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Paola Scorrano, Monica Fait, Lea Iaia, Pierfelice Rosato,

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# The image attributes of a destination: an analysis of the wine tourists' perception

Paola Scorrano and Monica Fait
*University of Salento, Lecce, Italy*
Lea Iaia
*Università degli Studi "Gabriele d'Annunzio" Chieti-Pescara, Pescara, Italy, and*
Pierfelice Rosato
*Universita del Salento Dipartimento di Scienze dell'Economia, Lecce, Italy*

## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to identify the features that qualify the wine tourism destinations' (WTDs) image and to deepen analyse the role of the image on the wine tourists' perception, assuming that it changes from tourist to tourist, depending on who has formed its perception after a real experience or not.
**Design/methodology/approach** – This contribution fits in the range of studies regarding the measurement of the destination image; the authors suited the Echtner and Ritchie's model (1991, 1993), as its multidimensionality approach, rarely applied in the area of wine tourism.
**Findings** – From a comparison between the images of the chosen destination, wine tourists consider Bordeaux the benchmark of WTDs and, in the collective imagery, France is one of the excellences between WTDs. The association territory-wine is less marked, so the biggest contribute is given by the *in situ* experience.
**Research limitations/implications** – Despite results can't be generalised because the samples of convenience, they have provided an overall outline of attributes, benefits and attitudes of wine tourists of Web 2.0.
**Practical implications** – A managerial lecture of results shows that young destinations (aka new wine regions) have a bigger propensity for destination management as well as the attention to marketing aspects, which are able to influence the competitiveness of destination. Instead, destinations with an ancient tradition (aka old wine regions), although unique for their wines and territories, food traditions and the historic-architectural heritage, need to improve their services.
**Originality/value** – This research applies the consolidated analysis method of E&R on the theme of destination image to the wine tourism, never used for WTDs, improving the model with a comparison between visitor and no-visitor perceptions.
**Keywords** Destination management, Wine tourism, Destination image, TDI
**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

It is still in discussion the relevance that the destination management should have in tourism destination image. On an international level, this theme has been studied through four different perspectives (Elliot *et al.*, 2011): the importance that the image of a destination has in the process of the tourists' choice (Matos *et al.*, 2015); the measurement of the image of destination through the definition of specific samples (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; Pike, 2007; Tasci and Kozak, 2006; Li, 2012; Stepchenkova and Li, 2014; Kislali *et al.*, 2016); the analysis of the process of the image creation (Baloglu and Mccleary, 1999); the detection of positive effects for the destination in terms of attractiveness and competitiveness associated to the positive image it has (Tapachai and Waryszak, 2000).

This contribution fits in the range of studies regarding the measurement of the image of destination countries. More specifically we suited the model proposed by Echtner and Ritchie to the measurement of the image of the major international wine tourism destinations (WTDs), rarely applied before, in order to highlight the emersion process and its drivers. In both academic literature fields there is a paucity of research analysing the link between the destination image and the wine tourists' perception; moreover, the research

enriched the E&R model assuming that the wine tourist perceptions change from tourist to tourist, depending on who has formed its perception after a visit to the place or not and comparing them.

## 2. Theoretical scope of the research

Since its very first theories (Gunn, 1972; Mayo, 1973), the theme of the image has had a significant importance in the management literature field about destinations (Blain *et al.*, 2005; Nandan, 2005), becoming a fundamental element for success, able to promote, distribute and develop touristic products (Pikkemaat, 2004), furthermore it brings benefits in terms of distinctiveness, profitability and developing innovations.

In fact, if tourists consider the destination as any other product, evaluating tangible and intangible elements (Clifton, 2003; Florek, 2005) through an organic process in which functional, symbolic and experiential elements are focussed (Kim and Yoon, 2003), it is evident that the development of a positive and highly distinctive image is crucial not only to identify and position the specific destination (Kapferer, 1997; Pappu *et al.*, 2006), but also for the making of a solid competitive benefit (Baloglu and Mccleary, 1999).

In this regard, the destination image represents a simplification of a huge number of information connected to a destination for its potential visitors (Kotler *et al.*, 1993), affecting positively the consumers idea. The image guides the individual behaviour because it has a crucial role in the decisional process of choice and purchase (Tapachai and Waryszak 2000; Pike and Ryan, 2004; Tasci and Kozak, 2006; Heitmann, 2011), while giving a global satisfied or unsatisfied judgement of the experience, which has a relevant role on both the re-purchase and the word of mouth (Bignè *et al.*, 2001). The destination image is important because it has to reflect organically values, products, facilities and different economic skills of a specific geographic area (Govers *et al.*, 2007), communicating them unitarily on the outside (Buhalis, 2000) and incentivizing the exchange of resources and competences on the inside of the said area (Haugland *et al.*, 2011). For the consumer, the image offers qualitative guarantees and the promise of an unforgettable journey, bonding it to the chosen destination. On one hand, this allows the tourist to reduce the feeling of any risk (Desivilya *et al.*, 2015), consolidate the experience recall and favour the recall of pleasant aspects (Ritchie and Ritchie, 1998); on the other hand, it offers to the management the basis of a solid unique selling proposition (Blain *et al.*, 2005).

### 2.1 The literature on wine tourism

The choice to analyse WTDs is taken because of the presence of a consolidated worldwide tourist niche that takes the name of wine tourism (Hall *et al.*, 2000), with a crucial role in the local economy. The growing relevance that this phenomenon has on an international level in terms of tourist flows, specific behaviour models and expressed needs (Mitchell *et al.*, 2000) is directly proportional to a growing attention of academic literature (Bruwer *et al.*, 2017; Fait, Scorrano, Cavallo and Iaia, 2015; Maizza *et al.*, 2014; Koch *et al.*, 2013; Gómez and Molina, 2012; López-Guzmán *et al.*, 2011), that defines wine tourism as (Hall and Macionis, 1998) "visitation to vineyards, wineries, wine festivals and wine shows for which grape wine tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of the grape wine region are the prime motivating factors for visitors".

Depending on the chosen perspective (if the one of the tourism destination, or the operators involved in the wider tourism sector or the wine consumers), wine tourism can have various configurations (Getz, 2000; Getz and Brown, 2006; Sparks, 2007). We considered the wine consumers' point of view, as they are curious not only to know more about the products, but also their place of origin (Iaia *et al.*, 2016). So, they consider the tourism destination like the "primary productive resource" where the "production experience" can be seen (Rullani, 2000); in this case, wine tourism allows to unite the wine consumption with the flavours discovery and the pleasure of the visit on the territory,

associated to multiple experiences and different levels of involvement (Charters and Ali-Knight, 2002), creating value for all operators (Festa *et al.*, 2017).

In this perspective of investigation, the WTD is the geographical area that, on the basis of defined and codified specific resources ascribable to tourist terroir (Hall and Mitchell, 2002), is able to start processes of destination management to identify market segments which can recognise and appreciate the offer validity of a well conceptualised wine-related destination.

With these assumptions, tourist wine destinations are called upon themselves to think about their image, not only focussing on their functional and symbolic aspects, but especially on those features, mostly immaterial ones, that make them unique (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993; Morrison and Anderson, 2002; Kislali *et al.*, 2016) and distinguish them from other competitors (Kotler and Gertner, 2002).

## 2.2 The destination and the process of purchase of the consumer

For consumers the image of a destination becomes a crucial aspect, in fact the theories on behaviour show that people act for how they feel rather than on real facts. In addition, they make decisions regarding journeys that are not rational and economically motivated (Bettman *et al.*, 1998) and this aspect is particularly important if we consider the international competition between destinations. Decisions regarding destinations are influenced by non-economic complex factors, for example aspirations, journey desires and self-realisation, interests, motivations, emotions and the cultural environment (Stepchenkova and Eales, 2011).

The touristic image is a mental representation of a location, formed by stirrings and experiences (Tuan, 1975) which often miss a real visit (Fridgen, 1987). Travellers, in fact, know "territories" even though they have never visited or experienced them (Schroeder and Borgerson, 2005), because they have a general sensation linked to that destination (Bignè *et al.*, 2001; Bignè Alcañiz *et al.*, 2009). So, the destination image is able to influence the consuming behaviour of tourists as the journey choice (Kotler and Gertner, 2002), because it allows them to organise the information, to share and express point of views and expectations; in this way, the destination image suggests tourists actions.

The importance that the image has in the decisional process and influencing personal perceptions is a discussed theme, even though the connection between the image of a destination and the process of propensity, selection, intention and purchase decision has not emerged yet (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991). The main stream of contributions focus on the tourist image, to analyse the image as an independent variable from which the behaviour of travellers stem from, with its different expressions such as the location choice, the satisfaction level and the consumer's loyalty (Bignè *et al.*, 2001; Nadeau *et al.*, 2008).

Moreover, the image of a destination has been identified as an element of tourists' loyalty. According to Gartner (1989) the final decision of a tourist is based on a set of expected benefits from the "product" destination. These expectations come from different moments of the consumer's life, before, during and after the visit. The perception and the image of the destination can sometimes change during the process of information request or purchase. It is important for the destination to maintain a set of characteristics in all the stages of interaction with potential or effective tourists. The real experience of a traveller in the tourism destination is able to produce a different perception of its image.

## 2.3 Image destination and its measurement

As a brand distinguishing name and/or symbol intended to identify the goods or services of either one seller or a group of sellers, and to differentiate those goods from those of competitors (Aaker, 1991), its role is also fundamental for tourism destinations. So the destination branding strategy can design a name, symbol, logo and more elements that defines and distinguishes a destination (Blain *et al.*, 2005) and also communicates the unique selling proposition of the destination which bring value to visitors and investors (Qu *et al.*, 2011). In this sense, the

destination image impacts in several ways the travellers' decisions, since the moment prior and after the visitation and the related satisfaction level which influence the tourist to repeat the visit (Önder and Marchiori, 2017).

If the contribute that the image can provide for the development and competitiveness of a destination is largely shared, the adoption of an interdisciplinary study approach (Baloglu and Mccleary, 1999; Hosany *et al.*, 2007) has made its theoretical qualification quite complex, impeding to achieve an univocal definition (Gallarza *et al.*, 2002; Tasci and Kozak, 2006; Stylidis *et al.*, 2017; Lai and Li, 2016).

Some studies consider the image as an unaware and overarching construct if compared to the single features that contribute to define the destination offer (Ahmed, 1991). Others instead, define it as a multi-featured construct, analysing the three fundamental components, hierarchically interrelated, that take part in its formation: the cognitive component, the conative and affective one (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999). In these models, cognitive evaluations refer to beliefs and knowledge relative to the features of a specific destination, the conative ones refer to the will of visiting it, while the affective ones refer to the complex of feelings and emotions associated to the destination and work as variable between the cognitive evaluation and the construction of the global image that shapes itself while evaluating a defined destination (Michaelidou *et al.*, 2013; Yang, 2016; Qu *et al.*, 2011; Kastenholz *et al.*, 2018; Lee *et al.*, 2017).

Moreover, the image is dynamic, because it is subject to change over time (Kislali *et al.*, 2016; Xu and Ye, 2018) and relativistic, because it is a set of perceptions that vary, according to the space and geographic distance in which they are formed (Crompton, 1979).

The variety of definitions that are present in literature and the multidimensionality (Ryan, 2003) of the concept of "image of destination", make the choice of the model to use to measure it also difficult (Stylidis *et al.*, 2017; Xu and Ye, 2018), because of tangible and intangible elements, measurable and not-measurable, that make up the image.

The models developed up till now, have focussed the attention on quantitative techniques for the measurement of items, based on tangible elements as the price, facilities and touristic services, omitting intangible aspects – as ideas and sensations that belong to the collective imagery – that cover a relevant position in terms of attractiveness and perception of the image.

However, among the various models proposed in the academic literature inherent the destination image review and taxonomies (Gallarza *et al.*, 2002; Dupain and Novitskaya, 2015; Kislali *et al.*, 2016) agree that Echtner and Ritchie's (1991, 1993) model is the reference framework for the measurement of the image of a destination. If most of the studies are focussed on specific components of the destination image without taking in consideration a more holistic and general vision (Pike, 2016), the multidimensionality of the approach of the two authors considers intangible and psychological elements, holistic perceptions and unique attributes as functional and common characteristics of a destination.

## 3. Aims of the research and methodology

### 3.1 Applied model and research questions

On the basis of the recalled theoretical prerequisites, the purpose of this research is to identify the features that qualify the image of WTDs and to analyse its role on the perception of wine tourists, assuming that the image of the destinations changes from tourist to tourist, depending on who has formed its perception after a real experience or not.

As previously specified, the used viewpoint – brand image (Keller, 1993; Kapferer, 1997) – is based on the ability of consumers to perceive the differences between destinations. In this perspective Echtner and Ritchie's (1991) model has been adapted in the area of wine tourism (cf. Figure 1). This model states that a destination must be favourably differentiated and/or
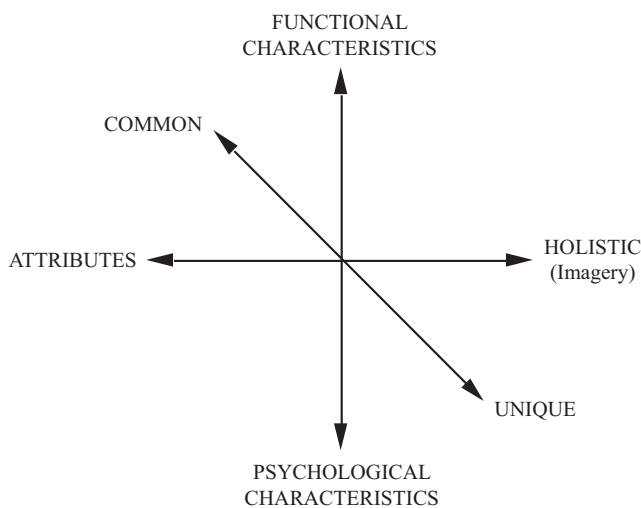
**Source:** Echtner and Ritchie (1991)

Figure 1.
The components of
destination image

positively positioned in the mind of the consumer and while evaluating the image of the destination, three fundamental dimensions must be considered:

- Attributes vs holistic: it is an itinerary that starts by identifying the single attributes directly bonded with the destination and ends by identifying the elements that describe, from a systematic point of view, their own mental image.

- Functional vs psychological characteristics: in such dimension, a concrete and visible characteristic may undergo a process of psychological abstraction and therefore be evaluated in relation to the sensation that the tourist feels.

- Common vs uniqueness: it allows to identify the distinctive elements of a WTD, distinguishing those that are considered common-generic for all destinations and those linked exclusively to specific destinations.

So, the research questions are:

*RQ1.* Which attributes and holistic image is linked to a WTD?

*RQ2.* What differences exist between the image of tourists who have visited the destination and those who do not have a real experience?

### 3.2 Data collection
For the above-mentioned reasons, an on field analysis has been carried out through the collection of data using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire, validated by a pilot test and conveniently reviewed, is made up of open and multiple choice questions, divided in three sections.

The first part has allowed to outline the wine tourists who have joined the survey (nationality, age, etc.).

The second part of the questionnaire intended to define the destination image according to the perception of wine tourists (*RQ1*), moving from the major international WTDs. In fact, partly adopting the principles of benchmarking (Watson, 1995), the questionnaire asked which were the three main wine tourist destinations held by wine tourists to be

representative of excellence, based on the top-of-mind approach (the first-named brand in a recall task Aaker, 1996). So, taking into consideration the number of times that a destination has been mentioned and the number of times that the same has been nominated for 1st – 2nd – 3rd, we have assigned a value equal to: 3 if the destination has been mentioned for first, 2 if indicated at the second place and 1 if indicated as third.

This section of the questionnaire has allowed us to reach a mapping of the attributes that qualify the image of WTDs and responding to *RQ1*, as mentioned. So, the wine tourist has been asked to provide, referring to the destinations they have previously chosen with the top-of-mind approach, three indications (grading them for importance) regarding the following dimensions:

(1) Images and characteristics: elements that come to the mind of the tourist as he thinks of the destination.

(2) Atmosphere or mood: the mood that a precise destination creates in the tourist. It can come from factors that, although concrete, can raise symbolic-emotional and experiential elements.

(3) Distinctive or unique tourist attractions: distinctive and/or unique elements that connote the destination and identify it in an univocal way.

By this way, wine tourists explained the image attributes mainly perceived for each above-mentioned WTD. Referring to each of the three dimensions above (a, b, c), the list of the words used by the interviewed has been extrapolated, normalisation of terms and semantic synthesis[1]; so, via congruous graded method, each of the predicted terms has had a value, taking into consideration the frequency and the relevance assigned from the wine tourist. At the end of this process, adapting Echtner and Ritchie's model it has been possible to construct the mapping of the image attributes (cf. Figure 2).

The third and last section of the questionnaire asked the interviewed if they had visited the indicated locations with the purpose to resolve *RQ2* and distinguish some possible differences between the perceptions of who have visited the destination and those who have not had a real experience. In this sense, the distinction analysed enhanced the E&R model assuming that the wine tourist perceptions change from tourist to tourist and allowed a comparison of the two perspectives.

The diffusion of the questionnaire took place using digital instruments by Web 2.0, seeking the involvement of as many wine tourists and wine-bloggers as possible, on a global scale (Nicoli and Papadopoulou, 2017). For this purpose, the link of the questionnaire has been many times posted on Facebook and Twitter pages, involving some well-known WTDs, identified thanks to the previous researches regarding excellent international WTDs (Scorrano, 2011), as believed to be "aggregators" for the treated matter, that is tourism and/or wine (e.g. "International Wine Tourism Conference", "Châteauneuf du Pape", "Chianti Classico", national and international bloggers).

The activities of administering the questionnaires, observation of answer rates and consequent reminder, posts on Facebook and Twitter and frequent dispatch of the questionnaire, were led between March–May 2017; the fulfilment of the same has allowed, through samples of convenience, to consider valid 366 filled questionnaires.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Sample profiling and chosen WTDs

The re-elaboration of the first section has allowed to outline the sample of wine tourists that took part in the survey: men (40 per cent) and women (60 per cent), aged between 18 and 60 (75.5 per cent), mainly with an academic education (85 per cent) and a professional employment (32.4 per cent). On the basis of the geographic origin, the majority of wine

The image attributes of a destination

**Functional Characteristics**

| | CORE RESOURCES | | PHISIOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE | | LANDSCAPE HERITAGE | | CULTURE AND HISTORY | | PRODUCTIVE AND ORGANIZATIONAL HERITAGE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Attributes | TOURISTS WITH A DIRECT EXPERIENCE | TOURISTS WITHOUT A DIRECT EXPERIENCE | TOURISTS WITH A DIRECT EXPERIENCE | TOURISTS WITHOUT A DIRECT EXPERIENCE | TOURISTS WITH A DIRECT EXPERIENCE | TOURISTS WITHOUT A DIRECT EXPERIENCE | TOURISTS WITH A DIRECT EXPERIENCE | TOURISTS WITHOUT A DIRECT EXPERIENCE | TOURISTS WITH A DIRECT EXPERIENCE | TOURISTS WITHOUT A DIRECT EXPERIENCE |
| Bordeaux | Food, Wine | Food, Champagne, Bordeaux, Wine, Burgundy, Castels, Grape, Red wine, Claret, Vineyard | Countryside, | Terroir-cru, Countryside, Sunshine, Sea, Beach | Landscape | Village, Côté d'Or, Natural beauty | Chateaux, Famous/interesting history, Traditional/cultured | Family oriented, Chateaux, Culture | Professionally, Traditional winemaking, Many guided visited | Rich wine heritage, Product enhancement |
| Tuscany | Food, Chianti, Vineyard, Sangiovese, Chianti | Wine | Sun, Weather, Vineyard, Sun | Countryside | Excellent landscape, Rolling hill, Beautiful landscape, Lush countryside | Hill town | History/old, Family generation | Ancient properties | Professionality, Rich wine heritage | Local festival, Excellent marketing |
| Napa Valley | Grapecrops, Bold wine, Cabernet sauvignon, Opus one | Wine, Grape vineyard | Nature | Sunny, Sun Summer, Sunshine | Rustic beauty, Nice landscape, Winery | Hollywood | - | - | Organization, Corporate, Modern tourism, Wine train | Marketing, New world, Competitive new player |

Holistic

**Psychological Characteristics**

| | EMOTIONAL ATTRIBUTES | | PHILOSOPHY AND VALUES | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Attributes | TOURISTS WITH A DIRECT EXPERIENCE | TOURISTS WITHOUT A DIRECT EXPERIENCE | TOURISTS WITH A DIRECT EXPERIENCE | TOURISTS WITHOUT A DIRECT EXPERIENCE |
| Bordeaux | Excellent/good wine, Good/great wine e food | Excellent/good wine, Good/great wine e food | Quality, Relaxing, Serenity, Charming, Style, Atmosphere, Passionated, Romantic, Rhone Style | Promising, Sophistication, Unforgettable, Open minded, Emotion, Relaxing, Charming, Chic, Exclusive, Serious |
| Tuscany | Excellent/good wine, People, Excellent/good wine, Good/great food, Nice/lovely people | Good wine, Good/great food | Quality, Friendly, Relaxing, Sophistication, Fashioned, Classic, Enthusiastic, Availability, Value for money, Affordable, Popular, Quality, Fashioned, Classic, Enthusiastic, Friendly | Joy, Relaxing, Serenity, Laid back, Sophisticated, Friendly, Proud |
| Napa Valley | Excellent wine, Good food | Excellent/good wine, Good wine, Family friendly, Lovely/beautiful vineyard | Laid back, Active, Crowded, Approachable, Expensive, New varied | Promising, Exotic, Welcoming, Fun, Young, Luminous, Crisp, Busy, Friendly, Relaxing, Open minded, Chic |

I quarter — II quarter — III quarter — VI quarter

**Source:** Our elaboration

**Figure 2.**
Destination image of major WTDs

tourists are Italians (38.7 per cent), followed by Germans (20.7 per cent), Californians (10.6 per cent), English (4.8 per cent) and Spanish (3.2 per cent).

The formulation of the ranking of the notoriety of destinations highlights that the first two famous destinations for wine tourists are also destinations of the oldest wine-producing tradition – Bordeaux and Tuscany – followed by areas with a younger vocation – Napa Valley –, that have started successful competitive wine-production processes.

The definition of the attributes of the image perceived by wine tourists must be led on the first three indicated destinations: Bordeaux, Tuscany and Napa Valley. The analysed sample is balanced between visitors and non-visitors of the destination[2].

### 4.2 Wine tourists' perception of WTDs

The principal drivers of the image perceived by wine tourists (*RQ1*) have been identified through a process that contextualised the terms in comparison with the chosen destination (e.g. Champagne for Bordeaux has the ordinary usage of wine in the international contest). Subsequently, each driver has been assigned to the belonging macro group. The following mould (cf. Figure 2) presents the effects that driver macro groups have on single destinations, distinguishing the perception of wine tourists who have a direct experience and those who do not (*RQ2*).

*4.2.1 Functional characteristics/attributes of WTDs.* The overall value of the I quarter of each destination, highlights the presence of common characters that revolve around the concept of wine, geo-naturalistic and climatic characteristics of the territory. Observing its composition in the imagination of who has visited the destination and who has not is more interesting. Comparing for example the elements that build up the two macro-groups, Napa Valley is principally known for elements strictly bonded to the territory (sun, summer, sunshine), while major identity elements referred to wine (Cabernet Sauvignon, Opus wine, bold/red wine, vineyard) for those who lived in that territory. If the same situation happens in Tuscany, associated to specific characteristic features (Chianti, Sangiovese), for the destination/territory Bordeaux, wine tourists who do not have a direct experience are those that outline the destination image with major accuracy (Claret, Burgundy, Castles, Terroir-cru, Burgundy).

*4.2.2 Attributes/psychological characteristics of WTDs.* Observing the III quarter it is noticeable, with a similar perception for all destination, that the common factor is excellent wine in all kinds of tourists. Moreover, for Tuscany and Napa Valley there is a cognitive perception in those who have visited the destinations, connected to the population (nice/lovely) and to elements like the link food-wine (good/great food) and wine-territory (beautiful vineyard).

*4.2.3 Holistic/functional characteristics of WTDs.* The comparison of the recorded data in II quarter where the evaluation of functional attributes happens at the interior of a wider system characterised by the perception between holistic bonds, allows some interesting observations, starting from the single destinations in which holistic resources are largely considered in every area. This highlights that in the consumer's imagery, functional elements have connections that take on different combinations in each of the three destinations, forming the brand image. Lingering on the bond between culture-history-territory, it is distinguishable from the elements chateaux, famous/interesting history, traditional/cultured for Bordeaux as well as for Tuscany history/old, ancient properties, family generation; from what has emerged in I and III quarter, the image that non-visitors have of the French destination is almost the same as the wine tourists' who have visited it, who enrich such imagery qualifying the known elements (famous, interesting chateaux). The principle differences are ascribable to productive and organisational heritage. It is obvious the contrast between the orientation of marketing, of

modern organisation (wine train) and the competitiveness of players of the New World (the words mostly used are: organisation, marketing, new world, competitive new player, organised, corporate, modern tourism, wine train) with the productive tradition, rich winemaking heritage, ancient vineyards and the professionalism of old producers (identified by the words: rich wine heritage, professionality, product enhancement, family oriented, traditional winemaking, many guided visited, local festival, excellent marketing).

*4.2.4 Holistic/psychological characteristics of WTDs.* The IV quarter that includes the group philosophy and values, is the most interesting one, since it demonstrates both how sensorial and mood attributes are extremely important in the emerging process of the territory's brand image and how the difference in perception between who has and who has not visited the destination is almost absent. Adjectives that characterize it are relevant: if on a hand every one recalls a calm, friendly, relaxed and back to the origins atmosphere, on the other it is evident how fascination, charme and sophisticated of the old wine region concepts substitute adjectives like open minded, welcoming, fun, young that express the more jolly and modern character of new wine region.

*4.2.5 Common vs uniqueness dimension of WTDs.* For the regions with an ancient winemaking tradition (Bordeaux and Tuscany) the fil rouge of the image is history, the tradition and their linkage with wine; data have allowed to observe that:

- wine is directly identified with specific denominations like: Champagne, Bordeaux, Burgundy, Bourgogne, Chianti;

- the bond between wine and food is well perceived, that is why cheese and wine, fine restaurants, cuisines are often named; and

- in the uniqueness dimension the historic-architectural heritage plays a major role (artistic cities and museums in Tuscany).

Instead, for younger areas (Napa Valley) references to American metropolis are important (San Francisco, Los Angeles), to specific environmental sites (Sonoma Valley Coast, Red Wood Forest) and to services like wine train, shopping, easy travelling, golf, indicative elements of a marketing vision looking for the enjoyment with secondary services.

## 5. Discussion and managerial implications

From the analysis, a different image for each destination has emerged from visitors and no visitors (*RQ2*). Napa Valley is characterised by elements strictly bonded to the territory and wine, besides the connection food-wine and wine-territory. To these a cognitive perception must be added to the relation between tourists and operators and the population in the destination, recurrent and appreciated element by who has visited the destination. The perception of the image, in a holistic way, is associated to a young destination as Napa Valley is, cosy and open minded, easy going but at the same time chic.

The image that tourists have on the wine destination Tuscany is ascribable to elements of territory, of wine with its bonds to food and the territory of origin as well as the population. Such image is agreeable mostly to who has lived in those places. In a holistic perception, tourists who talk about Tuscany, feel a strong tie between historic and cultural heritage and the territory of this destination, from which its charm and sophistication emerge.

Contrarily to what emerged from the first two destinations, the image connected to Bordeaux from wine tourists who have not visited it, not only is well defined, but also punctual with the features of the productive tradition, oenological heritage, landscape of ancient vineyards and chateaux, in which winemaker families live. The only differentiation element added by wine tourists who have visited the destination is the use of adjectives that emphasise the specificity and underline the refinement of the French experience.

While comparing the "new" and "old" wine destination image perception of the visitors and non-visitors of the chosen destinations, the results of the analysis could represent an important future development of both. A managerial lecture of results shows a bigger propensity for destination management of young destinations, as for Napa Valley, for the attention to marketing aspects as well as for the research of an always current organisational model, with a wide range of facilities, and following the sector trends; these aspects are able to largely influence the competitiveness of the destination. Instead, in the destinations with an ancient tradition, as Bordeaux and Tuscany, although the important role of wines and territories (Sotiriadis, 2017), food traditions and the historic-architectural heritage (Pantano, 2011), it is important to highlight the scarce concern for the offered services.

Therefore, it appears to highlight that the positive value of tradition must not be associated to the static offer regarding the services. In this sense, besides a better communication of the experiences of wine tourists, it would be useful for the destination, to pay more attention to the human side, that is giving it a "face". For example, through the operators involved in the service offer of that destination, in order to reduce the perception gap of wine tourists; in this way, destinations could change the stereotypes connected to single nationalities, relying on professionalism and hospitality of the destination.

This research could also be used for educational purposes as demonstrates the use of particular research models, as Echtner and Ritchie, and shows the subsequent opportunities on the destination image development of the proper marketing strategies.

## 6. Conclusions

Wine tourism is a growing sector that deserves deeper attention by researchers for its crucial role in the local economy.

The research tried to contribute to the literature of destination image filling the defined gap, in both academic literature fields where there is a paucity of research analysing the bond between the destination image and the wine tourists' perception, applying a consolidated method of analysis on the theme of destination image to the wine tourism area for the first time (Fait, Cavallo, Scorrano and Iaia, 2015).

The research also enriched the E&R model because it assumes that the wine tourist perceptions change from tourist to tourist, depending on who has formed its perception after a real experience or not and comparing them.

Despite the results cannot be generalised because of the difficulties in defining the survey's sample according to suitable statistic methods, in fact, they have nevertheless provided an overall outline of attributes, benefits and attitudes of an important category: wine tourists of Web 2.0.

In particular, from the analysis a conceptualisation of a brand image model came out that highlights how wine tourists from Web 2.0 perceive the image of destination through an organic process activated by recognising common resources to all wine regions (core resources, physiographic and climate), new and old ones.

Through a psychological abstraction process (Kock et al., 2016), they become emotional attributes and lose, once perceived in a holistic way, the dimension of simple attributes in order to become concrete attractors (landscape heritage, culture and history, productive and organisational heritage). Lastly, the holistic-psychological evaluation activates symbolic and emotional elements (philosophy and values) generating an integrated system in which each component, relating to others, becomes richer in immateriality, and consequently has more recognisable value (Pappu et al., 2006). This last step allows the destination image to become the result of a mechanism of relations activated or perceived by the consumer (Vrontis, 2011).

From the observations it is evident that the brand image can become a successful critic factor, able to promote and develop a territory and its products (Pikkemaat, 2004;

Stylidis *et al.*, 2017) if, from a destination management point of view, brand identity policies tend to valorise and potentiate the mechanism where the brand image of a WTD is formed, in order to create uniqueness, recognisability and value (Apostolakis *et al.*, 2015; Kislali *et al.*, 2016).

The described reference framework can be considered an example of the elements that must be consolidated in order to strengthen the competitiveness between WTDs (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999), as well as a tool to ease communication and discussion between actors of a territory, in terms of definition of strategies needed to reinforce the immaterial components for the formation of the image, and towards the co-evolution of the value of territories and their productions (Viassone *et al.*, 2016).

Further research to overcome the limitation of this study could be interesting to increase the sample of wine tourists, to extend the analysis to the nationality of the interviewed with the aim to nationalise results and develop appropriate marketing strategies for WTDs.

## Notes

1. Transformation of plurals to singulars, of feminine to masculine, elimination of articles, adverbs, pronouns, etc. and grouping of words considered synonyms.

2. Bordeaux 52.5 per cent visitors; 47.5 per cent non-visitors; Tuscany 54.3 per cent visitors; 46.7 per cent non-visitors; Napa Valley 48.9 per cent visitors; 51.1 per cent non-visitors.

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## Further reading

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## About the authors

Paola Scorrano is Researcher in Management at the Department of Management, Economics, Mathematics and Statistics, University of the Salento, Lecce, where she teaches Production and Logistics. Her research seeks to study the effects of information and communication technology (ICT) on company behaviour, particularly with reference to the agri-food and tourism sectors. She is the Author of several scientific publications and papers on agri-food SME competitiveness, innovation in promoting characteristic regional products and Web 2.0 marketing strategies for the development of wine tourism destinations. She is Speaker at national and international conferences and industry forums, working as a consultant for projects financed by regional and European institutions. Professor Scorrano's publications are available at: https://unisalento.academia.edu/PaolaScorrano

Monica Fait is Researcher in Management at the Department of Management, Economics, Mathematics and Statistics, University of the Salento, Lecce, where she teaches Economics and Business Management. Analysing current trends in consumption related to agri-food products, her work tackles the theme of enterprise development within specific regional contexts as well as from an international perspective. Specifically, her research topics include: the role of characteristic regional agri-food products in the creation of brand–land identity; the relationship between characteristic regional products and their place of origin; the role of certification of origin regarding competitiveness in the wine sector; the potential of social web communication in the wine sector. Monica Fait is Speaker at national and international conferences and industry forums. Professor Fait's publications are available at: https://unisalento.academia.edu/MonicaFait

Lea Iaia is Researcher in Management at Department of Business, University "G. d'Annunzio" Chieti-Pescara. Her research interests include web marketing, social media communication, wine and agrifood business and tourism. She has authored several publications and presented papers at several national and international scientific conferences. Lea Iaia's publications are available at: https://unisalento.academia.edu/LeaIaia. Lea Iaia is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: lea.iaia@unich.it

Pierfelice Rosato is Researcher in Management at the Department of Management, Economics, Mathematics and Statistics, University of the Salento, Lecce, where he teaches Hospitality and Destination Management. His research interests concerns to destination management and marketing, and hospitality management frequently connected with the SME's competitiveness. Professor Rosato is author of several scientific publications and papers, and Speaker at national and international conferences and industry forums.