competition. Beyond being considered a gastronomic product, here olive oil is a symbol of power.
	Tours, hotels, museums, restaurants (Turkey)	Saltik (2017) presents a collection of businesses and events in Turkey themed around olive oil. This collection includes a number of museums, hotels, tours, events, etc.... located in major part in the western part of the country.

Source: Own Elaboration

As EVOO is gaining momentum in the tourism and hospitality industry, inspiring innovative paths for local tourism development and destination diversification - especially in rural areas (López-Guzmán and González-Fernández 2011; Millán et al. 2012) - this mini review has provided a preliminary insight into the types of initiatives related to oleotourism. In light of the presented results, it is possible to reach certain conclusions about olive oil tourism, which can represent the first step towards a more sophisticated conceptual development of this new tourism typology and its practical execution, as an innovative practice for Euro-Mediterranean rural destinations.

It can be concluded that there is a general awareness about the urgent need of innovation and qualification of the olive oil sector. Even if concern about preserving the traditional Mediterranean olive groves dates back to the sixties, when national (Olearum_Spain) and international (IOC) associations were founded with this specific objective, it is only recently that there has been a common European concern about the preservation of the great value of the olive oil sector and the rich cultural heritage that surrounds it. Nowadays, the sector is at a crucial crossroads, struggling between the globalisation impulse, and



the need for maintaining traditional production techniques and high quality products.

The results in this review show a trend toward the protection of the wide cultural heritage embraced by olive oil and groves. Table 1 presented in this study illustrates a number of private and institutional initiatives undertaken with the aim of bringing to the surface the importance of fostering these groves and culture as a valuable support mechanism for the lasting profitability of Euro-Mediterranean economics and communities.

From a tourism perspective, it has to be said that even if a growing interest in oliveoil- based proposals can be detected, there is still much work to be done in order to tie olive cultivation with tourism. According to the results of this research, few initiatives exist in Europe directly focused on pursuing new tourism systems framed around olive oil products. The initiative with the most international visibility is that put forward by Greece: The Route of the Olive Tree, which represents an important starting point. It acts as a first attempt to join together some of the Euro-Mediterranean olive-growing countries, sharing common issues and problems with regard to the tourism development of their rural areas. Oleotourism can be a suitable pushing impulse for such regions, capable of providing several advantages: economic diversification, unique and experiential offerings, social and cultural preservation, clear competitive positioning in the global tourism market, tourism proposals linked with a rooted authentic identity, and an easily identifiable destination image.

Besides the high potentiality of oliveoilbased tourism initiatives, the sector has many challenges to face in order to turn this actual trend into a solid and profitable tourism activity. Some of the challenges that emerged in this research include: the lack of durable cooperation among the involved stakeholders at transnational level, meaning the presence of solid ties beyond the temporary partnership in a European project; the lack of a unified brand, and promotion actions and strategies for Euro-Mediterranean tourism destinations specialising in olive oil offerings and products; the poor availability of infrastructure prepared to satisfy the specific target group of oleotourists



demanding open olive mills, well-packed olive-based experiences and well-designed itineraries; and finally, the lack of a permanent network of initiatives around oleotourism. Spain, Italy and Greece appeared to be the most active countries in olive oil tourism promotion; however, there are many other olive-growing regions in the Euro-Mediterranean area that, if linked together, can give birth to a dynamic cluster for the tourism development of Mediterranean olive-growing regions.

In conclusion, olive oil tourism has great potential in the Mediterranean basin, as it can succeed in harmonising the multiple that exist in the olive oil sector and thus position this geographical area in the global tourism market with an innovative proposal, in line with the expectations of modern tourists. However, more efforts are required to make oleotourism a driving force for Mediterranean economic growth, the preservation of its identity, dissemination, and consumers' education. The limitations of this work have to be identified when drafting an exhaustive review of the initiatives on oliveoil tourism at Euro- Mediterranean level. As already pointed out, there exists a plurality of products, resources and initiatives on oleotourism, developed at local and national level, in the olive-growing countries. In addition, this work adopts a descriptive approach and employs a basic methodology in order to provide an initial overview of oleotourism in the Euro-Mediterranean area. In the future, it would be useful to keep exploring this research line in order to increase knowledge about oleotourism, and in particular, insightful to apply different methodologies, such as in-depth interviews addressed to selected agents of olive oil tourism development in the various Euro-Mediterranean countries.

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