

# **Identifying key wine product and wine tourism attributes in an ultra-peripheral wine region: Implications for wine consumers and wine tourism**

## **ABSTRACT**

This study contributes to the wine marketing and wine tourism literature, and examines the preferences and experiences of consumers of local wines and winery visitation in the ultra-peripheral wine region of La Palma Island, Spain. An online survey administered among consumers of local wines resulted in 102 usable responses. Apart from highlighting wine preferences, with aroma, taste, originality and uniqueness standing out, the findings underscore the potential for wine education and wine tourism to contribute considerably to further marketing and positioning of an ultra-peripheral wine region. Indeed, participants predominantly indicated purchasing wines at supermarkets and consuming wines at their home-accommodation, illustrating the opportunities for wineries to enhance knowledge, travel experiences, and ultimately consumption and appreciation. The study has important implications, including approaches for ultra-peripheral regions to develop wine and wine tourism offerings, as well as to position themselves, through maximising the distinctness of their wine heritage, core products, and experiences.

**Keywords:** Wine industry, wine consumers, wine tourism, ultra-peripheral wine region.

## **Introduction**

Ultra-peripheral regions of the European Union (EU) are territories located far from the European continent; the EU has 8 ultra-peripheral regions, of which include the Canary Islands archipelago (EU Commission, 2011). Earlier research has recognised the unique nature, as well as the challenges of ultra-peripheral regions. In investigating the significance of agritourism as a significant

diversification strategy, López and García (2006) explain that these regions, particularly islands, exhibit similar characteristics, including “their remoteness from the major supplying centres... scanty resources... island status or isolated location and consequent fragmentation of markets” (p. 85). Along these lines, other studies have explored the wine industry of ultra-peripheral regions, notably, in the Spanish territory of the Canary Islands. Among these, Duarte Alonso, Sheridan and Scherrer (2008), Scherrer, Duarte Alonso, and Sheridan (2009), and Sheridan, Duarte Alonso and Scherrer (2009) discussed opportunities and challenges for wine tourism development in this archipelago.

Scherrer et al. (2009) highlighted the need to enhance the islands’ destination image to emphasise their wine-making history alongside their scenic qualities, enabling them to move towards catering for independent, high-yield visitors. However, the strong decade-long focus on mass tourism has, on numerous occasions, led to the importing of cheaper wines to offset costs (Scherrer et al., 2009). These unsustainable choices have had repercussions for local wineries, as resourcing constraints and the limited opportunities for capacity building mean they are unable to operate on a level playing field. Moreover, in the absence of industries to manufacture bottles, corks, or packaging locally, Canary Islands wineries are often forced to import these from mainland Spain at higher costs.

Consequently, identifying opportunities for ultra-peripheral regions to exploit existing strengths and resources could contribute to enhancing their destination image and uniqueness. In addition, it could assist in developing and replicating a business model that could be operationalised in other ultra-peripheral, as well as geographically isolated regions. Past research (López & García, 2006) undertook a similar approach, proposing a model for sustainable agritourism in ultra-peripheral regions. The model’s objectives sought to identify the main attributes of agritourism, determine which were key to investigate from a supply point of view, and to assess them from a demand perspective (López & García, 2006). The model’s outcomes endeavoured to ascertain issues of

relevance for agritourism, its fundamental attributes, and the importance of these from the demand side (López & García, 2006).

Against this background, the main objective of the present research is to explore and identify existing attributes around wine products and services that could be exploited as potential future business opportunities in an ultra-peripheral region. More specifically, the following areas will be examined from the perspective of wine consumers, both from and outside La Palma. The research intends to answer the following questions:

- How are the local wines, including their attributes, perceived by wine consumers?
- Where do wine consumers typically purchase/consume local wines?
- How is the winery experience perceived?
- To what extent do consumers differ according to their demographic characteristics? For instance, are their salient differences based upon place/country of origin, gender, or age group composition?

The case of La Palma Island, a Designation of Origin (DO) established in 1994, with currently 17 wineries (Wines of La Palma, 2019), is chosen as an ultra-peripheral wine producing region (Figure 1). One fundamental reason for this decision is the DO's efforts in the last decade to develop in various ways. Indeed, from predominantly focusing on wine production, local wineries have progressively embraced various approaches to enhance their industry's image and that of the island's wine and wine tourism. For example, since 2008, a wine event, FIVIPAL, or fair of wine of La Palma, has been organised to celebrate and recognise the island's wine industry (Wines of La Palma, 2019). Over the years, however, this pioneering event has evolved into a wine and food celebration, building momentum and leading to the organisation of other related events on La Palma Island at various times throughout the year.

Figure 1 Here

A second objective of this study is to propose a model, which is based upon participating consumers' preferences for local wines, and includes their most valued aspects in consumption and purchase. The model also contemplates consumers' experiences of winery visitation and frequency. This model, which is partly aligned with earlier research (López and García, 2006), represents a roadmap for wineries to consider in this- and potentially in other- ultra-peripheral wine regions.

## **Literature Review**

### *The global wine industry and trends*

Figures from the International Organisation of Vine and Wine (OIV, 2019) indicate that, between 2015 and 2017, vineyard surface area worldwide decreased slightly, from 7.50 to 7.43 million hectares. Within the same year period, wine production decreased from 28.85 to 26.70 billion litres (Wine Institute, 2018a). In contrast, wine exports increased from 10.57 to 10.78 billion litres (OIV, 2019), as did wine consumption from 25.18 to 25.28 billion litres (Wine Institute, 2018b). In recent years, new entrants in the industry have emerged (Crescimanno & Galati, 2014). In fact, Ma (2013), and Mehta and Bhanja (2018) report on the developments in wine production in China and India, suggesting opportunities as well as challenges for future production or growth in consumption. Schaefer, Olsen, and Thach (2018) present the case of Poland, where some consumer segments are gradually becoming interested in wine consumption, while domestic wine production is growing.

These developments further support what authors have mentioned over the years, namely, that the wine industry operates in a globalised, but also saturated (Velikova, Murova, & Dodd, 2013), and intensely competitive environment (e.g., Bianchi, Drennan, & Proud, 2014; Pomarici et al., 2017). To exacerbate existing issues, the wine market is strongly fragmented (Ellis & Caruana, 2018), and

there have been changes in consumer behaviour. Indeed, Wine Institute (2018a) indicators illustrate both growth as well as decline in consumption in both established and emerging markets. The indicators also illustrate a decrease in consumption in France and Spain, two traditional, major wine producing and consuming countries. In the case of Italy, Lanfranchi et al. (2014) identify evolving consumption patterns, alongside changing eating habits affecting the wine industry. Moreover, there is a trend among consumers towards higher quality wines, with direct implications in the form of occasional as opposed to traditionally daily consumption (Lanfranchi et al., 2014).

### *Studying the wine consumer*

To address the aforementioned issues, both the industry and retailers have been compelled to design various strategies to increase, maintain or salvage their market share. One fundamental strategy entails marketing approaches based upon consumer preferences (e.g., Pomarici et al., 2017). A study on wine consumer preferences in the United States (Kelly, Hyde, & Bruwer, 2015) highlights the importance of intrinsic cues, such as aroma or taste when consumers assess the quality of wines. Other factors include extrinsic cues, such as colour, brand name, price, or packaging.

Furthermore, different product attributes have been found to contribute to drawing consumers' interest in wines. In investigating buying behaviour among Portugal's wine consumers, Nunes et al. (2016) found that, primarily, having previously tasted a wine constituted the strongest point of reference. This aspect is distantly followed by the region of origin, recommendations by relatives/friends, the pairing between wine and food, and ultimately the grape varieties. In Spain, Mtimet and Albisu's (2006) study revealed the significance of designation of origin and the wine aging attributes, followed by the grape variety. In the domain of organic wines, Kim and Bonn (2015) noticed that trust in the product, particularly through increased wine knowledge, taste, and environmental consciousness were significant attributes in influencing consumer intentions.

Indeed, extrinsic cues have similar influence on trends, with price (Huang and Lockshin, 2017) and branding (Vrontis, Thrassou, & Rossi, 2011) affecting consumer decision-making. Furthermore, Vrontis et al. (2011) suggest that strong wineries survive through their brands, enjoying cost-effective marketing and a better competitive position; consumer loyalty is also enhanced through branding.

However, Roe and Bruwer (2017) contend that, while marketers have been concerned with consumers' purchasing behaviour when trying to anticipate needs and wants and therefore achieve a stronger positioning of their product, consumers' decision-making processes are often more complicated. Overall, the increasing and fiercely competitive wine industry has meant that consumers are more exposed to a wider selection of wines (Bianchi et al., 2014). Indeed, when faced with an extensive assortment of wine products in retail stores (Roe & Bruwer, 2017) that cater to numerous tastes, price points or brand offerings (Mehta & Bhanja, 2018), the decision on what to purchase becomes problematic. Not surprisingly, no single perspective exists that can offer a "definitive approach or theory of wine consumer decision-making..." (Roe & Bruwer, 2017, p. 1362). Roe and Bruwer's (2017) point is also useful in reflecting on associated notions. For instance, with the development of wine regions, the rescue of almost extinct or off-the-beaten path varietals, and the focus on niche markets portray that consumers' decisions become more fragmented, subjective, and therefore more unpredictable to wine marketers and retailers.

In the context of an ultra-peripheral wine region, there is also merit in exploring the complex nature of wine consumer behaviour. Moreover, and in the case of the Canary Islands, local wines combine historic and traditional elements, with implications for both wine consumption, and for wine tourism experiences. These elements are fundamentally represented by niche-market wine grape varietals, which include Albillo Criollo, Almuñeco, Listán Prieto, Negramoll, and the more 'local' Malvasía Dulce or Vinos de Tea (Duarte Alonso, 2015; Gregori & Pérez, 2016). Given this significant competitively strategic factor, the following proposition is put forward:

- P1: *Certain attributes of wines of an ultra-peripheral wine region, including their uniqueness, aroma, and taste, are central to consumers.*

#### *Wine tourism: a key complement to the wine product*

Alongside marketing strategies, wine tourism activities such as visitation to wineries, and wine festivals or vineyards are key motivational factors (Hall et al., 1996) that can play a key role in enhancing wineries' competitiveness and sustainability. A rich body of literature in recent years highlights cases from numerous regions that are either developing their wine tourism offerings, and through these actions, transforming and evolving in the face of competition and consumer trends (e.g., Alebaki, Menexes, & Koutsouris, 2015; Figueroa and Rotaru, 2018; Jones, Singh, and Hsiung, 2015; Molina et al., 2015). Wine tourism is identified as a potentially significant attribute to a winery's offerings and business model (e.g., Colombini, 2013).

Arguably, wine tourism is heavily reliant upon various complementary and crucial elements, one of which is appropriate 'marriage' or pairing between a region's wine, its food heritage and local traditions. Indeed, many wine regions are also seeking to strengthen their image as culinary destinations, with Turner, Davidson-Hunt, and Hudson (2018) recognising the growing interest in gastronomy and food around the world. This interest is not only due to increasing expectations among consumers for sustainable agriculture, but also, and importantly, because of the growing demand for products that have strong linkage to heritage, novelty, or the exotic (Turner et al., 2018).

In the case of Italy, Colombini (2013) contends that cuisine, high quality food, and wine "with strong components of typicality are... important tourist attractions... they even exceed the huge Italian national artistic heritage" (p. 111). In exploring wine tourism development in the region of Conegliano Valdobbiadene, Boatto et al. (2013) refer to the richness of artistic, natural, and historical attractions, together with food, wine, and traditions. In Spain, Duarte Alonso and Liu (2011) revealed

the potential to create wine and food synergies, with several participants acknowledging offering wines and food at their winery, or directly selling them to local hospitality establishments. In the New World, Duarte Alonso (2013) discussed emergent developments to combine Uruguay's wine and culinary heritage, through the establishment of 'Tannat and Lamb.' This event, which is simultaneously offered at various wineries, showcases Tannat, a grape varietal with rich historic roots in the country, and roasted lamb, a popular local gastronomic dish. A final illustration of wine regions incorporating the gastronomic element is the 'Tasting' movement in Spain ([tastingspain.es](http://tastingspain.es)), which strongly emphasises the food-wine marriage through culinary events, including those in Logroño or Ciudad Real, where renowned wine industries are exhibited.

To make the winery visitation experience more successful and memorable, various authors also highlight the significance of high service quality standards. Indeed, Boatto et al.'s (2013) research revealed that, in light of increasing tourist numbers to the region, wineries have sought to attain service performance improvements, through for instance, hiring service managers. Furthermore, high quality service at wineries' cellar doors can lead to improved sales, strengthen loyalty, and enhance brand awareness (Carlsen, 2011). Clearly, there is strong merit in maintaining high levels of service quality, particularly as research suggests that the main motivational factors concerning winery visitation are also intrinsically associated with winery-visitor interactions. Recent findings by Bruwer, Prayag, and Disegna (2018) suggest that both tasting and buying wine constitute the main reasons for winery visitation. These aspects are followed by enjoying the winery's atmosphere, learning about wines and dining, which again suggests the increasing importance of the culinary element. Alebaki et al. (2015) also found tasting the winery's products as a key motivating factor for visiting wineries.

While overall numerous efforts have been undertaken among researchers to clarify and ascertain key aspects concerning wine consumer and wine tourist behaviour, there are further opportunities to address gaps or develop new research avenues. Molina et al. (2015) identify that, as compared to



New World wine countries, for instance, limited research has been conducted on wine tourism segmentation in Spain. This knowledge gap also includes ultra-peripheral Spanish regions that, as is the case of the Canary Islands, receive millions of visitors each year. Associated with this gap, the study proposes the following second proposition:

- P2: *The significance of engagement of winery management/staff in providing a memorable winery experience also applies in the context of wineries in an ultra-peripheral wine region.*

## **Methodology**

### *The geographic context of the study*

The main objective of the present research is to determine specific wine product and service related attributes associated with wine consumption and wine tourism experiences that could be maximised as business opportunities. The study focuses on the ultra-peripheral wine region of La Palma, Spain. For many decades, the island of La Palma and other Canary Islands have been a popular tourist destination for millions of predominantly European holidaymakers.

Arguably, La Palma Island's tourism model departs from that which is predominant in other Canary Islands. For instance, according to figures from the Canary Islands Institute of Statistics (ISTAC, 2019), with its 81,863 residents (2018) and approximately 360,000 visitors between August of 2018 and July of 2019, La Palma's tourist-local resident ratio is 4.4:1. This ratio is significantly lower than the 7.4:1 resulting from over 15 million visitors in the same period when viewed against a population (2018) of 2.13 million in the entire archipelago (ISTAC, 2019). Furthermore, even with the absence of large beaches, its remarkable fauna and flora, and various endemic species, contribute to its "status as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve" (Iglesias and Carballo, 2010, p. 5013). In addition, the island attracts numerous hiking enthusiasts throughout the year.

Given the apparent interest of La Palma's visitors in nature-based leisure pursuits, the local wine regulatory council has sought to develop the image of the island as a wine and culinary destination. For instance, its website (<https://vinoslapalma.com/noticias-vinos-la-palma.html>) illustrates the increasing number of food and wine events, some of which are co-organised through collaborations with other food sectors (e.g., honey and cheese producers). Thus, learning more about the perceptions of local wine consumers, as well as those from visitors, could provide valuable insights to be considered in other ultra-peripheral regions aiming to develop their wine or culinary products. At the same time, it is important to note that, to date, the numbers of winery visitors travelling to the island's 17 wineries have not been officially recorded. Of note, this response was provided to the research team when queries were made to the wine regulatory council or the island's tourism entities regarding published or recorded winery visits.

#### *The questionnaire design process*

While a wealth of studies have employed a quantitative research design to study wine consumers and winery visitors (e.g., Alebaki et al., 2015; Bianchi, 2015; Bruwer et al., 2017; Chang, Thach, and Olsen, 2016; Duarte Alonso, 2015; Ellis and Caruana; Nunes et al., 2016; Velikova et al., 2013), the present study makes use of a mixed methods approach. Utilising a semi-structured questionnaire allows the study to not only collect structured data around demographics and specific wine preferences, but enables examination of in-depth views from wine consumers, both national and international, concerning their wine and winery visitation experiences. Through a mix of closed questions and open-ended responses the semi-structured questionnaire was utilised to elicit specified responses alongside elaborated commentary from participants. The approach allows for the gathering of potentially useful insights through both quantitative and qualitative data.

Qualitative research essentially consists of enquiring into, documenting, and interpreting the meaning-making process (Patton, 2015). According to Matveev (2002), the strengths of qualitative

research include gaining a realistic feel, which is not experienced through statistical analysis stemming from numerical data, a descriptive capability as a result of unstructured, primary data, and flexibility in the interpretation and analysis of results. Survey instruments which utilise quantitative methodologies collect data in numeric form seeking to assign mathematical values to perceptual and attitudinal data (Oppenheim, 2000). While the intrinsic nature of the data is qualitative, these numerical values allow quantitative evaluation of potential associations between issues.

The use of both qualitative and quantitative data is particularly poignant and develops upon previous quantitative studies on the wine industry by providing richer detail (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) further highlight the “pluralistic and complementary” nature of qualitative and quantitative research, which when used “together produce more complete knowledge necessary to inform theory and practice” (p. 21).

The questionnaire was developed from a review of the above existing wine consumer and wine tourism research, and was broadly structured into four sections. The first section gathered participants’ demographic data. The formulated close-ended questions sought to learn about participants’ gender, age, and origin, enabling the opportunity to undertake comparisons between members of these groups and sub-groups. For instance, examining La Palma consumers against those from other islands, mainland Spain, and abroad regarding their wine preferences or winery experience, enabled the review of comparative data. This approach not only generated additional insights into the dataset but provided opportunities to identify practical benefits to the local wine industry, alongside marketing implications for La Palma’s tourism industry.

The second section of the questionnaire focused upon the predominant types of La Palma wine participants favour. This section also examined the most recognisable and enjoyable aspects (open-ended) of the wine. The third section sought to identify typical places of consumption and purchase (close-ended). The fourth and final section sought to identify the frequency of visitation to La Palma

wineries (close-ended), alongside any key aspects of winery visitation, including areas respondents could indicate for future improvements (open-ended).

In light of the different groups of visitors to wineries, including national and international visitors, the questionnaire was designed and distributed in multiple languages. All versions of the translated questionnaire were checked to ensure that both the questions and the areas being examined were consistent and that the terminologies utilised were clear for respondents. The different questionnaires were then pilot tested, and any uncertainties examined and remedied.

### *The data gathering and data analysis process*

Contact with the island's Wine Regulatory Council, and their subsequent agreement to collaborate with the research team enabled the dissemination of three URL links through the Council's website and Facebook page. The links, which directed potential participants to the online questionnaire, contained the translated versions of the questionnaire in the dominant languages utilised by domestic and foreign visitors - Spanish, English, and German. The survey was distributed under the aegis of the wine association to not only garner wider interest and increased completion rates, but also to further provide a stronger image over the authenticity of the research study to potential respondents.

The links were live between May and July of 2019. During these months, a total of 102 usable responses were obtained; 28 other questionnaires were left incomplete and were not considered. To facilitate further cleansing of the data and to identify the appropriateness of respondents, a number of filter questions were utilised. These questions, which included frequency of visitation to local wineries, personal preferences (types) of local wines, with the opportunity to select 'I do not consume wines of La Palma', and relevant aspects concerning local wines, afforded the opportunity to verify the suitability of the respondent and enabled the study to remove 'false' responses. The numerical data were exported onto SPSS, version 23, and quantitative analyses were undertaken by members of the research team. Pearson's Chi Square tests were predominantly conducted to

confirm/disconfirm relationships between participant groups, for instance, between gender, age or nationality, and aspects associated with wine consumption and visitation.

In addition, qualitative data were analysed through qualitative content analysis, thus, allowing for the identification of emerging themes, and their classification through coding (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). To complement and strengthen this process of qualitative data analysis, NVivo version 11, a data management software, was utilised. The content from the German and Spanish participants was translated back into English by a member of the research team and proof-read by the rest of the team, thus allowing for cross-checking and consistency in the analysis process. The coding of emergent themes were also cross-checked by the team to ensure issues highlighted by respondents were accurately reflected in the nomenclature.

#### *Participants' demographic characteristics*

The results in Table 1 show that most participants (64.8%) were male, and from Spain (69.6%). Within this last group, 51% were from La Palma Island, and almost one third (30.4%) were international. Further analysis illustrated that German nationals represented the dominant group among the international participants (n=22, 71%). Similarly, there was a dominance of respondents aged 46 years or above (n=72, 70.6%), particularly within the international group (90.3%). In addition, it is important to note the limited number of 'younger' wine consumers, or those who were less than 36 years old.

Table 1 Here

## **Results and discussion**

### *Preferences, most recognisable and enjoyable aspects*

The second section of the questionnaire was related to consumer behaviour entailed the examination of participants' wine preferences. While they could select more than one answer, a clear preference for white La Palma wines was revealed; these wines are typically represented by the Albillo Criollo and Malvasía varietals, as well as Listán Blanco. Reds, in second place in terms of preference, seemed to be favoured more among international respondents. Overall, when comparing different groups of participants (e.g., by age, gender) against the main types of preferred wines by running a Pearson's Chi Square test, no clear differences were revealed. However, it is worth noting that novel wines, such as Vinos de Tea, which feature a distinct resin undertone due to being aged in barrels made with local pine trees, or fruity, rosé and late harvest wines (e.g., sweet Malvasía) were also favoured, though to a lesser extent. This finding suggests the importance of presenting consumers with different types of wines from the region, particularly those with limited experience in consuming La Palma wines. Furthermore, there is a strong likelihood of consumers favouring and taking to lesser known types, as well as with new additions.

Second, participants were asked to indicate in their own words the most recognisable- as well as the most enjoyable- aspects of La Palma wines; as many as five attributes emerged in both cases. In line with consumer research conducted in the United States (Kelly et al., 2015), aroma and taste were the most recognisable, followed by uniqueness and originality. From both a wine consumer and wine tourist marketing perspective, and with the historic background of the local wine industry, these and other attributes should be strongly emphasised. Indeed, Rodríguez-Donate et al. (2017) explain that wine production in the Canary Islands began in the late 15<sup>th</sup> Century, with exports of local wines starting in the mid-1520s. The Malvasía varietal was particularly sought after, sold in Northwest Europe, including in the UK. Another important aspect is the exceptional landscape that the Canary Islands' vineyards provide, with "a rich variety of grapes and one of the best preserved examples of Europe's oldest varietal heritage" (Rodríguez-Donate et al., 2017, p. 317).

One area that remained rather unrecognised among participants was the potential for pairing the local wines and foods; in fact, this element was only mentioned by 3 participants, including the following from a La Palma respondent: *“The red wines (Listán Prieto, Negramoll) are quite versatile and lend themselves to pairing with a multitude of dishes...The whites can be preferably consumed before a full meal, or pairing with desserts.”* The fact that the local cuisine was ignored from being an ideal complement to local wines could be due to a lack of knowledge among non-local participants. Additionally, it is plausible that a lack of appreciation and/or consideration exists among local participants. Another explanation is the limited or complete absence of food offerings or food-wine pairings at local wineries, which, even at a basic level (e.g., local cheeses and breads) would help foster the imagery of a local food-wine link. Therefore, by elevating the experiential aspect of the local wine and food consumption through pairings and educational activities, there is a significant opportunity for wineries and local restaurants to build a stronger image and recognition of local wines.

Therefore, in line with previous research (Boatto et al., 2013; Colombini, 2013; Turner et al., 2018; Duarte Alonso & Liu, 2012), the culinary or gastronomic aspect could be further emphasised when consuming La Palma wines, particularly given the existence of a rich culture of local cuisine. For instance, Barrenechea (2009) discusses the repertoire of the Canary Islands’ gastronomy, which includes the ‘papas arrugadas’ (wrinkled potatoes), the ‘mojo’ (dip or sauce), as well as products grown regionally (tomatoes, bananas, figs, avocados, papayas, oranges) that are part of the local diet in numerous dishes and desserts. In addition, being surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean, there is an abundance of different types of fish such as mackerel, sardines, ‘vieja’ and ‘besugo’ (similar to a parrot fish and snapper, respectively) that are a key components of local dishes (Barrenechea, 2009).

Table 2 Here

Several inter-related comments from the four groups of respondents (La Palma, other Canary Islands, mainland Spain, and international) concerning their perceived most enjoyable aspects of La Palma wines, further highlight the favourable views of wines, with important implications for wine marketing and wine tourism development in the region:

*La Palma: Their originality and uniqueness, but above all, their softness in the mouth as they have not excessively aged in barrels.*

*Other islands: Original, singular, elaboration with traditional Canary Islands varieties, especially from La Palma; respect for the terroir.*

*Mainland Spain: The white wines are very well balanced in acidity, aromas and fruity flavours.*

*International: The versatility of the different geographic regions, from the warm south of the island, with its sweeter wines, to the northern part, where white wine grapes are grown in what are probably the highest vineyards in Europe. Both regions are opposite poles. You should promote these invaluable aspects much more as they are unique. Wines from almost 2,000 metres altitude!*

The evidence presented above and in Table 2 clearly supports Proposition 1. In addition, when comparing groups of respondents concerning the most recognisable elements of La Palma wines, a much higher percentage of foreign participants (54.8%) valued the ‘taste’ attribute much more than did national participants (32.4%); this difference was statistically significant ( $\chi^2_{(1, n=102)} = 4.560$ ,  $p=0.047$ ). This finding further underlines the importance of educating and informing consumers and visitors, as well as promoting the uniqueness and other valuable elements of local wines.

*Where participants consume and acquire wines of La Palma*



The third section of the questionnaire focused on ascertaining typical places of consumption and purchasing of La Palma wines. As illustrated (Table 3), home or paid accommodation was the most typical place of consumption, with restaurants being second. Several differences emerged when comparing groups of respondents. For instance, a higher percentage of participants between the ages of 46-55 (87.8%) indicated consuming wines at home than did those aged below 45 years old (66.7%), and those aged 56 and above (53.3%); this result revealed a statistically significant difference ( $\chi^2_{(2, n=101)} = 10.502, (p=0.005)$ ). In addition, a much higher percentage of males (68.2%) indicated consuming wines at restaurants than did female participants (47.2%); this difference was statistically significant ( $\chi^2_{(1, n=101)} = 4.293, (p=0.038)$ ). Furthermore, over one-third of La Palma residents (36.5%) favour consuming La Palma wines in local bars, as opposed to only 18% of non-residents ( $\chi^2_{(1, n=102)} = 4.399, (p=0.036)$ ). With a significantly higher percentage of La Palma residents favouring the consumption of wines at local bars, more effort and promotion of La Palma wines by local bar personnel and managers could be undertaken. Increased promotion could attract the interest and patronage of non-resident consumers, including in hotel bars, while simultaneously solidifying the custom of local residents. Apart from potentially increasing revenues, these efforts could enhance visitors' experience, with the likelihood of repeat visits, or positive word of mouth within as well as outside of La Palma.

Table 3 Here

A similar high difference between both residents and non-residents was noticed regarding consumption of La Palma wines at local wineries. In fact, 16 (30.8%) of La Palma residents indicated consuming local wines at the island's wineries, as opposed to only 5 (10%) of non-residents ( $\chi^2_{(1, n=102)} = 6.725, (p=0.010)$ ). This result has important implications for La Palma's wineries, and therefore for wine tourism. With nearly 360,000 visitors recorded between August of

2018 and July of 2019 (ISTAC, 2019), wineries could draw wine enthusiasts from the non-resident contingent, including international visitors. Moreover, the fact that almost half of the participants indicated residing outside La Palma, and 62% of these coming from abroad suggests the significance of continuous efforts from wineries and the Regulatory Council to promote and emphasise existing winery offerings. For instance, more attention could be paid to promoting events at the local airport or at the harbor where numerous cruise ships arrive each year. Doing so could capture other wine enthusiasts that might not be aware of, or might not have attempted to visit wineries while staying on the island.

Several statistically significant differences were also revealed between groups of participants concerning where wines of La Palma are purchased. Noticeably, foreign participants (45.2%) preferred purchasing wines during winery visits more than did Spanish participants (19.7%) ( $\chi^2 (1, n=102) = 7.014, (p=0.015)$ ). A much higher percentage of male participants (69.7%) purchased wines at supermarkets than did their female counterparts (47.2%) ( $\chi^2 (1, n=102) = 4.982, (p=0.033)$ ). Finally, it is also worth noting that very few participants mentioned purchasing La Palma wines online. Even though the short geographical distances around the island of La Palma would allow for travelling to wine shops or wineries, this form of sales could be attractive to both consumers and wineries, and a potential avenue to consuming La Palma wines abroad/overseas. Currently, while wineries have access to electronic mail, very few wineries have a distinct space on their website for potential buyers to make orders online.

#### *The winery experience*

The fourth section of the questionnaire examined frequency of winery visitation among respondents, and focuses upon their winery experience, average expenditure, and perceived areas for improvement. Table 4 shows that nearly two-thirds of participants had visited La Palma wineries in

the last 12 months, with international participants visiting mostly between one and five times (58.1%).

With regard to the winery experience, and while not statistically significant given the limited numbers in cells preventing further testing (i.e. Pearson's Chi Square), noteworthy differences were noticed between the Spanish and international groups.

Essentially, and as compared to their international counterparts, a higher percentage of Spanish participants perceived friendliness and engagement among members of the staff or winery ownership as key elements of the visit. Similarly, Spanish respondents perceived cleanliness and being able to taste wines as important. They also expressed that the way wines are presented, for instance, keeping white wines cooled, closing bottles properly after serving wines, or even presenting wines in an orderly and informative manner were all key elements in the winery experience. These factors were valued more highly by them as opposed to international respondents.

Table 4 Here

However, various comments not only reinforce the above aspects, but also illustrate that regardless of the origin of the participants, they expect, value, and agree with the provision and delivery of basic yet vital, elements, including a welcoming environment towards visitors:

*La Palma: Presentation [of the wines], owner/staff friendliness and professionalism, product quality, and cleanliness of the winery.*

*Other Canary Islands: The quality of the wines, the friendliness of the owners/staff, the cleanliness of the winery, and the passion in running the winery.*

Mainland Spain: *Visiting the vineyard and observing the substantial differences in growing techniques. Also, learning about the different varietals, which are so distinct as compared to those of mainland Spain.*

International: *Being hospitable, original, and providing useful recommendations about the wines.*

The apparent agreement among the different participant groups concerning the role of the winery ownership/staff also supports Proposition 2. An additional sub-section of the questionnaire sought to identify perceived areas in which La Palma wineries could improve. Of the 65 individuals who indicated visiting local wineries, only 28 (43.1%) provided extended comments. From the qualitative analysis, there was no clear prevalence of specific themes. Nevertheless, some patterns based upon the origin of participants were identified. For instance, the following three La Palma residents raised issues concerning opening days/hours, and the need to have facilities for tastings:

- *Opening hours; wineries need to bear in mind that the public on La Palma Island can mainly travel weekends and during bank holidays.*
- *Having a proper space to taste the wines, and to chat about wines and wineries.*
- *Staff with language skills, having set opening hours. Some wineries still lack an adequate space for tastings or for evaluating the wines.*

Participants from outside La Palma, on the other hand, perceived that the island's wines were not sufficiently promoted and therefore still relatively unknown to the average consumer/visitor:

Mainland Spain: *Visitors still do not know many key aspects of the wines of La Palma.*

International: *More promotion of the local wineries is needed through Internet.*

International: *While I enjoyed my visit, I strongly believe that more promotion of the local wineries is needed.*

International: *Paying more attention to the visitors, as well as generating more interest among them.*

Finally, 44 (67.7%) of the 65 individuals who had visited La Palma wineries in the last 12 months indicated their expenditure at the winery. On average, each participant spent 55.2 euros. This average expenditure once again emphasises what other studies have identified, notably, that wine tourism can help wineries to maximise returns, add value to wineries' revenues, and ultimately contribute to image, brand awareness and equity (Carlsen, 2011; Lockshin & Spawton, 2001). The findings here reflect the research of Vrontis et al. (2011), who posit that to be successful there is a need for "wine branding to be associated with more than just the quality of the product itself" (p. 300). The average indicated expenditure by participants also highlights avenues towards targeting visitors, for instance, in wineries providing leisure opportunities (Marzo-Navarro & Pedraja-Iglesias, 2009; Williams, 2001). Similarly, there are avenues to enhance consumer value through staff knowledge and other service-related aspects, such upskilling and developing new abilities (Carlsen & Boksberger, 2015). Indeed, the combination of product attributes and consumer value could have important ramifications for the future development of La Palma's marketing of wines and wine tourism.

### *Proposed model*

This study proposes a model (Figure 2) of wine consumers and wine tourism in an ultra-peripheral region that is developed from the various findings drawn from the gathered raw qualitative and quantitative data, as well as from the literature. For instance, several authors (e.g., Duarte Alonso, 2015; Gregori & Pérez, 2016; Rodríguez-Donate et al., 2017) underline key elements of Canary Island wines, including their heritage, historical background, distinctiveness (e.g., Malvasía), as well

as the fact that they are genuinely local. Indeed, there are distinct ancient varieties that are only produced commercially in the archipelago. As previously noted (e.g., Duarte Alonso & Liu, 2011), these elements strongly suggest the potential for the region's wines to vie for a niche market. The various positive aspects of La Palma wines as identified by respondents further indicate strong and viable opportunities for the archipelago.

While various alternatives exist for participants to purchase and consume wines, there is still little consideration of the wineries themselves. As illustrated in Figure 2, it can be argued that, although the majority were familiar with winery visitation on the island, this medium could be emphasised much more strongly. The rationale is that not only does the cellar door experience help to create strong bonds between wineries and consumers (Dodd, 2000; Lockshin & Spawton, 2001), but it further enhances consumer value (Carlsen & Boksberger, 2015). These actions would also lead to further potential financial benefits for wineries, for instance, through increased sales (Carlsen, 2011).

Figure 2 Here

The island's diverse topography already adds to its existing repertoire of natural attractions and to the unique scenery present at various vineyards scattered around different locations. Wineries could build upon these valuable characteristics and further enhance visitors' experiences with educational talks or offerings of the local gastronomy. In addition, and as participants who had visited the local wineries indicated, there is merit in paying careful attention to core aspects associated with the winery visit. Increasing promotion, and maintaining a consistent front line service could go a very long way, and have tangible effects or impacts on the future of the wine and wine tourism sectors of the island.

The model could be considered in other ultra-peripheral regions that are vying to develop a destination image, particularly through the maximisation of existing products that, like wine products, have strong links to a region's tradition, history, and heritage.

## **Conclusions**

The main purpose of this study was to investigate preferences and experiences of wine consumption, as well as wine tourism experiences among wine consumers in La Palma Island, an ultra-peripheral wine region of Spain. The Canary Islands region is home to a repertoire of wines only grown commercially in this archipelago, and therefore constitute a unique and valuable resource, as well as a niche production (Duarte Alonso, 2015). Thus, there is merit in ascertaining those preferences and experiences, particularly as this, as well as many other less known wine regions, are seeking to develop their wine and wine tourism sectors. The data gathered revealed various key aspects. First, while aroma and taste of local wines were the main recognisable aspects, their uniqueness (rarity) and originality (e.g., growing and production methods) were also perceived as both recognisable and enjoyable elements. While extrinsic cues were less obvious, there are some aspects of branding that have been emergent.

The study has also identified key areas of focus around consumer behaviour, namely that the consumption of purchased wine was dominantly at home, at vacation accommodation and at restaurants. Regarding these aspects, the study also sought to identify inter-group differences, including between national and international participants. For instance, international visitors were much keener to purchase wines during winery visits than did their national counterparts (Table 3). These findings provide useful insights into the patterns of consumption and with it signposting on potential opportunities for wineries to create synergies – for example, winery specific wine bars in hotels, sponsored events at restaurants and collaborative arrangements such as wine pairings with

food. In addition, the findings highlight opportunities for wineries to increase consumption and therefore sales, through attracting and drawing consumers to patronise their offerings.

The highly-focused preference for purchasing wine at supermarkets also provides direction in distribution and logistics and further suggests avenues to expand awareness and custom through sales and marketing via online or specialist retailers.

Similarly, the results reiterate the importance of not only the basic aspects required in the service offerings, but also a need to deliver excellence as part of winery visits. Hospitable service and the active engagement of winery owners/staff were vital preferences as suggested by respondents.

### *Implications*

By collecting rich qualitative and quantitative data the study has developed a model (Figure 2) that encapsulates the main dimensions of wine consumption and wine tourism in an ultra-peripheral region. Fundamentally, it provides signposting and a thematic toolkit, which encourages in-depth analysis, reflection and understanding of wine marketing and wine tourism. Moreover, the key findings identify areas where there are opportunities to be maximised and benefits to be achieved, for example, through activities that embrace the uniqueness of a region's wine and its culinary attributes. These actions mirror existing theoretical underpinnings around entrepreneurial action (e.g., McMullen and Shepherd, 2006; Mitchell and Shepherd, 2010), which underlines the strategic merit of evaluating and acting upon opportunities. Espousing this theory with the findings could contribute to alternative ways of analysis, examining wine marketing and wine tourism from a more pronounced entrepreneurial perspective.

From a practical perspective, the findings and the resulting framework illustrate key linkages that could also be ascertained in the context of other ultra-peripheral or lesser known wine regions. Similarly, while the model is focused upon wine, it has implications for other ultra-peripheral regions where resources are scant or where there are geographical limitations. While these may be viewed as



limitations, the study suggests otherwise and instead signposts maximising upon the uniqueness and individuality of the area, exploiting opportunities and celebrating its strategic merits. In the case of La Palma, and as with the other Canary Islands, clear associations exist between the historic background of the wines, their heritage, the islands' culture, their 'locality' and their distinctiveness. Similarly, no other regions outside the archipelago grow these varieties commercially. This last attribute clearly denotes an opportunity which could be seized upon, or developed further to establish or reinforce more specific niche products for a unique market; such potential is also illustrated through the most recognisable and enjoyable aspects of local wines.

As with other wine regions around the globe, the existing intense competition renders the marketing of wines as an extremely challenging undertaking. However, some regions, including the Canary Islands, are blessed with a large and continuous flow of visitors throughout the year (ISTAC, 2019). Thus, the suggested benefits of wine tourism (e.g., Carlsen and Boksberger, 2015; Dodd, 2000; Lockshin and Spawton, 2001) could be maximised much more strongly, not only as a revenue streams but as an opportunity to spread awareness of the uniqueness of the product offering. Also, and as previous research has underlined (e.g., Duarte Alonso, 2015; Duarte Alonso and Liu, 2011), there needs to be much more emphasis on the local gastronomy, which, together with scenery, sun and beach, constitutes yet another pillar of the islands' heritage. Indeed, this attribute is clearly distinct from other Spanish regions. Overall, maximising the potential of wine, together with consistent service and engagement with visitors could go a long way in drawing current and future generations of wine enthusiasts. Moreover, fulfilling basic demands, such as cleanliness, educating/recommending products/services, or emphasising the unique aspects of the cultivation of local varieties are all different activities that could have a lasting impact. Finally, the findings signpost these opportunities that other ultra-peripheral wine regions could similarly exploit to widen awareness, develop own their offerings, and market their uniqueness.

### *Limitations and Future Research*

While the research provides insightful results, as well as theoretical and practical implications, various limitations must be acknowledged. First, response rates from various key consumer groups, including those below the ages of 35, females, international, and from other islands and mainland Spain were limited. Given the nature of the research, in that invitations to partake in the study were made through website and social media (Facebook) announcements, there was no control over the characteristics of participants, except for their consumption of wines and visits to La Palma wineries. However, future research could consider making a stronger case for a wider diversity of participants.

In addition, the study was only conducted among consumers of La Palma wines, and as a result, limited comparisons can be made between these and consumers from wines of other Canary Islands. Furthermore, the overall number of participants is limited and therefore the overall findings might not be generalizable among La Palma wine consumers. In both cases, future investigations should seek to collect larger response rates to enable further testing and understanding into consumer actions and choices. Doing so would allow for making useful comparisons across groups based on their demographic characteristics and island of residence, and overall, and contribute more to the literature and research concerning wine consumer and wine tourism in ultra-peripheral wine regions. Finally, exploring the perceived potential of local food-wine consumption among winery visitors through, for instance, group bookings or events could provide insightful practical information to local tourism marketers and pioneers.

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