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New World and Mediterranean wine tourism: A comparative analysis

Abstract

This is a theoretical paper providing a comparative overview of wine tourism in the New World and Europe – particularly the Mediterranean region. The review is timely because while there has been substantial wine tourism research in Anglophone countries, less has occurred in Europe, despite the fact that it has such a long history of wine production. The paper suggests a series of differences between the two areas based on both structural factors affecting the context in which wine is produced. These contextual factors relate both to wine supply and to demand, and include production factors, appellation systems, attitudes to business, producer commitment, consumption patterns, the search for experience, and the stimulus to wine tourism. The paper also considers aspects of the practice of wine tourism, including events, education and the cellar door experience, before offering some underlying themes and areas for future research.

Keywords:

wine tourism; Europe; Mediterranean; New World

Introduction

Wine tourism is currently a key issue for the European wine industry. As wine production around the world continues to exceed consumption, techniques which develop consumers' commitment to a brand and which increase sales must be developed. However, one can suggest contextually that wine tourism appears to be underdeveloped in Europe generally and the Mediterranean region in particular, despite the fact that wine has a long history there. Additionally, less research has examined wine tourism in the Old World than has taken place in New World countries – especially Anglophone ones (e.g. Charters, Fountain, & Fish, 2009; Dodd, Yuan, & Kolyesnikova, 2006; Mitchell & Hall, 2004; Tassiopoulos, Nuntsu, & Haydam, 2004). Additionally, European research has tended to use rather less primary research (exceptions include Correia, Passos Ascensão, & Charters, 2004; Frochot, 2001). However, there has been wine tourism in the Mediterranean region since ancient times (Cambourne, Hall, Johnson, Macionis, Mitchell, & Sharples, 2000), and it expanded in some parts of

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Europe (notably Germany) at the beginning of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, again in comparison to the way it has developed in North America, Australasia and South Africa, it seems to have been less formally planned. The issue at the core of this paper is to examine this paradox by comparing European wine tourism – particularly in the Mediterranean region – with that in New World countries, particularly English-speaking ones.

In order to develop this theme the paper has been structured in two parts: the first looks at the more theoretical contextual factors relating to the production and consumption of wine which shape wine tourism in the two areas of the world and the second looks at some of the more practical outworkings of it. In the first part seven aspects will be considered in some detail. These include: (1) different production contexts; (2) appellation systems; (3) attitudes to business ownership and co-operation; (4) the commitment to tourism shown by small wine producers; (5) changing consumption patterns; (6) the desire for an experience, and; (7) the motivation to develop wine tourism. The second part will consider the outworking of wine tourism in practice, including aspects such as events, education and the reception of visitors.

This exploration is not the result of primary research, but rather stems from a long-term involvement with the field, a number of visits throughout most of the New World wine producing countries and many of those in Mediterranean Europe, plus a review of literature surrounding both wine consumption and wine tourism, together with occasional findings from various studies the author has been involved with. However, the perspective is inevitably a personal one, and the commentary offered here is more in the way of propositions aimed at informing future research, and which themselves require more detailed exploration, rather than a series of empirically verified findings.

Additionally, the paper focuses mainly on the perspective of wine producers and the wine consumer, rather than the wider viewpoint of tourism and tourism providers generally. Finally, and contextually, it is important to remember that, for the wine producer, wine tourism may fulfill one or both of two main goals. The first is the short term one of increasing immediate sales; the second is the longer term aim of developing brand equity for the product, and winning long-term customers (Charters, & Carlsen, 2006).

The contexts of wine tourism

DIFFERENT PRODUCTION CONTEXTS

In New World countries many wine regions have only developed in the last 30-50 years. This may have produced a 'pioneer spirit', which influenced the co-operative and dynamic approach to wine tourism. This in turn can be seen to be linked to the expansionist mentality dominant in many of the New World 'settler' societies, where land was seen to be available (see, for example, the Australian doctrine of *terra nullius* – the idea that the land was vacant and available, even though Aborigines actually lived there). Unlike a more individualistic European 'peasant' tradition, much New World

pioneering was based on equal opportunity and co-operation (at least in times of hardship) (Davison, 1992; Kapferer, & Morris, 2003; Kapferer, 1990). For wine tourism to be effective it needs the co-operation of a wide range of key actors, and fairly general local support (Carlsen, 2004). Thus both pioneering and co-operation provide some of the key necessary determinants for wine tourism to develop.

Conversely, in much of Europe and the Mediterranean, a number of issues have come together to provide a different entrepreneurial focus. Conservative land ownership structures, historically often concentrated possession on substantial landlords, have given rise to a concentration on who actually owns the land and on its stewardship for future generations – something which may be particularly true in areas with inheritance systems stemming from the Napoleonic Code, which divides land equally between offspring (Sargent, 1952). Similarly, wine production in traditional European agricultural systems tended to focus on very localised marketing (Unwin, 1996); wine was made for the producer's own use, to sell to friends, and maybe in a local market – thus, with a product focus, there was no need to think about wider marketing issues, co-operative branding, regional relationships or the like (Hall, & Mitchell, 2000). The result of this is that, while wine may have a strong local symbolism, codified in an appellation system (see below), there was no perceived need work together to 'sell' that symbolism. This is true despite the fact that production co-operatives exist in many parts of the Mediterranean; historically the focus on these has been on providing a facility to process grapes, not to arrange joint marketing of the resulting wines (Mitchell, Charters, & Albrecht, 2009).

APPELLATION SYSTEMS

Related to this, the use of appellation systems to guarantee regional quality may affect how wine tourism is viewed (both operationally and for branding). It is evident that appellation of origin has a significant role in creating desirable wine tourism destinations (Brown, & Getz, 2005; Tzimitra-Kalogianni, Papadaki-Klavdianou, Alexaki, & Tsakiridou, 1999). This may be a positive aspect in the future development of wine tourism in the Mediterranean region, for producers already have an affinity with and commitment to a place. It may also be, however, that reliance on the appellation to sell the wine reduces the desire of a producer, or a group of producers in a region, to use tourism to sell their wine; there is substantial evidence that producers in some southern European areas rely on appellation to promote their wine at the expense of more conventional and user-friendly forms of marketing (Charters, 2006; Gade, 2004). The fact that in many European countries the appellation is not considered to be a brand – and therefore lacks effective brand management – may also weaken the basis for developing effective wine tourism in some regions.

However, it is also clear that appellation may offer part of the attraction of wine tourism, and it is perceived to be a key intrinsic dimension of wine by consumers in many cultures (Martinez-Carrasco, Brugarolas, & Martinez-Poveda, 2005; Schamel, 2006; Tzimitra-Kalogianni et al., 1999).

ATTITUDES TO BUSINESS OWNERSHIP AND CO-OPERATION

There are different approaches to the value and use of land in varying cultures, based in part on differing views of individual ownership and community benefit. Recent studies suggests that there may be substantial divisions in the attitudes to public and private viticultural land use in parts of the New World compared with some places in Europe (Mitchell et al., 2009). One of the consequences of this is a very individualistic approach to business in parts of Europe (despite the formalised type of co-operation created by production co-operatives), based on a peasant tradition which is strongly protective of land. One French vigneron said during a study 'we like to be alone with our vines'. Conversely, whilst private land ownership is fiercely defended in most Anglo-Saxon cultures, enterprises themselves may be much more co-operative, working together to promote the wines of their village or region (Mitchell et al., 2009). One French wine producer, who has worked extensively in New Zealand, when offered the idea that she could co-operate with other producers in her village to develop a collective wine tourism centre, replied 'but that is not the way we do it here. We could not all work together like that'.

PRODUCER COMMITMENT

It has been suggested that small European wine producers, who sell wine direct to the public at their property, often do not think that they are involved in wine tourism (Charters, & Me-nival, forthcoming); rather they consider that it is an activity reserved to big producers who can mount visitor tours, exhibitions and events. This idea bears further research. However, if it is correct, it may suggest two things. The first, evidently, is a lack of willingness to invest in the infrastructure and co-operation necessary to develop wine tourism, because sales are not linked to wider local or regional promotion. The second is that to the extent which it exists, wine tourism is used only as a means of increasing sales; there is no idea that it could be useful for encouraging improved brand equity over the long term or for developing greater economic growth in an entire region. These studies have been born out by research in Portugal (Correia et al., 2004), which has also underlined the danger that organisations promoting wine tourism in Europe may get bogged down in bureaucracy, rather than displaying a more entrepreneurial and dynamic approach.

Indeed, other research in France notes greater links between wine and food than more general tourism activity (Frochot, 2000). Thus, images of food and wine are more significant in representing a region than those of tourism, tourists or local people, although Frochot's (2000) research also notes the advantages of this. If a region can move from simplistic food/wine links to a more comprehensive regional positioning strategy, different images of food may ultimately be used to underline the distinctive position of specific destinations (Hall, & Mitchell, 2000).

CONSUMPTION PATTERNS

Consumption patterns and behaviour vary substantially from country to country. Traditionally Mediterranean Europe has seen high per capita consumption levels (Smith, & Solgaard, 2000). However, this wine has often been a cheap, staple drink, consumed

less for aesthetic pleasure than as a customary beverage (Tzimitra-Kalogianni et al., 1999), with little socially-embedded symbolism and choice determined overwhelmingly by local availability (Charters, 2006). Wine tourism has had little relevance to such consumption. More recently, consumption in most southern European countries has begun to fall substantially (Wine Institute of California, 2008). The result is that there is a reducing pool of (in any event) low-involvement consumers in those countries who may be interested in wine tourism.

Meanwhile, the last few decades have seen a dramatic increase in wine consumption in northern European and Anglophone countries (and more recently in east Asia) (Wine Institute of California, 2008). In these environments wine is seen less as a traditional product imbued with cultural symbolism, and more as something related to the consumer's lifestyle (Demossier, 2004), which in turn is attached to the lifestyle pursuits of tourism and place-attachment. Wine is linked to travel, and wine is identified with (other) places; its consumption breeds a desire to visit the regions from which it comes. In the very competitive wine markets of New World countries this has been used by wine producers who actively adopt wine tourism as a mechanism to stimulate visits to their region, thus tasting, and consequently sales and brand loyalty (Getz, 2000).

THE SEARCH FOR EXPERIENCE

In the New World research shows that wine tourists seek an overall experience rather than just a focus on wine (Charters, & Carlsen, 2006), a fact which links closely to the aspects of lifestyle consumption noted above. This experience includes the reception at the domaine, but it also comprises the surroundings and presentation of the winery, the natural environment and the aesthetic dimension of the visit. Beyond this, it is clear that wine tourists do not seek an exclusively wine experience, but look for other related heritage, environmental, historical and artistic activities (Carlsen, 2004). Increasingly, as wine tourists in Europe become more involved in their overall lifestyle and less concerned merely with tasting and buying wine, a wider perspective will be required of wine enterprises. The danger with this is that the possible insularity of these producers, and their lack of understanding about the broad nature of wine tourism (noted above), will inhibit dynamic wine tourism development (Hall, & Mitchell, 2000). The advantage, however, for producers in the Mediterranean is that they have a wide range of natural environments, heritage, culinary and artistic and historical attractions to which they can link their wine tourism offering. Additionally, they can link the historical and culinary traditions explicitly to the role of the region as the origin of the drink and the cradle of wine production (Unwin, 1996). This gives them a distinct advantage when it comes to marketing the attraction.

THE STIMULUS

Possibly, in Europe, producer wine tourism involvement only develops when there is a drop in sales, and is only used to prop-up declining economic activity rather than to develop long-term branding. This is the converse of the view noted above that producers have a weak commitment to the wine tourism product and note that it is not for

them – at least when it remains comparatively easy to sell their wine. Wine tourism has become increasingly common in France, at least, in direct proportion to the drop in domestic and (later) export sales (see e.g. Mallon, 1996; Thevenin, 1996). In the New World, on the other hand, one can suggest that wine tourism developed alongside the growth of wine industries based on the more pioneering approach (noted above), and that this growth was not merely the result of the economic need for sales but was also consumer driven as part of a desired 'lifestyle experience' (Charters, 2006).

The approach adopted in Europe and the Mediterranean presents three dangers. The first and most significant is that it sees wine tourism solely as an extension of the wine industry, rather than the partnership with tourism operators, which it needs to be if it is successful. The poor quality of much wine tourism organisation, such as promotion and signage, is evidence of this (Correia et al., 2004; Hall, & Mitchell, 2000). Second, one can suggest that the move to develop wine tourism will only happen when it is too late – when sales are under substantial pressure, and the time for developing a viable wine tourism product (assuming it is possible) is insufficient to 'save' the wine in the region. The final problem is that this limited view tends to focus exclusively on wine sales at the expense of developing brand equity, when it is the long-term relationships with consumers (built up over considerable time) which will both have greater long term impact and more regional (rather than wine-industry specific) effect (Charters, & Carlsen, 2006).

The practice of wine tourism

Three categories of wine tourism practice highlight the distinction between the Mediterranean and the New World approach. These include events, education and the operation of the cellar door. It must be remembered, however, that what is offered here is a generalised account. It is suggested that it is broadly accurate, but exceptions exist. One factor which is, however, significant, is that fewer wine industry actors in Europe involve themselves in wine tourism than in the New World. Although the figures are slightly dated now, Cambourne et al. (2000) suggest that only 5% in Burgundy and 3.2% in Italy are engaged with it, in comparison with 90% in Australia and 60% in New Zealand. Another general point relative to Europe is that in some of the former communist bloc countries, where distribution was centrally organised, wine was marketed as a product independent of any tourism relationship, and therefore historically wine tourism may have been especially slow to develop in these areas (Cambourne et al., 2000).

EVENTS

In Europe a number of events can be used to offer a wine tourism experience. Typical these may be village festivals, often associated with a local saint or, as in France or Italy with the festival of Saint Vincent (the patron of vine growers) on the 22 January (Frochot, 2000). Typically, in France, local statues will be paraded through a town or village, a mass will be said, and a dinner or wine tasting may be held. However, the structure of such events means that tourists are often the passive observers of what happens, rather than active participants in the process. Additionally the organisation

of these may be difficult or haphazard. In some European countries or regions, such as Greece, wineries are often some distance from each other, which can make organising co-operative events more difficult (Cambourne et al., 2000).

One interesting variant of this is the wine brotherhoods which exist in Europe, particularly in France (Frochot, 2001) but also in Portugal, Spain and other countries. These tend to be groupings of producers in a particular region who incorporate other aficionados for the wines of that region. As Frochot (2001) points out, these groups give the appearance of being somewhat cliquy dining clubs, but they can act as dynamic ambassadors for their region and, although their events tend to be select, they offer a very distinctive and attractive aspect of wine tourism for the high involvement consumer.

On the other hand, events in the New World tend to be festivals, which are more integrative and inclusive of consumers (Carlsen, & Getz, 2006), or major artistic events linked to a particular winery, such as the series of concerts traditionally organised by (amongst many others) Robert Mondavi Wines in the Napa Valley or Villa Maria in New Zealand. The wine festivals, particularly, focus less on the existing culture of a wine region and its history and production focus than on the experience of consumers, with effort being made to ensure that they can move easily from winery to winery, or that they have a chance to taste a wide range of wines. Explicit links are also made to local food, restaurants and providores. Thus, for example, the Waiheke wine festival in New Zealand features in excess of 12 local wineries, local beers and ciders, different food stuffs plus a stadium with continual music. In comparison, in the author's experience, a festival in a small village in Champagne features many local businesses, and wines from producers in other parts of France – but no presentation of wines from any of the many small domains producing champagne in that village. As noted above, this is a generalisation; there is, for instance, a very participative wine festival in Montalcino in Tuscany (Dusi, 2002); nevertheless, viewing rather engagement tends to be much more common in Europe and the Mediterranean region. Even the artistic events noted above tend to involve a mass audience who bring or purchase a meal which they share in the open air, wine is widely available and the performers encourage participation; there is a greater sense of communality, rather than 'us and them' separated into wine industry and observers.

EDUCATION

Education as part of the wine tourism offering is common in many – perhaps most – parts of the world. However, the way it is delivered does vary, particularly between the New World and Europe. Specifically one can note the prevalence of wine museums in the old world. Their focus tends to be on the history and culture of the wine region as much or more than information about what currently happens, or the promotion of a group of producers in an area (Mitchell, & Hall, 2004). In this respect one can compare, say, Vivanco Museum of the culture of Wine in the Rioja Region of Spain or the The Museum of Wine in Umbria, Italy, established by the *Fondazione Lungarotti* with the McLaren Vale Visitor Centre in Australia. This is not an absolute distinction; institutions in the New World will address the history of a region, but the emphasis tends

to be more on viticulture, grape varieties, how the wine is made now and why particular styles appear. Even the wide-ranging *Hameau du Vin* (wine hamlet), created by the major Beaujolais négociant Georges Duboeuf tends to have a historical focus.

One other interesting difference which emerges is the more explicit link between wine and food in the northern Mediterranean basin. The two are certainly paired consistently in the New World, but the longer tradition of gastronomy and the long-standing development of regional cuisine in Europe results in a very organised and structured approach, which is one of the continent's strengths (Frochot, 2003). In Italy the idea of 'wine routes' has now been replaced by wine and food routes, and food is often a major component of the blend (Vincenzo Asero, University of Catania, personal communication). Indeed Frochot (2003) has noted that in the regional positioning of French wine regions it is often images of food which dominate.

THE CELLAR DOOR

The focus of the cellar door, or visits to a domaine, also display some subtle differences between Europe and the New World countries. The dichotomy between the winery's emphasis on tasting and the consumer's tendency to search for an experience at the cellar door has been well established (O'Neill, & Charters, 2000), but it may be that there are differences between Old World and New. The former, at least for smaller producers, has a near total focus on tasting, with little in the way of ancillary experience offered (whether it is educative, the sale of wine-related products or promotional goods or craft, artistic or food and drink). Co-operatives are especially prone to this, often being focused merely on wine sales, predominantly to a local clientele, without providing any additional attractions whatsoever. Even small producers in the New World will try to offer extras, even if it is only a picnic area.

Big companies in Europe are often different from their smaller colleagues, and may provide a more focused experience, particularly cellar tours. Crucially, whereas vineyards in the New World are often effectively off-limits to visitors, in the Mediterranean region they may be free to roam around the edge of them. Even great vineyard sites are open, and the visitor can touch the vines or the soil.

Conclusion

Both the Old World and Europe have strengths and weaknesses in respect of their wine tourism provision, a number of which have been suggested here. Critically, these may relate to a series of proposed underlying dichotomies which distinguish the attitude of both areas to wine production and tourism generally (although these bear further research). Crucial amongst these are the split between the New World focus on production, or the enterprise as a whole, rather than on wine as agricultural produce (Charters, 2008), something which comes from the earth, has a ready market and does not require ancillary marketing effort. Additionally it can be suggested that the more recent development of wine production in the New World has made the industry more proactive (and thus ready to experiment with wine tourism) against the more reactive approach adopted by a place which has produced wine for more than two millennia and which has no tradition of needing to find new markets.

These dichotomies in the approach of producers in turn create differences in the product with which the wine tourist engages. It can be suggested that the concentration in the New World tends to be on the total experience (even if this is still not fully appreciated by producers there) whereas in Europe and the Mediterranean the offer is still very firmly focused on the wine itself. Again, where the focus is wider than the wine it is much more concentrated on the environment and production in the New World rather than the culture, history and regional food context in the Old. Linked to this, it may often be a more active and participative experience in the Anglophone wine producing nations compared with a passive experience in more traditional wine producing countries. These variations reflect in some part the varying types of consumer gaze proposed by Urry (2002).

As noted at the start of this article, this is a broad brush approach, which does not take account of the nuances of the wine tourism offer, and which will have many exceptions. It is also true that the wine tourism landscape is evolving rapidly. Nevertheless, it is argued that as a series of general propositions it holds good, at least for the present. The propositions made here, if correct, are significant in revealing the constraints which limit the wine tourism offer in both areas, and as such they would repay further research to assess their accuracy and the full nature of their impact.

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