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## **From the enhancement of a olive heritage to territorial development: oleotourism**

### ***De la valorización de un patrimonio olivarero al desarrollo territorial: el oleoturismo***

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#### **Abstract**

The olive tree is part of the collective imagination of large Mediterranean territories, awakening the interest of residents, heritage communities and tourists. Precisely, oleotourism has recently emerged as a way to promote olive heritage, at a time when tourism tends to promote increasingly personalized services, with added value in the experience. Each territory seeks to diversify its tourist offer through a more intelligent and sustainable use of its endogenous resources, by creating niche offers strongly imbued with authenticity, which include traditional practices, cultural interaction, gastronomy and the characteristics of the destination. Some regions have already begun to benefit from “quality income from the territory and baskets of products in which olive oil is one of the stars”, and they see the olive tree as a resource capable of playing “an important role in the revitalization of the territory for a local public in search of its roots or in terms of preserving traditions in relation to the tourist clientele”. In any case, and with increasing frequency in the regions surveyed, olive oil tourism is developing.

**Keywords:** Olive heritage; oleotourism; territorial development; Mediterranean countries; France; Greece; Portugal.

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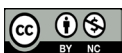
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## Resumen

El olivo forma parte del imaginario colectivo de amplios territorios del Mediterráneo, despertando el interés de residentes, comunidades patrimoniales y turistas. Precisamente, el oleoturismo ha surgido recientemente como una forma de promocionar el patrimonio oleícola, en un momento en el que el turismo tiende a promover servicios cada vez más personalizados, con valor añadido en la experiencia. Cada territorio busca diversificar su oferta turística a través de un uso más inteligente y sostenible de sus recursos endógenos, mediante la creación de ofertas de nicho fuertemente imbuidas de autenticidad, que incluyen prácticas tradicionales, interacción cultural, gastronomía y las características propias del destino. Así, algunas regiones ya han comenzado a beneficiarse de las “rentas de calidad territorial y de cestas de productos en las que el aceite de oliva es una de las estrellas”, de manera que ven en el olivo un recurso capaz de desempeñar “un papel importante en la dinamización territorial ante un público local a la búsqueda de sus raíces o de cara a la preservación de tradiciones en relación a la clientela turística”. En cualquier caso, y cada vez con mayor frecuencia en las regiones observadas, el oleoturismo se está desarrollando.

**Palabras clave:** Patrimonio olivarero; Oleoturismo; Desarrollo territorial; Area del Mediterráneo; Francia; Grecia; Portugal

## 1. Introduction

The olive tree is the symbolic tree of the Mediterranean. A territorial marker if ever there was one, it marks out the contours of the Mediterranean area, nurturing identities like the Mediterranean diet. Over the centuries, the olive tree has shaped landscapes and cultures. Rome's Monte Testaccio was built from the many amphorae that enabled oil to be transported throughout the Roman Empire, while the terraces and dry-stone walls made it possible to grow olive trees on the steepest slopes. Today, it is also one of the most widespread crops in the Mediterranean basin, with almost 10 million hectares under cultivation. The industry is rich in know-how, with professional and amateur olive growers, millers and confectioners tending the trees, making olive oil and producing soaps. The Turks still smear themselves with olive oil, like the gladiators of old, to fight bare-handed as part of the *Kirkpinar*, included on the list of the intangible heritage of humanity by Unesco in 2010. Olive oil is still used in baptism rituals by the Orthodox Church in Greece, olive festivals run by olive guilds are multiplying in France, and the combination of vines and olive trees forms the landscape of the slopes of the Douro in Portugal, the terraces of *Cinque Terre* in Italy and the plain of *Stari Grad* in Croatia. The role of the olive tree and its products is therefore considerable in the Mediterranean basin. Symbolically, its value is no less, since the Greeks and Romans set it up as a symbol of peace and victory. For Stéphane Angles, the olive tree "constitutes a veritable 'polyiconic' subject, an object endowed with multiple images forming a set of perceptions, ideals, fantasies, realities and narratives in which symbols, sensations, multiple representations and concrete actions are intimately intertwined. It is rare to find another plant that offers such a wealth of meanings and impressions, and arouses such enthusiasm and passion. It is this phenomenological specificity that places the olive tree in the realm of the imaginary, the artistic, the religious and the spiritual, as well as in a more prosaic reality". (Angles, 2016, p. 13)

It is these multiple facets that allow us to consider the tree and all that surrounds it (leaves, olives, olive oils, soaps...) as heritage, in the full sense of the word, natural and cultural heritage,

tangible and intangible. Combining landscapes, culinary specialities, know-how, festivals and rituals, buildings and tools, the olive tree is the object of the many attentions of the people who have inherited it and wish to share it with future generations (Chabert and Deramond dir., 2023).

The olive is part of people's imagination, arousing the interest of locals, heritage communities and tourists alike. In fact, olive tourism has recently emerged as a way of enhancing the value of olive heritage, at a time when tourism is tending to focus on increasingly personalised services, with added value in the experience (Ferreira and Martín, 2021; Pulido-Fernández et al., 2019). Each region is seeking to diversify its tourism offer through a more intelligent and sustainable use of its endogenous resources, creating niche offers with a strong sense of authenticity, which include traditional practices, cultural interaction, gastronomy and the terroir of the destinations (Ferreira and Martín, 2021). Some regions have already begun to take advantage of the "territorial quality rent and the baskets of goods in which olive oil is a key product" (Angles, 2012), starting with the Baronnies and the Alpilles in France, and Tuscany in Italy, which see the olive tree as a resource capable of playing "an important role in animating the region for a local public in search of roots or the preservation of traditions, and for tourists<sup>3</sup>" (Angles, 2012). However, in most of the regions studied, olive tourism is still developing.

## 2. Method

In order to prepare this work, we mainly used communications presented at an international conference organised under the auspices of the European JPI-CH Olive4All project, which aims to raise the value of olive heritage for sustainable development purposes. Selected by international experts to respond to the 2020 call for proposals of the Joint Programme Initiative on Cultural Heritage, "Heritage, identities and perspectives: adapting to changing societies", the Olive4ALL project, led by Julie Deramond, aims to study between 2021 and 2025 the heritage of the olive tree and the emotional links it arouses in 3 Mediterranean countries, France, Greece, Portugal, in order to share its riches with the general public, for sustainable tourism purposes<sup>1</sup>. The third work package aims, in fact, to study and analyse integrated oleotourism products. It is in this context that a conference was held in October 2023, organised by Francisco Dias and his team, in Portugal on "Oleotourism and the development of innovative tourism products".

In this article, we summarise and comment on various recent studies that seek to raise the relationship between heritage, tourism, identity and territorial development of olive-growing regions. We aim to make multidisciplinary approaches, using quantitative and qualitative methodologies, carried out in southern European countries (France, Spain, Portugal, Greece). These approaches address oleotourism from a sometimes panoramic, sometimes particular view, multiplying the scale games, from the general case study to the localised case study. Finally, the diversity of perspectives adopted stands out, taking into account the points of view of decision-makers and political institutions, tourism experts, as well as residents and tourists. These multiple contributions therefore allow us to draw up an original overview of oleotourism in Europe, which may be of interest both to heritage and tourism researchers and to decision-makers and entrepreneurs in the oleotourism sector.

## 3. Background and state of the art

The general characterisation of olive tourism as a new tourism product has been undertaken over the last decade by many authors (e.g. Alonso and Northcote, 2010; Murgado, 2013; Millán-Vázquez de la Torre et al., 2014; Campón-Cerro et al., 2014; Elias and Barbero,

2017; Saltik, 2017; Nguyen, 2018; Pulido-Fernández et al., 2020; Hernández-Mogollón et al., 2019; Bezerra and Correia, 2019; Parrilla-González et al., 2020; Čehić, Mesić and Oplanić, 2020; Oplanić, Čop and Čehić A., 2021; Hwang and Quadri-Felitti, 2021). Some of these studies elucidate the history and origins of olive tourism (e.g. Abril-Sellarés and Tello, 2019; Millán-Vázquez de la Torre et al., 2017), others highlight its specificities as a niche tourism product (e.g. Parrilla-González et al., 2020; Pulido-Fernández et al., 2019; Oplanić, Čop and Čehić A., 2021; Pulido-Fernández et al., 2020), while others emphasise the experiential dimension underlying olive tourism (e.g. Hwang and Quadri-Felitti, 2021; Miftarević and Mitrović, 2019; Folgado-Fernández et al., 2019; Bezerra and Correia, 2019; Murgado, 2013).

Due to the great diversity of cultural practices that characterise olive heritage, as well as its multi-millennial nature, the tourism use of olive heritage (i.e. the development of olive tourism as a new tourism product) is both a huge challenge and a great opportunity for local communities in olive-growing territories, given the multiplicity of cultural practices and tourism experiences that the very name of olive tourism encompasses (De Salvo, Mogollón, Di Clemente and Calzati, 2013; Pulido-Fernández et al., 2019). As Murgado et al. (2011) point out, the field of oleotourism experiences is very broad, in that it encompasses a multitude of very diverse activities in the areas of culture, gastronomy, health and leisure in a rural and natural context (Bezerra and Correia, 2019; Alonso, 2010; Morales et al., 2015; Millán-Vázquez de la Torre et al., 2017; Elias and Barbero, 2017; Nguyen, 2018).

In this respect, olive tourism is very similar to wine tourism, which is more developed and better organised in the wine-producing world, combining culture, gastronomy and heritage in a variety of ways: walks in olive groves, visits to olive mills, olive oil tastings, walks and marathons in the countryside, discovering remarkable trees, circuits and routes, not to mention spas and massages. They share common characteristics in that they allow for forms of tourism development focused on nature (vineyards / olive groves), gastronomy (wine / oil), health (cosmetics and products developed from the grapes and oil), technology and know-how linked to the preservation of products (presses and cellars / mills).

From then on, olive tourism is part of the many forms and categories of tourism that are being invented and reinvented today: from rural tourism (Roberts, Hall and Morag, 2017), to creative tourism (Richards and Raymond, 2000; Mondes du tourisme, 2014), via gourmet tourism (Lemasson, 2006) or gastronomic tourism (Csergo, 2016; Dixit, 2019), itinerant (Marcotte, Bourdeau, 2015), international and local. So, in order to inventory or typify the various oleotourism experiences, we propose a gradual path that starts with the olive tree and all that it symbolises (a biological species with sacred symbolism) and unfolds into the countless possible uses of olive oil (the oil that is extracted from its fruit: the olive), as a multifunctional product (food, hygiene and health), through the stages of harvesting and processing olives into oil in mills (Dias, Soares and Oliveira, 2023). By sequentially mapping the different stages of the cycle that begins with the planting of olive trees and ends with the different ways in which olive oil is used and consumed by human communities, we can characterise the following contexts for olive tourism (Dias, Soares and Oliveira, 2023)

The olive tree in its habitat and all the practices (ancient and modern) used to cultivate and maintain olive trees and groves. This is an ecological and cultural heritage that tends to be promoted through tourism in the form of visits to thousand-year-old olive trees, picnics in the olive groves, participation in the olive harvest, as well as less specific activities such as enjoying the olive-growing landscape, walking, cycling or horse-riding in the vast olive groves. These activities can be explored via routes and circuits (Angles, 2023), often under the aegis of the

Routes of the Olive Tree, a Council of Europe cultural route (Kalamata). The wealth of knowledge on techniques for growing and treating olive trees and groves (extensive, intensive, organic, etc.) and on the varieties of olive trees is also of interest to tourists.

The transformation of olives into oil at the mill. It is in this context of olive oil production that tourists have the opportunity to discover the ancestral and modern techniques of crushing, filtering and storage. Depending on the type of mill and the type of programme offered to tourists, the context of a visit to an olive oil mill may combine agro-industrial tourism experiences (the evolution of olive oil crushing and filtering techniques, and their artefacts, from time immemorial to the present day), as well as experiences more closely linked to cultural and gastronomic practices, such as olive oil tasting, learning about the organoleptic characteristics of olive oil, social interactions between the mill and the olive-growing community, etc.

The many uses of olive oil in gastronomy and other fields. The vast majority of consumers and tourists see olive oil only as a food product and a cooking ingredient (Soares, 2022). As olive oil is one of the main ingredients in the Mediterranean diet (included in the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2010-2013), and its consumption is actively recommended by nutritionists (Sousa, 2023; Veillet, 2010), olive oil-related tourism experiences increasingly include cooking workshops. In addition to gastronomy, olive oil's applications are increasingly recognised in the field of health and wellness tourism (olive oil massages), as well as in the production of cosmetics and soaps.

### **3. Results and discussion**

The first study, "Olive Oil Tourism Experience: A Systematic Literature Review", by Monteiro and Salvado, seeks to provide a panoramic view of the state of the art among researchers on this subject. To this end, the authors examined 85 indexed scientific articles (Scopus database) on olive oil tourism and concluded that: (1) there is no universal set of attributes or indicators for evaluating the olive tourism experience, as the concept of olive tourism is very complex and multifaceted; (2) studies on the relationship between olive tourism and the image of destinations, and the overall tourism experience at the destination, are still lacking; (3) there are also still few studies on the olive tourism experience and the integration of communities in olive-growing areas, as well as on synergies with other types of heritage, such as wine. For this reason, the authors recommend that future studies focus on the complementarity of tourism supply, demand and the role of stakeholders, in order to avoid a 'strategic drift' in the concepts, perceptions, experiences and practices of olive tourism.

After this initial theoretical article, the paper entitled "Les Paysages d'oliveraies d'Andalousie: analyse des dynamiques patrimoniales, identitaires (habitants) et touristiques dans le processus d'inscription Unesco" gets to the heart of the matter with a case study. Isabelle Brianso examines Andalusia's application to UNESCO for recognition of the 1.5 million hectare olive grove as a World Heritage cultural landscape. It thus analyses the heritage dynamics (Davallon, 2006 and 2023) at work, visible in the application documents. This study makes it possible to combine the heritage dimension with the tourism dimension, by showing how the Unesco candidacy process is at the heart of local territorial development policies, in order to combat coastal and urban over-tourism. In particular, it highlights the role of local people and their emotional relationship with landscapes, in lobbying international decision-makers for this listing.



The study by Lopes and Martins entitled "Olivotourism as a tourist-cultural product and its influence on the dynamics of territories" highlights the existence of a close link between olive-growing practices and the tourism and cultural development of more natural and rural areas, and that this link helps to strengthen and enhance the unique identity of places, through the promotion of traditional activities that can be experienced by tourists. In addition, this study highlights that product development strategies linked to olive trees and olive oil are relevant to enhancing knowledge of the products themselves and their link to local history and traditions. More specifically, the case study, which focuses on the municipality of Idanha-a-Nova in Portugal, highlights the recovery of certain traditional activities that are helping to revitalise territorial cohesion.

More critical is the perspective taken by Philippe Bachimon and Pierre Dérioiz in their analysis of French olive tourism, using a qualitative geography methodology: "Le tourisme oléicole en Provence, une forme touristique inaboutie". In their wide-ranging article, they attempt to draw up a generic picture of olive tourism in France, based on a scattered offering with a blurred message in the context of niche and often amateur olive growing.

The article written by Julie Deramond, Pauline Grison and Eric Triquet, "Valorisation touristique de l'olivier à Saint-Rémy de Provence: entre requalification symbolique et détournement de valeurs patrimoniales" is very complementary. It takes a similar approach with a case study of a tourist town in the south of France. Using a qualitative study based on a semio-pragmatic survey in information and communication sciences, the authors highlight the strong presence of the olive and the olive tree - in the form of images, landscapes, logos and potted trees - in the town's streets, shops and institutions. At the end of the survey, the commercial dimension took precedence over the heritage dimension, and product sales took precedence over a detailed understanding of the olive and the olive tree. The territorial development associated with tourism development is above all economic, to the detriment of the other 'pillars' of sustainability, the human dimension and the environment. In order to build a more diversified and integrated olive tourism offer, the authors conclude that the many stakeholders in the area should work in synergy to better coordinate their actions.

Taking as their starting point a conceptual triangle whose vertices are gastronomy, olive oil and wine, Salvado and Monteiro present a study entitled "Wine & Olive Oil food heritage synergies within the tourism experience: Analyzing corporate websites". Focusing on Portugal's main wine-growing region, the Douro, the authors analysed the content of 290 winery websites offering wine tourism experiences, with the aim of understanding how these wineries manage to exploit synergies through traditional Portuguese products (wine and olive oil), transforming both into creative tourism experiences. The authors conclude that wine tourism estates use their websites as a showcase for their products and services, with particular emphasis on their wine and olive oil portfolios, product price lists and information on wine varieties. However, only around half of the websites value close links with local communities, customers and the ability to provide real-time information. It turns out that 51% of websites do not mention local resources, only 15% promote traditional foods and 12% cultural heritage. In addition, only the sharing of ideas with customers is undervalued (13%).

In the study entitled "Olive Tourism motivations, activities and experiences: Perspectives from a Portuguese Delphi Panel", Francisco Dias and Fernanda Oliveira seek the consensus of a multidisciplinary team of experts regarding the type of olive tourism experience and activity most likely to succeed in Portugal, as well as the main motivations that characterise demand for this niche tourism product. The authors conclude that the activities and experiences

considered most relevant in the context of olive tourism are directly related to the tasting of olive oil and typical gastronomic dishes in which olive oil is the most prominent element. It therefore appears that gastronomy-related motivations are the most obvious and significant in the context of olive tourism.

Finally, in their study entitled "Green gold" - "Divine gift" - "The definition of family": Perceptions and attitudes of domestic olive tourism visitors regarding the olive heritage in Greece", Maria Kouri and Marios Kondakis look at how olive heritage is received by tourists in Greece. This survey, conducted using qualitative methodology based on interviews, identifies who the olive tourists in Greece are and what their expectations are. These visitors, who have benefited from an excellent education, are strongly attached to this tree and its history. Although many of them are unfamiliar with olive growing and the technical production of olive oil, this study shows that they are interested in this aspect. The authors conclude that it would be advisable to develop products and experiences enabling tourists to improve their knowledge of the subject.

#### **4. Conclusions**

In short, tourism experiences related to the intangible cultural heritage objectified by the olive tree, olives and olive oil, cover a wide area that inextricably includes nature, the rural world and culture (Pulido-Fernández et al., 2019), resulting in a diverse and heterogeneous set of practices, such as visiting olive oil production sites and staying in local accommodation, taking part in cooking classes, buying olive oil, hiking olive oil routes, etc. (Yerliyurt and Manisa, 2014). By adapting to local conditions, olive tourism creates synergies that promote the competitiveness of businesses, the development of territories and the authenticity of experiences.

In this study we use the term "olive tourism" which we consider to be the most comprehensive. What's more, the olive tree can also attract tourists who are concerned about preserving the planet and its inhabitants. The heritage associated with the olive tree is thus at the crossroads of gastronomy, agriculture and rurality, landscapes and conviviality, a treasure trove of potential for sustainable tourism. Perhaps will it help to combat agricultural intensification, growing urbanisation and the economic pressure that sometimes tends to jeopardise a protean age-old heritage? Olive tourism, or oleotourism as it is often know, raises a number of questions. What forms does it take and what dimensions can it cover, from a trail through the heart of the olive groves, to a visit to a museum, the discovery of remarkable olive trees, oil tasting and picking championships? What is its development potential? How can it be structured? Can it contribute to the development of the areas in which it is established? In this way, we look at olive tourism from the point of view of regional development.

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