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*in*

Arcas N. (ed.), Arroyo López F.N. (ed.), Caballero J. (ed.), D'Andria R. (ed.), Fernández M. (ed.), Fernandez Escobar R. (ed.), Garrido A. (ed.), López-Miranda J. (ed.), Msallem M. (ed.), Parras M. (ed.), Rallo L. (ed.), Zandi R. (ed.).  
Present and future of the Mediterranean olive sector

Zaragoza: CIHEAM / IOC

Options Méditerranéennes : Série A. Séminaires Méditerranéens; n. 106

2013

pages 97-109

Article available on line / Article disponible en ligne à l'adresse :

<http://om.ciheam.org/article.php?IDPDF=6809>

To cite this article / Pour citer cet article

Murgado E.M. **Turning food into a gastronomic experience: olive oil tourism**. In : Arcas N. (ed.), Arroyo López F.N. (ed.), Caballero J. (ed.), D'Andria R. (ed.), Fernández M. (ed.), Fernandez Escobar R. (ed.), Garrido A. (ed.), López-Miranda J. (ed.), Msallem M. (ed.), Parras M. (ed.), Rallo L. (ed.), Zandi R. (ed.). *Present and future of the Mediterranean olive sector*. Zaragoza: CIHEAM / IOC, 2013. p. 97-109 (Options Méditerranéennes : Série A. Séminaires Méditerranéens; n. 106)



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# Turning food into a gastronomic experience: Olive oil tourism

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**Abstract.** Nowadays, gastronomy has taken on a new role associated with social, cultural, pleasure and entertainment needs and has become one of the main motivations for travel. Therefore, agriculture and food have become extremely important new drivers of tourism in production areas. The positive relationship between gastronomy and tourist activity is an economic catalyst for growth in specific territories, promoting local products and providing added value to the tourist. In this context, gastronomic tourism is an excellent business opportunity for Spain if the country is able to capitalize on the development of high-quality agriculture and food, especially related to olive oil. This paper analyses the state of olive oil tourism in Spain. Based on qualitative interviews with gastronomic tourism experts, and specifically olive oil tourism experts, this paper proposes a series of recommendations to guide the design and improvement of olive oil based tourism products and aid the creation of related experiences.

**Keywords.** Olive oil tourism – Value co-creation – Experiential marketing – Gastronomic tourism.

## *Transformer l'aliment en une expérience gastronomique : Oléotourisme*

**Résumé.** De nos jours, la gastronomie a assumé un nouveau rôle lié aux besoins sociaux, culturels, au plaisir et au divertissement, et est devenue l'une des principales motivations au voyage. Ainsi, l'agriculture et l'alimentation sont devenues des moteurs extrêmement importants pour le tourisme dans les zones de production. La relation positive entre gastronomie et activité touristique est un catalyseur économique pour la croissance dans des terroirs spécifiques, avec la promotion de produits locaux et l'apport de valeur ajoutée pour le touriste. Dans ce contexte, le tourisme gastronomique est une excellente opportunité commerciale pour l'Espagne si ce pays est capable de capitaliser sur le développement d'une agriculture et de produits alimentaires de qualité, surtout dans le domaine de l'huile d'olive. Cet article analyse la situation du tourisme oléicole en Espagne. En se basant sur des entretiens qualitatifs avec des experts en tourisme gastronomique, et en particulier des experts en oléotourisme, cet article propose une série de recommandations pour guider la conception et l'amélioration des produits touristiques basés sur l'huile d'olive et aider à la création d'expériences dans ce domaine.

**Mots-clés.** Tourisme oléicole – Co-création de valeur – Marketing expérientiel – Tourisme gastronomique.

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## I – Introduction

Tourism as an act of consumption refers to all of the activities a person does from the moment they experience the need to travel until making a purchase and using tourist services. This process is influenced by different internal and external stimuli such as marketing. Among these stimuli, the motivation to travel is one of the most important internal conditions since it is the element that activates the purchasing process.

In recent times, there has been a significant change in consumer tourist behaviour since leisure time is an essential part of consumers' personal and social self-realization. Consumers are more demanding, have more choices and require more information and knowledge to make decisions. Therefore, the tourism model characterized by seasonal, mass tourism, with little diversity in supply, in which consumers adopt a passive role, has given way to a more

fragmented model, which relies on the pursuit of quality as the key and gives consumers a more active role in the purchase and consumption process.

This new approach views tourism as a complex activity in which consumers seek deep experiences, and intense emotions, which are the main motivation for travel. From this perspective, companies are challenged to design products that consumers consider experiences. This requires greater attention to service, to so-called "moments of truth" and to consumer interactions with the organization, rather than a focus on the functional benefits of the product or service.

Experienced based marketing is particularly important in emerging tourist areas, which need innovative management approaches to compete in a well established marketplace. Products and services that provide comprehensive experiences, generating added value, are the basis for attracting and retaining customers.

However, value is created not only by an enterprise but is the result of a process involving multiple actors including consumers. This approach, called value co-creation, means that the consumer is an endogenous variable in the value creation process so that value creation and consumption processes are seen as inseparable (Ordanini and Parasuraman, 2011). A basic premise postulates that companies do not deliver value because it is created by the customers themselves when using or consuming products or services (Lusch and Vargo, 2011). Thus, the role of the company, prior to customer interaction, is to facilitate value, providing customers with goods and services that generate value through use or consumption. Nevertheless, a company can act as a co-creator of value through interactions with customers.

The adoption the co-creation of value approach in designing consumer experiences is considered a suitable framework for tourism management and thus can be directly applied to the development of olive oil tourism. As Vargo and Lusch (2004), point out, the co-creation of value provides opportunities to innovate and make a product or destination more attractive, offering the tourist what he or she really wants. This is the main challenge facing olive oil tourism in order to gain a foothold in an increasingly crowded marketplace with many, poorly differentiated packages, where a low price is still the common denominator.

Based on the previously established positive relationship between gastronomy and tourism, this paper analyses the current olive oil tourist situation in Spain. Interviews with experts in olive oil and related agents resulted a set of recommendations and considerations that respond to some of the challenges facing olive oil tourism and that should guide the design and development of tourist products based on olive oil.

## **II – The gastronomy and food binomial**

Throughout history, food has played an essential role in nutrition being the way in which individuals satisfied their most primitive need. Recently, there has been a proliferation of increasingly differentiated ways of eating. According to Espeitx (2004), this diversity can be explained because food has become a commodity through which an individual expresses him or herself through consumption patterns, and this has led to its introduction in the field of leisure and fun. A broad range of eateries have developed not only to meet a basic need for food, but also to be a source of fun and entertain. Moreover, food has a social dimension that is the result of social ties and relationships that occur when food is shared, a situation that is amplified in the field of entertainment.

Thus, the cuisine has acquired new functions associated with social, cultural, health-related and pleasure needs. Food has become one of the main attractions in a tourist destination and one of the most important travel motivations. In Spain, about five and a half million people a year visit a destination for this reason and the vast majority of the fifty million foreign tourists mention the appeal of Spanish cuisine as one of the most highly valued aspects of their visit (Anson, 2010).

Moreover, some research has indicated that tourists spend nearly 40% of their budget on gastronomy (Boyne *et al.*, 2002) leading to the question of whether it is possible to integrate food intake with tourist activity in order to attract higher income consumers. The answer is yes, and has given rise to so-called food tourism (Hall *et al.*, 2003), culinary tourism (Wolf, 2002), gastronomic tourism (Hjalanger and Richards, 2002) or tasting tourism (Boniface, 2003) motivated, among other factors, by growing consumer interest in the product development process in the place of origin.

In general, this type of tourism is seen as an activity in which tourists or visitors plan their trips wholly or partly to taste local gastronomy or participate in activities related to gastronomy (Fandos and Flavián, 2011). Gastronomic tourism, though still a minority tourist modality, has high growth prospects. It can be considered as the main motive or principle experience of tourist activity, or as a secondary travel motivation, which is a more developed typology. According to Millán and Agudo (2010), gastronomic tourism involves visits to primary and secondary producers of food, food festivals, restaurants and specific locations where food tasting and experimentation in the process of food production is the main reason for the completion of the journey.

Several different types of food tourism have been identified. These include variables such as a tourist's level of involvement with food (Royo, 2011) or the type of need to be satisfied (Tikkanen, 2007). Focusing on this criterion, the following types of tourism have been identified: (i) tourism based on biological needs where food is perceived as an attraction in itself; (ii) tourism based on social needs where food becomes the central element of festivals, fairs or other events; (iii) tourism where the need for learning or prior knowledge are the main motivation; and (iv) tourism based on self-realization needs consisting of attendance or participation in fairs, conferences or seminars.

Gastronomic tourism is also often associated with the heritage and cultural resources of an area and, in this sense, can be defined as tourist activity linked to indigenous food tasting as means to get closer to the culture, tradition, history and customs of a particular area. Thus, food products, which identify a village or territory, become a vehicle for cultural approach (Feo, 2005). Similarly, Montoya (2003) points out that the recovery of local traditional cuisines and their inclusion in tourist itineraries will not only enrich interior cities but will help keep centuries-old cultural heritage alive. This approach makes food products tourist resources that contribute to the development of further tourism as well as establishing effective tools for the promotion and marketing of quality food products (Armesto and Gómez, 2004; Kivela and Crofts, 2006). Therefore, this type of tourism can consolidate regional productive culture, enhance regional products and boost regional economies through the promotion of products and food culture. In short, three objectives can be achieved through gastronomic tourism: first, it provides added value to tourists, second, it contributes to the promotion of a region's typical products, and third, it boost competitiveness of a territory.

Thus, culinary tourism can become an effective instrument for the development of a tourist destination. Some studies indicate the existence of a strong relationship between food and culture (Reynolds, 1993), considering food an easy way to experiment and make contact with the culture and lifestyle of a destination. In this line, Hall and Mitchell (2000) contextualize gastronomic tourism identifying four, key dimensions of it: (i) as part of the local culture; (ii) as a tourism promotion instrument; (iii) as an element of local economic development; and (iv) as an indicator of patterns or habits of the local population. Thus, food has been used as a recurring attribute to promote tourist destinations associated with healthy and quality food.

This growing trend of culinary tourism provides a business opportunity for Spain considering its vantage point in the development of quality food products, including olive oil, ham and wine, among others. The consumption of local products with a designation of origin (D.O.) is usually motivated by the desire for authenticity and unique experiences, making the choice a crucial factor for the consumer. In this context, a food product becomes important as a tourist product

and as variable that influences the tourist's decision process (Table 1).

**Table 1. The agricultural food product from the perspective of the supply and the demand**

<b>Supply: As a tourist product</b>	<b>Demand: Variables on which it has influence</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishments of restoration and sale</li> <li>• Food fairs and events</li> <li>• Local and regional agricultural markets</li> <li>• Schools and cooking workshops</li> <li>• Farms and factories: visit installations</li> <li>• Interpretation centers</li> <li>• Feeding circuits and tours: tourism routes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decision-making of the tourist (Hjalanger and Corigliano, 2000)</li> <li>• Satisfaction with the experience or tourism destination (Neild <i>et al.</i>, 2000)</li> <li>• Tourism destination image (Neild <i>et al.</i>, 2000)</li> <li>• Involvement and / or attachment to the tourism destination (Gross and Brown, 2006)</li> <li>• Design of tourism products (Henderson, 2009)</li> <li>• Promotion of products and destinations (Henderson, 2009)</li> <li>• Image and positioning communicated (Frochot, 2003)</li> </ul>

Source: Adapted from Royo (2011).

In the case of olive oil, it is necessary to design tourist products based on experiences to enrich the act of product consumption. To do this, it is necessary to know what has been done so far in the field of olive oil tourism and what could be done.

### III – Olive oil tourism in Spain

As a complement to its traditional role of food, olive oil is considered a tourist resource with enormous potential in the field of culinary tourism. Indeed, the combination of food product and tourism raises promising new business opportunities for the olive, boosting the economy of certain territories. The cultivation of the olive tree, the olive harvest and oil production is a distinctive culture with its own slang, customs, lifestyles and identity that form the "culture of the olive and olive oil."

In this context, "oleo tourism" or olive oil based tourism emerges. On a scientific level, very few studies have focused on this tourist activity since it is still in the early stages of development. However, in recent years, business events and several institutional projects whose main objective was the exchange of experiences related to the enhancement of the resources associated with olive oil have been held.

Oleo tourism is understood as a set of activities that revolve around oil. These include visits to olive groves and mills (sometimes coinciding with the olive harvest), conducting oil tastings and tasting typical local dishes in which olive oil is the star ingredient. Additionally, olive oil tourism can include other cultural activities related to nature and which immerse the visitor in local culture of the environment and territory.

To understand the potential of this tourism activity in Spain it is important to analyse some indicators related to supply and demand of olive oil tourism.

From the supply perspective, Spain is the largest producer of olive oil in the world with a production level of 1,389,600 tonnes in 2010/11 (IOC, 2011) and a per capita consumption rate of 9.66 litres (MAGRAMA, 2011). This data gives Spain a privileged position in the marketplace that can be exploited in the field of olive oil tourism. However, this phenomenon is also being developed in other countries linked to the olive sector, such as Italy, Greece, Portugal, France, Morocco and Tunisia, among others, with similar levels of achievement.

There are significant tourist resources related to olive oil and olive oil mills including oil factories, specialized museums, olive groves and views of landscapes, and oil fairs and festivals that can

be visited throughout olive producing territory. These resources have been integrated into various tourist routes offered by small businesses and professionals dedicated exclusively to the development of this activity. Currently, these routes are in an embryonic state not only because of the small number of activities on offer, but also in terms of marketing and management. In this regard, it is noteworthy that these routes are not operated by a single entity and that there are no explicit cooperation agreements between the companies offering this type of tourism, leading to questions about the quality of this tourist product.

However, when taking into account the objectives established by the Ministry of Tourism (Secretaría de Estado de Turismo, 2000) for this type of tourist product, it is clear there are very few existing routes that contribute to these goals. These objectives include increasing and removing the seasonal stigma of this tourist activity in a particular geographic area, generating wealth through activities which complement traditional ones, and improving the infrastructure of the geographical area thus increasing the quality of life of people who live there. Currently these objectives are not being met principally because they do not generate continuous tourism and management does not lie within one entity that boosts, energizes, coordinates and markets this tourist product as a whole. For these companies, the business can be summarized basically in providing information services and some olive oil related resources for a traveller to visit in a given geographical area. However, there are no partnerships, cooperative agreements, or philosophy of working together between the actors involved in olive oil routes so each tourism provider operates independently.

These routes have been developed in the main olive oil producing areas: Jaen, Cordoba, Seville, Cadiz, Granada, Aragon, Extremadura and Catalonia. Information about tourism in these areas and in this field can be found on different specialized websites such as: [www.cerespain.com](http://www.cerespain.com), [www.oleoturismo.es](http://www.oleoturismo.es) and [www.olearum.es](http://www.olearum.es)<sup>1</sup>, among others, or in specific guidebooks such as the Mercacei Guide to Extra Virgin Olive Oil from Spain (Peñamil, 2004) or the Guide for Oil Museums in Spain (Lorenzo, 2008). Table 2 summarizes the main oleo tourism experiences now available in Spain.

From the demand perspective, the research does not reveal conclusive results about the oleo tourist consumer profile mainly because there have only been studies about specific geographical areas which analysed only the profile of visitors to the mills.

Given this limited information the olive oil tourist can be defined as a married male, aged 45 and up, with a monthly income between 1,001 and 1,500 euros, from an urban habitat and who rarely sleeps in olive territory mainly due to poor tourist infrastructure. Satisfaction with visits is high, again, emphasizing the consumption experience. However, as the number of days in a stay increases, satisfaction with tourist visits decreases due mainly to the short supply of open mills and lack of existing complementary offers (Millán *et al.*, 2011).

A deeper analyses of demand is required in order to define and segment the target olive oil tourism market and to identify the main motivations and expectations of visitors, in order to design commercial offers adapted to each segments' needs.

The previous analysis indicates that there is great potential for the development of oleo tourism in Spain. However, the current offer is inadequate and suffers from serious problems. Thus, tourism products have focused only on activities such as mill visits and oil tastings, leaving aside complementary leisure activities that could increase the length of stays and the attractiveness of this kind of tourism. Furthermore, these activities are offered by individual companies, which prevent the existence of joint management of olive routes, a situation that calls into question whether these initiatives are true tourist products as they don't integrate resources and provide a unified image. Finally, the housing supply in olive growing areas is scarce, limiting the development of olive oil tourism and the possibility of combining tourist

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<sup>1</sup>Olearum is an association of producers, millers, technicians and friends of olives and olive oil who have joined forces to defend, promote and disseminate the olive culture and heritage linked to this product.

resources. There must be an increase in the promotion of hotel development to increase the attractiveness of olive oil based tourism.

In summary, this analysis highlights the need to promote tourist attractions designed to offer integral experiences surrounding olives, olive oil and its related culture.

**Table 2. Main Oleotourism experiences in Spain**

Routes of the Olive Oil	More important tourism resources
<p>Tours in Jaen, province with the highest concentration of olive trees. Globally, it ranks first in production of olive oil.</p> <p>Paths that meander through the Cazorra, Segura and Las Villas natural park, the Sierra Magina region, the comarca of Southern Highlands and the Sierra de Andujar natural park.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visitable oil mills: La Almedina (Cazorla), Potosí 10 S.A.(Orcera), Olivar de Segura (Puente de Genave), Aceites Campoliva, S.L. (Pegalajar), Aceites Viana (Garciez), Ildefonso Espinosa (Pegalajar), Aceites La Laguna (Baeza), Almazara García Morón (Arjonilla), Galgón 99, S.L. (Villanueva de la Reina), Hermejor de la Reina, S.L.(Villanueva de la Reina), Cortijo del Madroño (Martos), Pydasa (Martos).</li> <li>• Specialty shops: La casa del aceite (Ubada y Baeza), Oleoteca Cueva del Ponto (Beas de Segura), Oleocata (Jaén), Artesanía del Olivo (Sabiote).</li> <li>• Museums: Museo de la Cultura del Olivo, the largest in Spain on this genre, nestled in the resort Hacienda La Laguna (Baeza), Museo de Artes y Costumbres Populares (Jaen), which presents a representative sample of the popular culture of the province (kitchen utensils, farm tools, old mills, etc.), Museo del Alto Guadalquivir de Cazorra and Museo de Jodar (which displays interesting objects and equipment related to the culture of the olive).</li> <li>• Olives unique: Olivo de Fuentebuena (Arroyo del Ojanco), olivo de la Era de la Zarza (Castillo de Locubin) and la Estaca Grande (Martos).</li> <li>• Festivities: Fiesta de la aceituna (Martos) on 8 December.</li> <li>• Fairs: Feria Internacional del Aceite de Oliva e Industrias Afines EXPOLIVA (the most important event in the world which is held every two years in March); Feria Internacional del Olivar Ecológico ECOLIVA, biannual.</li> <li>• Tourism products: the route of olive tree and the olive oil greenway route.</li> </ul>
<p>Tours in Cordoba</p> <p>Routes that pass by Montoro-Adamuz, Pedroches, Baena, Priego de Cordoba, Countryside South, Alto Guadalquivir and Cordoba city.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alameños countryside or "four legs" olive trees (Cordoba city).</li> <li>• Núñez de Prado Oil mill and museum of olive and olive oil (Baena).</li> <li>• Thematic exhibition of olive trees of the company oleo cultura (Castro del Rio).</li> <li>• Historical and archaeological museum (Almedinilla).</li> <li>• House-museum Castil de Campos (Priego de Cordoba).</li> <li>• Festivity of arremate (Iznajar).</li> <li>• The old Mill (Cabra).</li> <li>• The Mill of the Duke (Aguilar de la Frontera).</li> <li>• The oil train (Montilla, trazado ferroviario del aceite).</li> </ul> <p>Tourism products: Club of tourism product "Olive Tree Lands".</p>
<p>Tours in Extremadura</p> <p>Most important routes: Monterrubio and Gata-Hurdes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oil mill and packaging Aceites Bonet situated under the cloister of an ancient monastery in Olivenza.</li> <li>• Coto de la Serena host the DoO Aceite Monterrubio.</li> <li>• Production area of Sierra de Gata.</li> <li>• San Martín de Trevejo olive oil museum.</li> <li>• Ethnographic Museum of Cilleros where rural life is reconstructed from a wealthy farming family.</li> <li>• Mill museum of Medio de Robledillo de Gata.</li> <li>• Festivity of the Baile del Capazo held in Torre de Don Miguel.</li> <li>• Olivac de Don Benito fair.</li> </ul>

**Table 2 (cont.). Main Oleotourism experiences in Spain**

Routes of the Olive Oil	More important tourism resources
Routes in Catalonia Routes are concentrated in the provinces of Tarragona, Girona and Lleida where the route of "Les Garrigues" is one of the most visited	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oil thematic park, considered one of the best oil thematic museums in Spain.</li> <li>• Tourist Interpretation Centre of Les Garrigues, that allocates an exhibition to promote the culture of olive oil.</li> <li>• Field cooperative "Sant Isidre".</li> <li>• Festivity of olive oil: Fira de l'Oli Extra Verge de Les Garrigues held in January.</li> <li>• Olive oil and rural world in Castellldans museum.</li> <li>• The oil ecomuseum of La Pobla de Cérvoles.</li> <li>• Old oil mill of Belianes.</li> <li>• Agricultural Cooperative of Soleràs offers the opportunity to learn the process of oil production and it has a farm shop where their products can be bought.</li> </ul>
Routes of Bajo Aragon Provinces of Zaragoza and Teruel.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visitable oil mills: The centennial mill oiler of Jaganta in the Parras de Castellote, The oil mill Alfonso Muniesa (Belchite) and the disseminator center of the Aceite del Bajo Aragon D.O., multiservice space specializing in olive oil (tasting rooms, shops oil).</li> <li>• Museums: La Muela (Zaragoza), specialized in teaching and disseminating of the techniques and traditions related to olive growing and oil production and the Ráfales museum (Teruel).</li> <li>• Centenary olive trees of the Belchite and Alcañiz comarcas.</li> <li>• The oil meson in Bulbunte.</li> <li>• Agricultural Fair of olive trees and olive oil held in Calaceite.</li> <li>• Festivity of the mill, organized by the Regulator Council of the Designation of Origin Aceite del Bajo Aragon held at the end of the harvesting the olives.</li> </ul>

Source: Own elaboration.

## IV – Olive oil routes designed to create experiences

The creation of tourist routes is one of the strategic options in the design and development of tourist products based on food. In general, routes can be defined as the creation of a cluster of activities and attractions to encourage cooperation between different areas and serve as a vehicle to stimulate economic development through tourism (Briedehmann and Wickens, 2003).

The design of a tourist route should: facilitate contact between the client and the tourist product provider (Herbert, 2001), be built on the basis of an activity that distinguishes and differentiates itself from others in the market, be developed with the support of a road/travel network, and begin where the service provider can offer a traveller all the necessary elements to follow the route properly (Fernández and Guzman Ramos, 2003).

Routes based on food products are usually organized around a product or set of products that represent the culture and identity of an area and are composed of producers, regional restaurants and companies engaged in regional agribusiness.

Certificates of food quality are the backbone of attraction for many tourist routes since they differentiate routes from competitors' tourist products. In Spain, the system that certifies the quality of a food is based on the granting of Protected Designations of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographical Indications (PGI). According to Regulation (EC) 510/2006 (20 March 2006), the PDO, defined as the name of a region, place or country used to describe an agricultural product or food, requires that the product originates from that place, that the quality or characteristics are due essentially to the geographical area in which it is located and that the



production, processing and preparation take place in the defined geographical area. For PGI certification, the first two requirements are the same as for PDO certification, but the third requirement is that the geographical area may be related to any stage of the product development but not all stages. In sum, these certifications differentiate a food product based on its characteristics stemming from the geographical area in which it is produced and where the product is processed.

There are 27 PDO and PGI (Table 3) recognized by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Environment (MAGRAMA, 2012) for olive oil in Spain.

**Table 3. Designation of Origin and Protected Geographical Indications for the Olive Oil in Spain**

Autonomous Region	Number	PDO & PGI
Andalusia	12	Antequera Baena Estepa Lucena Montes de Granada Montoro-Adamuz Poniente de Granada Priego de Cordoba Sierra de Cadiz Sierra de Cazorla Sierra de Segura Sierra Magina
Catalonia	4	Aceite de Baix Ebre-Montsià Aceite de Terra Alta Les Garrigues Siurana
Castilla-La Mancha	4	Aceite Campo de Montiel Aceite de La Alcarria Campo de Calatrava Montes de Toledo
Valencian Community	1	Aceite de la Comunitat Valenciana
La Rioja	1	Aceite de La Rioja
Aragon	1	Aceite del Bajo Aragon
Extremadura	2	Aceite de Monterrubio Gata-Hurdes
Community of Navarra	1	Aceite de Navarra
Balearic Islands	1	Aceite de Mallorca
Total	27	

Source: MAGRAMA (2012).

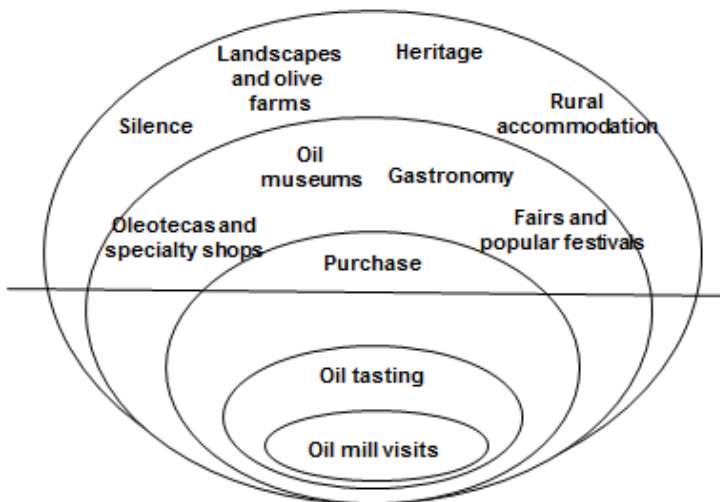
Based on an experiential approach, olive oil routes comprise a set of experiences related to this product that are offered to consumers in a particular territory and reinforce the culture of the olive and valorisation of olive oil (Murgado *et al.*, 2011).

From this perspective, an olive oil tourist route is based on a model of concentric circles representing different experiential components (Fig. 1) including: visiting a mill, oil tasting, buying olive oil, visiting "oleotecas" (olive oil bodegas) and specialty shops, visiting museums, attending fairs and festivals related to olives and olive oil, tasting the local gastronomy, visiting landscapes and olive farms, and staying in places associated with the product.

The inner circles are smaller and represent experiences that have the greatest impact on tourists (especially the visit to the oil mill) and the activities represented in the external, larger sized circles cause less impact. Similarly, the situations separated by a horizontal line represent activities that are controllable by tourist companies and those that are not.

Interactions between the service provider and customer, or "service encounters or moments of truth" take place throughout the buying and consumption process. A tourist builds his or her perception and satisfaction of the tourist product based on these moments of truth. In each of these service encounters the customer evaluates the quality of the service, and although the first encounters may be especially important due to a risk of dissatisfaction reflecting on subsequent services, any meeting can be potentially critical when it comes to determining satisfaction and customer loyalty.

This tourist product model is designed to generate multiple "service encounters" as a result of the participation of different businesses (hotels, restaurants, museums, mills, tourist service companies, etc.) and their interactions with a client. The interdependence of these companies creates the need to strengthen partnerships between them since the degree of customer satisfaction does not depend on a single agent or operator, but on all service providers as a whole. Thus, positive experiences with each service provider will result in a perception of overall quality of the tourist product and vice versa. However, a combination of positive and negative experiences will increase the level of insecurity in the client and therefore the product will be more vulnerable in the market.



**Fig. 1. Components of an olive oil tourist experience. Source: Murgado *et al.*, 2011, p. 202.**

For this model to work, some obstacles and problems currently present in olive oil related tourism need to be overcome. Some of these problems are endemic to agricultural and gastronomic tourism, and experts in the sector cite their resolution as the key to successfully develop this tourist activity.

## V – Overcoming problems in olive oil related tourism

Based on a qualitative study in which experts related to general culinary tourism management and specifically, to olive oil related tourism were interviewed, nine factors important to the successful development of olive oil tourism were identified. These factors are explained in detail below:

**1. Lack of cooperation between those involved in the supply of tourist products.** This is considered one of the most challenging problems in gastronomic tourism in Spain and is due to the lack of cooperative culture among companies. Overcoming this resistance to cooperation is crucial when taking into account that the interdependence between the companies providing services influences the level of overall customer satisfaction.

Some of the proposals put forward to promote an integrated approach to the management of tourist products include the creation and use of instruments such as a Tourism Product Club or a support from incoming travel agencies to promote cooperation networks between area businesses and entrench existing strategic alliances. In short, solving this problem requires a high level of involvement on the part of both public and private players related to olive oil tourism.

**2. Inexperience and lack of personnel training among olive oil tourism service providers.** This is especially evident in key activities such as visits to mills or oil tastings, which require a high level of training in order to explain the production process and technical issues and respond to questions. This problem stems from the low involvement of the mills in the tourist product and scepticism about the project, as evidenced the small number of mills open to the public, reduced tourist visiting hours, and the small investment dedicated to this business activity.

**3. Poor business infrastructure that requires investment to meet high quality standards for this tourist product.** It is necessary to promote and foster a corporate marketing culture.

**4. Lack of attractive tourist products in the market to spark demand for olive oil related tourism.** Therefore, we propose the creation of an official olive oil route in Spain that brings together high quality tourist resources and better standards of equipment. Additionally, the established of a such a route would improve services related to the olive culture among all participants: mills open to the public, old oil mills, "oleotecas" and specialty shops, olive and olive oil museums, rental cottages and rural houses, unique olive landscapes, organic olive groves, centenarian olive trees, oil festivals, traditions, regional gastronomy, designations of origin, monuments dedicated to olives and/or olive oil, oil trade shows, restaurants featuring olive oil menus and related archaeological sites.

Likewise, it is important to create a unique brand that is actively managed by an integrated marketing plan. To do this, specific brand positioning must be defined and clearly identified with consumer perceptions about the destination and product category linked to the site and its values.

**5. Insufficient hotel infrastructures limit the potential for development of olive oil related tourism.** Since most visitors do not stay overnight in "olive territory." This restricts tourism to very specific services such as visits to the olive groves, mills or oil tastings, but prevents the development of a broader range of services that could provide a tourist with more knowledge and allow them to experience the culture of the territory. Also, there is no specialized hotel package related to olive oil tourism. Such a package would better serve the middle-upper level income tourist segment resulting in more visits, longer average stays and increased average spending per visitor.

**6. Meagre range of extra-activities to strengthen olive oil tourism.** It is important to

emphasize the need to develop additional services that link the client with the olive oil producing area as this could improve the level of tourist satisfaction and perceived value of the product. Therefore, we propose the creation of distribution networks specializing in traditional products and restaurants to increase tourist attraction.

**7. Lack of a comprehensive and continuous communication plan to adequately disseminate information and strengthen the identity of the tourist product.** Thus, the following actions are proposed: (i) promote the culture of olive oil by promoting a better understanding of the nutritional and culinary properties of this product; (ii) the use of this culinary product as a tourist attraction and added value for tourists; (iii) the use of simple icons, representing the historical and cultural values of olive oil and the cultivation areas; and (iv) increased use of the Internet and social networking to publicize olive oil tourism packages, participating organizations and tourist attractions that can be visited.

**8. Poor interactive marketing, a crucially important aspect of tourist services.** Proper interaction between companies and customers helps achieve higher levels of satisfaction, involvement and customer loyalty. Thus, if the interaction is positive and the customer is satisfied, he or she will become the best form of product publicity.

**9. A misdirected marketing approach focused on the product, not the customer.** Experiential marketing is an especially important way to convert a tourist product into an authentic and singular proposition that stirs emotions, and feelings, and that adds value for the customer. Thus, the important thing is not the tourist resort itself, but the experience that can be generated in and around it. It also requires proper management of perceived service quality not only technically, but also functionally.

## VI – Conclusions

The present study analyses the potential of olive oil tourism in Spain as an emergent model of tourism based on the search for quality. This model gives the consumer a more active role in the process of purchase and consumption.

This kind of tourism is called gastronomic tourism and gastronomy and its related activities are the main motivations for tourist visits to a particular region or country. Therefore, agriculture and foods are important not only for their tourist value, but also as a variable influencing a tourist's decision-making process.

In Spain, olive oil tourism is in its initial stages. Currently, there are some tourist routes in the principle olive oil production areas, which include important related resources that can be exploited in the field of tourism. Additionally, Spain is known for being the main olive oil producing country in the world and its advantageous position in the cultivation of high quality agricultural foodstuffs emphasizes the notable economic potential of this activity.

However, the success of the olive oil tourism depends on the design and improvement of tourist products in order to create culinary tourist experiences that will attract high-income tourists. Therefore, the best strategic option to create integral tourist experiences around olive oil is the organization of one or more related stops on a route in which the tourist will have to pass through various experiential stages including: mill visits, oil tastings, olive oil purchases in "oleoteca" or olive oil bodega and specialty shops visits, museum visits, attendance at fairs and festivals related to olives and olive oil, tasting local gastronomy, landscape and olive farm visits, and accommodation in places associated with olives and olive culture.

In this context, the current lack of cooperation between the potential players in an olive oil tourism route, combined with the inexperience and lack of personnel training among olive oil tourism service providers, the poor business infrastructure, the lack of attractive tourist products, hotel infrastructures and the scarcity of related extra-activities highlight important challenges to developing successful tourism in this field. In addition, the development of a

successful olive oil tourist route demands changes in marketing management, such as strengthening interactive marketing and implementing an integral communication plan.

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