

Does Wine Enhance the Attractiveness of a Destination?

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Abstract:

Purpose - The role of regional wines in attracting “average consumers” to a destination is only scarcely investigated.

Design/methodology/approach - While many studies examine wine store, wine region or wine festival visitors’ motives, satisfaction, spending etc. or cluster wine consumers or tourists who were interviewed within a specific environment i.e. a wine-store, -festival, -online platform or similar, very little is known of the people who are not necessarily to be found in such locations.

Findings - In order to find out if wine enhances the attractiveness of a destination for the “average consumer”, a representative German and Austrian sample was questioned in an online survey. Results proof and highlight the importance of wine as a tourism magnet and culinary tourism driver on the one hand and show that, on the other hand, wine as a single offer - at least in the case of Austria - is not a sufficient destination-choice argument for the German and Austrian “John Doe”.

Keywords: Wine, tourism, attractiveness, destination, average consumer

1. INTRODUCTION

Regional wines and food products have a significant, proven and well-documented impact on the image and consumer perception of tourism destinations (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999; Bessiere, 1998; Cusack, 2000; du Rand et al., 2003; Green & Dougherty, 2008; Fox, 2007; Handszuh, 2000; Henderson, 2009; Telfer & Wall, 1996; UNWTO, 2012). Particularly unique and handcrafted specialties with a protected appellation contribute significantly to enhancing the appeal of places (Karim & Chi, 2010; Stöckl, Rinke & Eisingerich, 2014). Most studies investigate consumer behaviour on site, i.e. in the wine (tourism) region or in special circles such as online wine platforms, representing an involved group of consumers. However, the role of regional wines in attracting “average consumers” to a destination is only scarcely investigated. Although there are many specific studies on influencing factors and purchase behaviour for specialists, in specialist stores and on wine-tourism destinations, for example investigating the influence of store environments (e.g. Orth, Heinrich & Limon, 2010), background music and shopping behaviour (Areni & Kim, 1993), region and country-of-origin effects (e.g. Skuras & Vakrou, 2002) or the impact of sustainable production methods on purchase decisions (Klohr, Fleuchaus & Theuvsen, 2014), as yet, no research investigated the role that wines and regional or national wine “umbrella brands” play for the “average consumer – in contrast to high involved wine connoisseurs – when rating or assessing the attractiveness of a destination.

Speculations or even estimations regarding the importance of “John Doe” as a wine buyer and as a culinary or even wine tourist are difficult due to a lack of research on the topic. Nevertheless, a number of indicators could help to assess the importance of the “average consumer” for both the wine business and tourism destination marketing. In Austria 74 per cent of all wines purchased off-licence i.e. for home-consumption (not in restaurants, bars or at festivals) were purchased in discounters and super markets; 82% of all purchased wines cost less than EUR 7,- (AWMB, 2014). Szolnoki & Hofmann’s (2014) study is a first approach to segment the German wine market by considering consumers’ usage of different sales channels. Their findings suggest that German consumers can be separated into two major segments: a basic group and a premium group. The majority of the participants of their survey among a representative German sample (62 per cent) belongs to the basic segments. The “average” German wine buyers account for roughly 50% of all purchases and about one third of the total turnover (Szolnoki & Hoffmann, 2014).

Although the “average consumer” is still far from being a wine connoisseur (Bernetti, Casini & Marinelli, 2006), changing consumer purchasing behaviour in the major retail chains indicates that wine “culture” is expanding. The average consumer normally devotes little time to the purchasing of most goods he or she selects in major retail chains, and their decisions are influenced predominantly by price (Bernetti, Casini & Marinelli, 2006).

Consequently, the overarching research question of this paper – in contrast to the vast majority of existing research that investigates motives and behaviour of high or medium involved consumers who are observed, questioned or interviewed in a wine-tourism environment – is: Does wine enhance the attractiveness of a destination for “John Doe”? Based on this research question, the aim of this study is, first, to investigate if countries with a highly developed wine culture are considered as more attractive for tourism with a culinary aspect than non-wine-growing countries. The second objective is to analyse the role of wine as a pull factor in tourism in comparison to other beverages such as beer, spirits, coffee and food products such as bread or vegetables and fruits. Finally, this study aims to find out whether or not wine is a culinary tourism driver. These efforts will result in answering the

question, if wine enhances the attractiveness of a destination. Using a representative online survey (n = 1,268) we first analysed which beverages and food products are of interest to this target group when travelling. Accordingly, a ranking was conducted with the average German and Austrian sample to find out whether or not wine growing countries would dominate a destination classification regarding the culinary attractiveness of a country. Secondly, a content analysis of Austrian culinary offers (n = 1,188) was carried out to examine if the range of culinary-tourism offers differs in wine-growing and non-wine-growing provinces. To this end, we decoded Austrian destinations as either “non-wine growing” or “wine-growing” region using the respective postal codes.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Wine tourism is a rather new form of tourism that has been able to develop constantly over the last years. Food and wine were able to attract an ever increasing number of aficionados and stimulates food and wine-related traveling (Croce & Perri, 2010). “Increasingly passionate about food and moved by a desire to discover more about the terroir of particular products, changing consumer behaviour has had a decisive impact on wine tourism“ (ibid., p. 3).

However, for the majority of consumers wine and gastronomy is usually not the main motivation when choosing a destination (UNWTO, 2012, p. 6). An analysis of the Austrian National Tourist Office investigated the traveling motive “food and wine” of guests to Austria. Findings reveal that culinary offers do influence the destination choice behaviour, but the results again confirm that food and wine are usually not the main motive to choose or travel to a certain destination (Österreich Werbung, 2013). Hall et al. (2003), who stated that gastronomy plays a role in decision-making and traveling behaviour of individuals, also support this. However, great differences in the importance of this motive can be observed among travellers, who show a high interest towards cuisine and wine (and who are hence highly motivated to participate in gourmet tourism, gastronomic tourism and cuisine tourism) and travellers, who have an average or low interest in food and drinks (Hall, Sharples, Mitchell, Macionis, & Cambourne, 2003, p. 10), as indicated in figure 1.

Nevertheless, what has to be considered in this context, is that approx. one third of all holiday spending are allotted to food and drinks (UNWTO, 2012, p. 8). This means that every tourist – and therefore also the average or low involved consumer and (potential) traveller – is, to some extent, a culinary tourist due to the fact that each traveller needs to drink and eat (Hall, 2012).

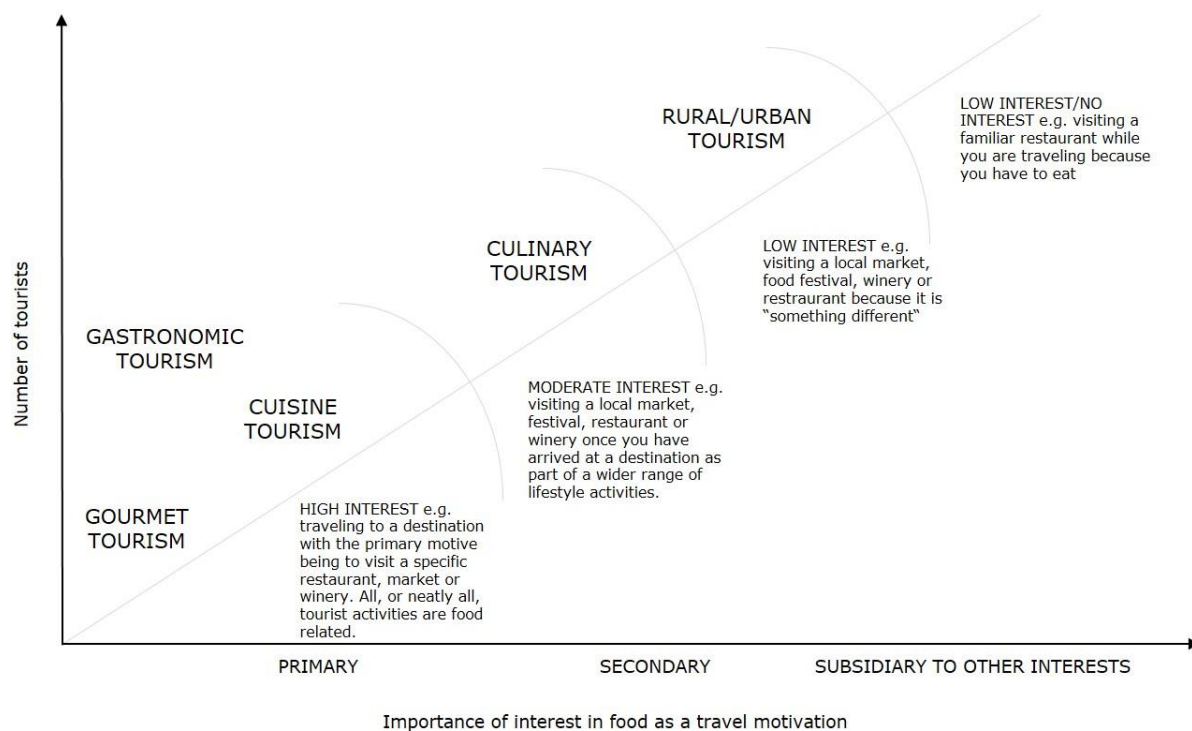


Figure 11: Importance of interest in food and wine as a travel motivation

Source: modified after Hall et al. (2003, p. 11)

(Potential) visitors with varying levels of culinary motivations must recognize national and local culinary identity and uniqueness, so that destination management organizations are able to make economic use of a destination's image and attractiveness (Henderson, 2009).

Culinary identity and heritage helps to create a unique positioning for a place (Fox, 2007). Food and wine thus became an important marketing and positioning instrument for destinations (Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Ottenbacher & Harrington, 2013).

Culinary offers do not only influence cultural identity and image (Bessiere, 1998; Du Rand, Heath, & Alberts, 2003a; Cusack, 2000; Handszuh, 2000; Telfer & Wand, 1996), they can also revalue visitor experiences at the destination (du Rand et al., 2003) and contribute to guest satisfaction and experience (Ryan, 1991; Smith, 1991; Timothy & Ron, 2013). Furthermore, significant correlations were proven between the culinary image of a destination and visiting intentions (Karim & Chi, 2010). Local cuisine and the entire culinary offer can therefore act as an image driver of a destination (Che, 2006; Lin, Pearson, & Cai, 2011; Tellström, Gustafsson, & Mossberg, 2006; Timothy & Ron, 2013), that may not only influence special and niche target groups.

Based on the above-mentioned studies and literature, the following hypothesis were derived:

H1: "Average consumers" from Germany and Austria will rate wine countries as more attractive culinary tourism destinations than non-wine growing countries.

H2: Wine is considered as an interesting part of the culinary offer of a place.

H3: Wine is a culinary-tourism driver and therefore the culinary offer – products (other than wine), culinary tourist attractions such as guided tours through production facilities and culinary events – are more numerous in wine-growing regions than in non-wine growing.

The study which is presented in the following sections tries to investigate the role of regional wines in attracting “average consumers” to a destination using a population-representative sample of German and Austrian consumers and the case of culinary tourism in Austria.

3. METHODOLOGY

A two-step methodology was applied to provide answers to the research question.

In order to explore if wine enhances the attractiveness of a destination, primary research in form of a quantitative survey was conducted at first. A population-representative online survey in Austria and Germany was carried out. For this purpose a quota sample based on the criteria age, gender and residential areas all over Austria and Germany was drawn to reach theoretical representativeness. A sample size of $n = 762$ was achieved for Austria. A total sample size of $n = 506$ was obtained in Germany. An online survey was chosen, as its advantages lie in the high perceived anonymity and flexibility of the respondents which helps to ensure data quality. According to Statistics Austria 81% of Austrians had internet access at the time of the survey (Statistik Austria, 2014). In Germany, the percentage of internet users amounted to 82% according to the Federal Statistical Office (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2014). The high internet penetration rate legitimizes the use of an online survey in both countries.

The contents of the questionnaire were based on the core research question of the study. At first, respondents were asked to state which countries they spontaneously associate with culinary tourism. Furthermore, respondents had to express their interest in various culinary offerings using a 5-point scale. Eventually, respondents were questioned to evaluate different elements of the culinary offer in Austria.

The survey was programmed using LimeSurvey and conducted online in January and February 2015. Respondents were asked to take part in the survey via an e-mail invitation sent out by a panel provider. Subsequently, data were analysed using SPSS 23. Frequency distributions showing measures of distribution, location and variability as well as cross-tabulations were used for data analysis. The internal consistency of the scale used was tested and classified as being reliable (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.909$) (Fantapié Altobelli, 2011, p. 165). According to the scale levels and the specific requirements of analytical methods ((Berekoven, Eckert, & Ellenrieder, 2009, p. 219), Mann-Whitney tests (Untersteiner, 2007, p. 146ff) were carried out to detect significant differences between Austrians and Germans.

Ethical behaviour was kept in mind at any stage of the research. Participation in the survey was voluntary and respondents had the right to refuse to answer any questions. Participants were given the information that any personal information or data were treated as confidential and anonymous and that they have the right to access research findings at any time. Additionally the participants were not deceived regarding any aspect of the research (Jennings, 2010, p. 99).

Secondly, a content analysis of all websites of official destination management organizations in Austria was performed. The Austrian Hotelier Association, who regularly compiles and publishes contacts of all official destinations management companies in Austria, obtained the

list of all official Austrian destination websites. All culinary offerings of these destinations were recorded and categorized according to pre-established criteria. In addition, 35 experts were interviewed in different destinations to obtain a list of culinary offers that is as comprehensive as possible. These expert interviews were done by telephone, via e-mail or personally. Three types of culinary offers were investigated: culinary products (e.g. ham, cheese, wine, etc.), culinary events (e.g. festivals) and culinary attractions (e.g. companies that offer product-related tastings). This approach resulted in a list of 1,188 regional products, tourism attractions and events all over Austria.

4. FINDINGS

Three main findings based on the two-step methodology lead to the assumption, that wine enhances the attractiveness of a destination for the average consumer and that wine can be seen as a culinary tourism driver.

Firstly, average consumers assess Italy as the culinary destination par excellence, this holds true for both Austrians and Germans. This also confirms the results of Karim & Chi (2010), who see Italy as the country with the best culinary image and the highest potential for culinary tourism. Besides, France and Spain (as equally important wine growing countries) follow on the second and third place of the ranking. Results indicate that the image of these top three countries is highly shaped by wine as a culinary offer: The second most important spontaneous association of our sample for Italy was “wine” (after “pasta”). The same holds true for France with “baguette” followed by “wine” as the most important associations. The result for Spain is again quite similar with the highest connotations for “tapas” and “paella” followed by “wine” as predominant image items. Table 1 shows that well-known wine growing and wine exporting countries tend to be preferred culinary tourism destinations of Germans and Austrians. Wine producing countries clearly dominate the ranking regarding the overall culinary attractiveness.

Top 10 culinary tourism destinations of Germans and Austrians	
1. Italy	68.7%
2. France	37.4%
3. Spain	36.9%
4. Austria	32.5%
5. Greece	27.6%
6. Germany	16.5%
7. Turkey	13.2%
8. Croatia	11.8%
9. Thailand	9.8%
10. China	6.7%

Table 5: Top 10 culinary tourism destinations of Germans (n=506) and Austrians (n=539)

Secondly, the findings lead to the assumption that a good offer provided in the segment of wine can act as a moderate pull factor in culinary tourism. When comparing wine to other beverages such as beer, spirits and coffee, it can be seen that Germans and Austrians tend to be most interested in wine and coffee. Nevertheless, most food specialties arouse greater interest than wine (see figure 2). In contrast to the moderate interest, Austria's wine offer is assessed very positively. Wine can therefore act as a moderate pull factor and motivation for culinary tourism in Austria, especially in highly interested (niche) target groups.

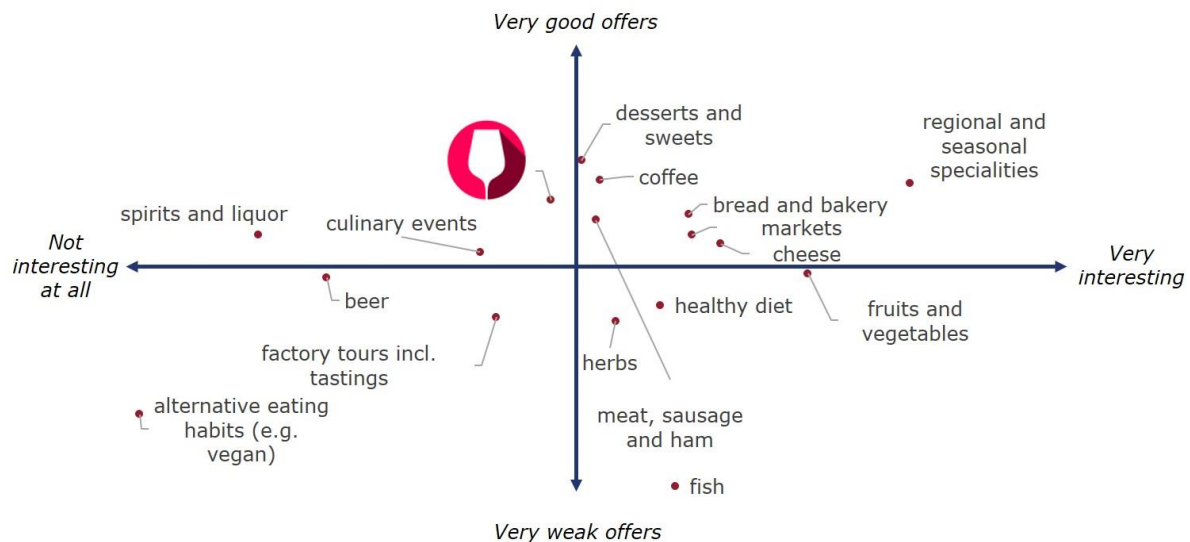


Figure 12: The position of wine in Austria's importance-performance matrix of "average consumers" (n=1,268)

Thirdly, it became obvious that wine can be considered as a culinary tourism driver in Austria. Based on the content analysis, the range of culinary-tourism offers (regional products, tourism attractions and events; 1,188 in total) was analysed for both types of provinces. Results show that culinary offers vary greatly by region. Almost every Austrian region offers a distinct range around one or more central food topics like cheese, apricots, pumpkin, etc. These products are often culinary trademarks of the respective region. Concerning beverages, a predominance of wine can be seen throughout Austria. This is by far the most important culinary product. For a deeper analysis, Austria was divided into its wine-growing and non-wine-growing provinces and afterwards, the range of culinary-tourism offers was again analysed. Findings indicate that wine growing regions offer considerably more events, products and attractions. Furthermore, wine is a driver of culinary tourism, as culinary hotspots typically arise around wine growing regions. Wine can thus be seen as an enabler of culinary tourism.

5. DISCUSSION

When summarizing the results, it becomes clear that wine can lead to higher visitor interest and a clearer culinary image. This underlines the findings of Karim & Chi (2010), who claim that the travelers' image perception of a destination helps destinations to determine what type of marketing program to develop in order to appeal to potential travellers. According to these authors, Italy and France have been quite successful in positioning wine as one of their core culinary tourism products and highlighting themselves as "lands of wine". Therefore, H1, which states, "average consumers from Germany and Austria will rate wine countries as more attractive culinary tourism destinations than non-wine growing countries," is verified.

H2, though, "wine is considered as an interesting part of the culinary offer of a place," cannot be thoroughly confirmed. Although wine is considered as the most interesting alcoholic drink as part of a culinary tourism experience and beer as well as spirits and liquor are regarded as far less interesting, wine ranges only in the lower bound of interest. Coffee for example raises

more attention. In addition, bread, fruit and vegetables, cheese and other everyday goods seem to have a higher attractiveness for culinary tourism experiences than more sophisticated products for “connoisseurs” such as wine and spirits.

Our third hypothesis (H3): “wine is a culinary-tourism driver” can be affirmed. Wine growing regions offer considerably better culinary “infrastructure” for visitors than non-wine growing areas. In the case of Austria it became apparent that wine-growing regions offer a larger amount of attractions and events, not only connected with wine, but also other culinary products. Wine and wine-related events and attractions can be seen as essential drivers of culinary tourism for Austria.

Results therefore proof and highlight the importance of wine as a tourism magnet on the one hand and show that, on the other hand, wine as a single offer – in the case of Austria – is not a sufficient destination-choice argument for Austrian and German consumers. Therefore, wine enhances the attractiveness of a destination, but it cannot be assumed that wine serves as the main motivation when choosing a destination, at least for Austria. A number of interesting managerial implications are to be derived for destination-, company- and product marketing and branding. Our results also indicate that research investigating “average consumers” who, after all, represent a considerable albeit laborious target group for the wine and wine-tourism industry is only in its very basic stage.

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