

GASTRONOMIC TOURISM, PROTECTED DESIGNATIONS OF ORIGIN AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN ANDALUSIA: PRESENT SITUATION

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The rural areas of Andalusia generally concentrate their production in economic activities directly related to the primary sector. To raise the low levels of rural incomes are necessary complementary income. In this context, rural tourism –and especially the gastronomic tourism– may be the engine of economic development and of job creation.

On the other hand, interest in regional foods is increasing, based on the high quality of agricultural products which serves as an enhancer of culinary or gastronomic tourism, which has become one of the most important forms of rural tourism.

Gastronomic tourism is a symbiosis between agriculture and tourism. In this type of tourism quality food products become in promotional tools of the food industry in rural areas and, at the same time, enhances the marketing of products with a distinctive image. Therefore, gastronomic tourism offers a number of benefits to rural destinations to both individual and collective levels, such as increased sales at places of production, improved image of a tourist destination and also increases the number of tourists.

However, this type of tourism also has significant costs. Not only for individual agricultural enterprises that decide to embark on culinary tourism development, but also for development of the supporting infrastructure and appropriate marketing actions. In this sense, the creation of gastronomic routes constitutes a clustering of activities and attractions that stimulate cooperation and collaboration between local communities and neighboring regions. These gastronomic routes are a key part of the culinary tourism industry.

The certification of the quality of food products in the EU is done through a standardized system that generates two types of organizations: Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographical Indication (PGI). Many agricultural enterprises promote gastronomic routes linked to certified products, such as wine routes in France.

Andalusia produces a variety of high-quality agricultural products certified by 29 PDO and 26 PGI. Products with PDO certification are olive oil (12), wine (8), vinegar (3), ham (2), olives (1), custard apples (1), honey (1) and raisins (1). Andalusia has a enormous potential to promote culinary tourism as a strategic option for development. In some cases, producers have promoted routes linked to their PDO products. And currently, wine routes are the most popular and the most visited, followed by olive oil routes.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the gastronomic tourist profile and the supply linked to PDOs and PGIs in Andalusia, in order to establish a quality tourism product appropriate for the demand. Specifically, the analysis is focused on the four most important products: wine, olive oil, ham and baked goods. To do this, field work was carried out based on two types of questionnaires:

- A questionnaire to 126 participants in gastronomic tourism routes (wineries, olive oil mills, meat companies, baked good factories, restaurants, hotels, shops) with 22 questions that were grouped into three blocks (staff – production, involvement in the gastronomic route and actions undertaken to promote tourism).
- A questionnaire to 1,009 tourists who had spent at least 6 hours in a route to know the production process, a museum, a festival, etc. based on the agricultural product. It contains 36 questions grouped into six blocks (socio-demographic profile, economic profile, profile of the potential tourist, purpose of the visit, characteristics of the visit and opinions about the route).

According to our data, tourists visiting the gastronomic routes were married (53%), had an education (77%), were between 50 and 59 years old (just over 40%), with an average income of between €001 and €500. However, statistically significant differences were noted in average income between wine tourists and the rest of gastronomic tourists. Wine tourists had higher incomes (32% exceed 2500 euros/month) than the rest of gastronomic tourists (5% exceed 2500 euros/month). And we noted that the higher the income level, the greater the per diem tourist expenditure. The main item of expenditure was the purchase of products related to the route, such as wine or olive oil. Regarding occupation, 20% of tourists were employees and only 7% of tourists were students.

We found that the way to know the route was associated with age. The younger tourists found the route through Internet, while older tourists knew the route through friends and family or travel agencies. So, most of the tourists chose a gastronomic route recommended by family and friends (48%). Moreover, they made the trip accompanied by the family (just over 40%) or partner (approximately 35%) and their main motivation was to visit wineries, olive oil mills or the corresponding factories, in order to know the manufacturing process and taste the products (47%). However, they only visited one winery, olive oil mill or factory (61%) mainly because these facilities are not open to the public during key hours or days. We noted that the greater the number of wineries, mills or factories visited, the greater the level of tourist satisfaction.

General services, such as communications (roads, rail networks and airports), public safety, food products, and telecommunications, were evaluated positively (58%, 67%, 53% and 72%, respectively). Tourists considered that the price of the trip (accommodation, catering and transport costs) was normal (52%), the treatment was good (48%), the environment was well preserved (72%) and restaurants were good too (63%), both the service and the food quality.

Nevertheless, not all services were evaluated positively. This was the case of cleaning, signposting of routes and accommodation. The number of accommodations and the professionalism of staff could be improved. Moreover, tourists identified the lack of complementary supply as the main weakness.

In general, the satisfaction with the visit to the route was high and tourists were willing to return to the area.

On the supply side, our data suggest companies were not strongly involved in the development of the gastronomic routes. Entrepreneurs think that the expense of adapting their facilities to tours will not be offset by revenue from tourists. So, only companies that obtained subsidies adapted their facilities.

We found that the higher the number of workers, the better the perception of the route as an additional source of income. Moreover, companies with better trained workers (or with staff retraining) had longer opening hours to facilitate visits. On the contrary, cooperatives were the most reluctant to promote gastronomic tourism.

Our findings suggest that gastronomic routes have great potential to generate wealth in Andalusian rural areas, but it requires an improved tourism orientation, significant private and public capital investment, as well as a willingness on the part of agricultural entrepreneurs to adapt to visitor needs and demands.

Cooperation between entities promoting routes, and even cooperation between routes, is a key factor. The different routes can have benefits by sharing investment, resources and knowledge to improve the development of gastronomic tourism in Andalusia. So, for example, tour packages can be designed including visits to various routes for several days.

Travel agents that offer tour packages to gastronomic tourists, as well as entities wishing to promote gastronomic routes can take into consideration the findings of this study in order to design effective marketing plans.