

Landscape's Relationships with Wine Consumer Behaviour Constructs from an Italian Wine Tourism Perspective

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INTRODUCTION

In rural tourism studies, landscape has received much attention from researchers (i.e. Stoffelen and Vanneste, 2015; Terkenli, 2004). The complex relationships between landscape and tourism have however, not been subjected to the same amount of investigation. Not surprisingly, Stoffelen and Vanneste (2015, p.545) assert that the multi-disciplinary nature of tourism and landscape “provides specific challenges to analyse this complexity.” In many wine tourism studies, landscape is perceived as one of the most relevant attributes of winescape perceptions among wine tourists (i.e. Bruwer and Gross, 2017; Bruwer and Lesschaeve, 2012). Although previous studies have defined and assessed landscape as a uni-dimensional concept, no previous study has evaluated the importance wine tourists give to the main representative elements/attributes of the landscape of a wine region as a wine production area and tourism destination. Moreover, no previous study has examined the effects wine consumer behaviour constructs such as involvement, knowledge, information processing and, opinion leadership have on how the landscape of the region is perceived.

LITERATURE REVIEW

During the process of wine tourism attaining special-interest tourism (SIT) status, the importance of landscape as a winescape dimension has consistently been confirmed in research studies (i.e. Alampi-Sottini *et al.*, 2019; Bruwer and Gross, 2017). The exact role played by the various landscape elements in the wine tourism situation however, remains unclear (Bruwer

and Lesschaeve, 2012). Moreover, despite wine consumer behaviour studies having examined, mostly in isolation, the relationship between the wine tourism visit decision and consumer behavioural constructs such as involvement (Bruwer *et al.*, 2019), product knowledge (Ellis and Caruana, 2018), and information processing (Bruwer and Thach, 2013), the relationships between these and landscape perception, and ultimately preference remain unexplored. We make a substantive contribution by examining these in our study.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

We use a multi-layered approach, firstly to identify the preferred landscape elements in a wine tourism setting via a pilot study. Next, we execute an online study using a representative sample of 1,000 wine tourists originating from cities across Italy. In this, we execute a discrete choice experiment (DCE) using a photo-based approach (as in Jacobsen, 2007) to determine the preferred landscape elements from the pre-identified set. We conceptualise the constructs of involvement (Bruwer *et al.*, 2019), knowledge (Ellis and Caruana, 2018), information processing (Bruwer and Cohen, 2019) and opinion leadership and seeking (Flynn *et al.*, 1996). We then use structural equation modelling (SEM) to test for effects on landscape perception. Potential moderating and mediating effects of variables such as visit frequency, gender and age are also tested for effects.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Preliminary results show there are four dimensions (anthropic elements, natural elements, vineyard (scape) and, distance from origin) and ten attributes comprising the physical landscape construct. Once final results are available, we will model the relationships between constructs and test for effects (see research methodology above).

CONCLUSIONS AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATION

Our research integrates conceptual underpinnings from the tourism, consumer behaviour and wine tourism fields and contributes to the wine tourism knowledge base using a somewhat unorthodox approach to firstly conceptualise, and secondly, test for effects between fundamental wine consumer behaviour constructs and elements of the landscape construct. The main managerial implication of our research will be to inform a future proposal to UNESCO for recognition of a historical landscape in Italy.

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