

## INVESTIGATING DIFFERENCES BETWEEN DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL WINERY VISITORS IN GREECE

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### ABSTRACT

Despite the growth of the global wine tourism market, officially recorded data and comparative empirical studies concerning the issue are relatively limited. Though, market knowledge is fundamental to support future growth. In this vein, the present study aims to investigate differences between domestic and international winery visitors in Greece. A convenience sample of 517 visitors, 349 Greeks and 168 foreigners is used. Statistical comparisons of the two sub-samples identified significant differences in terms of motives, initial attitudes, awareness and loyalty, wine spending, income, age groups, satisfaction and future behavioral intentions. Practical implications of the findings are discussed.

**Key Words:** wine tourism, winery visitors, foreigners, Greece

### INTRODUCTION

Wine tourism has been growing significantly during the last two decades; as O'Neil and Palmer (2004) note, "*the wine-tourism phenomenon has taken on truly global proportions*". A widely accepted definition for wine tourism is the one proposed by Hall et al. (2000, p. 37): "Wine tourism includes visitation to vineyards, wineries, wine festivals and wine shows, for which wine tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of a wine region are the prime motivating factors for visitors". Mitchell (2004) further distinguishes between wine tourism more broadly and winery visitation, the latter being perhaps the most important of the various elements of the wine tourism experience. Indeed, the winery or cellar door visit, which constitutes a form of Consumer Experience Tourism, is one of the main services offered in the context of wine tourism (Christou and Nella, 2010a).

Although relative academic literature follows a growth trend (Christou and Nella, 2010b), a lack of officially and systematically recorded data and comparative studies characterizes the field (Van Westering and Niel, 2003; Carlsen, 2004; Alonso, 2009). Moreover, significant difficulties emerge for researchers while trying to compare figures from different wine tourism destinations not only due to the structural differences of wine tourism destinations (Getz and Brown, 2006), but also due to definitional issues of who should be regarded as wine tourists (Carlsen et al., 1998; Charters and Ali-Knight, 2002; O'Neill and Palmer, 2004; Collins, 2005). Consequently, authors are in many cases restricted to estimations rather than accurate information (e.g. Tassiopoulos et al., 2004).

Though, it is unwise to develop specific marketing strategies for wine tourists while knowledge of the target markets for wine tourism remains not well developed (Carlsen, 2004; Loubser, 2004). Additionally,

geographic sub-segments of the wine tourist market become especially important to understand, as many emerging wine tourism destinations are beginning to focus their advertising resources on attracting travelers from international regions (Williams and Dossa, 2003; O'Neill and Palmer, 2004).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This section attempts to provide an overview of research on various profiles of wine tourists. Certain studies claim that wine tourists usually belong to specific age groups, i.e. 40 to 50 years old and have enhanced wine knowledge (King and Morris, 1997; Heaney, 2003) while other studies contradict these findings (e.g. Corigliano, 1996; Taylor, 2004; Tassiopoulos et al., 2004). Dodd and Bigotte (1997) suggest that income is one of the most obvious predictors of wine tourism. Though, as wine tourism grows rapidly, the generalisability of regional or even national scale findings can be easily questioned; Charters and Ali-Knight (2002) suggest that the profiles of wine tourists may vary from region to region or even from winery to winery. Thus, many authors propose that there is not a typical profile of wine tourists (Ali-Knight and Charters, 2001; Bruwer et al., 2001; Charters and Ali-Knight, 2002; Mitchell and Hall, 2006; Bruwer and Alant, 2009). Consequently, various typologies for wine tourists have been proposed in the existing literature. Motives, relationship and involvement with wine, demographic and social characteristics have been used as segmentation criteria.

One of the initial segmentation proposals with great impact is that of Hall (1996). The author, based on perceptions of winery owners identified three basic types of wine tourists: the “wine lover”, the “wine interested” and the “curious tourist”. Other authors have tried to identify these three segments among wine festival visitors (e.g. Houghton, 2008) or among winery visitors in wineries of other countries (e.g. Marzo-Navarro and Pedraja-Igglecias, 2010). Charters and Ali-Knight (2002) used wine knowledge and interest towards wine in order to segment the wine tourism market of Western Australia. They identified the existence of five segments, i.e. wine lovers, connoisseurs, wine interested, wine novices and hangers-on. Bruwer et al. (2001) noted that although wine tourists may have demographic similarities, they may differ substantially in dimensions like attitudes towards wine, life style and consumption behavior. Thus, psychographic variables may help researchers understand better differences among wine tourists' segments. In this direction, a widely cited segmentation proposal is that of Corigliano (1996), who used lifestyle characteristics of Italian wine tourists and proposed four segments: Professional, Impassioned Neophyte, Hanger-On and Drinker. Other authors have used involvement with wine as a segmentation basis (Lockshin and Spawton, 2001; Brown et al., 2007; Yuan et al., 2008b). Motives have also been used as segmentation variables (Johnson, 1998; Williams and Dossa, 2003; Yuan et al., 2005) while Galloway et al. (2008) concluded that personality traits, such as sensation seeking, can be also used as a segmentation basis. In Greece, empirical data concerning wine tourism are scarce. Alebaki and Iakovidou (2010) conducted a study about the profile of 133 winery visitors at Northern Greece resulting at the identification of four segments: wine lovers, neophytes, occasional wine tourists and hangers-on.

Apart from segmentation studies, the issue of differences among discrete sub-groups of wine tourists (e.g. male/ female, domestic / international visitors, visitors of different age groups) has not been explored in depth. Alonso et al. (2007a,b) studied the differences between winery visitors of different age groups and between domestic and international visitors in New Zealand. In their second study, the authors identified differences between domestic and international visitors in terms of winery expenditures, age groups, education and income.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology designed and implemented a large scale quantitative study which used as the basic research tool a structured questionnaire available both in English and Greek versions. The method of self-completion was chosen. Based on its content, the questionnaire was divided in four parts: a) relationship with wine prior to the winery visit, b) evaluation of the winery experience, c) post-visit perceptions and behavioral intentions and d) socio-demographic data. The empirical study took place in the period of May-July 2010 in 18 wineries of major wine producing regions of Greece. A total of 1.300 questionnaires were sent to the participating wineries in order to be distributed to their winery visitors. Finally, a convenience sample of 517 completed questionnaires was gathered. The sample consisted of 349 Greeks and 168 foreigners from 17 different countries. The S.P.S.S. 19.0 software was used for the statistical analysis, which included descriptive statistics, cross-tabulations and t-tests for comparisons of group means, where applicable.

## FINDINGS

### *Socio-demographic characteristics and relationship with wine*

Cross tabulations were used in order to identify differences between groups in terms of gender participation, age groups, income, education and type of occupation. International visitors had higher percentages of women participation, i.e. 60.5% while the respective percentage among Greeks was 45.4%. The Pearson's Chi-Square test ( $\chi^2$  test<sub>(1, n=484)</sub> = 9,915, P = 0.002) confirms a statistically significant difference for the variability of sex between domestic and international visitors. While examining the income levels of the two samples, a clear statistical difference became evident ( $\chi^2$  test<sub>(4, n=454)</sub> = 45,139, P = 0.000). Foreigner winery visitors appeared to be at a better financial status: among foreigners 42.5% had an average monthly income higher than 1.800 euros while the respective percentage for Greek visitors was 21.3%. Additionally, Greek visitors had much higher percentages of monthly incomes lower than 1.300 euros (59.2% versus 26.1%). In terms of age distribution, the two sub-samples showed a statistical difference ( $\chi^2$  test<sub>(5, n=504)</sub> = 19,417, P = 0.002). Domestic visitors had much higher percentages in the younger age groups, i.e. 18-34 (total 42,1% versus 27%) and in the age group of 45-54 y.o. (23.4% versus 18.6%) while foreigners had higher percentages of visitors aged between 35-44 y.o. (35.9% versus 23.4%) and 55-64 y.o. (13.8% versus 7.7%). The examination of the two samples in terms of educational levels and type of occupation showed no statistical difference ( $\chi^2$  test<sub>(3, n=486)</sub> = 3,340, P = 0.342 and  $\chi^2$  test<sub>(3, n=488)</sub> = 3,127, P = 0.372 respectively). It is though interesting to note that both samples had very high percentages of university degree holders (66% for international visitors and 59% for domestic visitors) while an additional 17.6% and 18% respectively were MSc or PhD degree holders.

Then, we analyzed data concerning the relationship of the respondents with wine and wine tourism, i.e. involvement levels, interest and expertise in wine issues, consumption frequency, average monthly spending for wine purchases, satisfaction from previous wine tourism experiences, motives to visit the specific winery, visitation as a group member, initial attitudes towards the winery's products and initial expectations for the winery visit. For the variables that were measured with 7 point Likert scales or 7-point semantic differential scales, differences between domestic and international visitors were examined with t-tests.

Cross tabulations were performed for the identification of differences in wine spending between the two segments, which revealed a statistically significant difference ( $\chi^2$  test<sub>(4, n=473)</sub> = 30.327, P = 0.000). More precisely, foreigner winery visitors proved to be heavier wine spenders, as they had significantly higher percentages in the categories of spending over 80 euros, i.e. 23.6% versus 11.8%. Greek visitors, on the other hand, had a much higher percentage in the category of average spending less than 20 euros (i.e. 29.2% versus 13%). Group visitation was another important variable that was examined, as in the case of wine tourism in Greece it is commonly linked with foreigner tourists. Indeed, the existing sample confirms the perception that foreigner winery visitors are most likely to visit as members of a group (57.7%) while the relative percentage was significantly lower for domestic visitors (33.5%). The chi-square test confirmed the existence of a statistically important difference ( $\chi^2$  test<sub>(1, n=517)</sub> = 27,409, P = 0.000).

As for the motives of winery visitors, 8 different motives were examined, as indicated by previous research (Alant and Bruwer, 2004). The 8 motives were: to buy wines, to taste new wines, to gather information about the winery's wines, to meet the producer, to have a winery tour and/ or experience the atmosphere of a winery, to participate as a member of a group visit, to make an excursion/short trip/ to escape or other motives. Respondents were asked to identify and rank their 4 major motives. Based on this ranking, some statistical differences appeared. In terms of percentages, more Greeks appeared motivated to "to buy wines", (major motive for 49.4% of Greeks and for 39.5% of foreigners,  $\chi^2$  test<sub>(1, n=515)</sub> = 4,453, P = 0.035), "to meet the producer", (43.4% of Greeks and 29.9% of foreigners,  $\chi^2$  test<sub>(1, n=515)</sub> = 8,580, P = 0.003) and "to have a winery tour and/ or experience the atmosphere of a winery" (70.7% of Greeks and 57.5% of foreigners,  $\chi^2$  test<sub>(1, n=515)</sub> = 8,820, P = 0.003). On the other hand, foreigners appeared more motivated "to participate as a member of a group visit" (major motive for 39.5% of foreigners and for 25.6% of Greeks,  $\chi^2$  test<sub>(1, n=515)</sub> = 10,432, P = 0.001) and to make an excursion/short trip/ to escape", (50.9% of foreigners and 33% of Greeks,  $\chi^2$  test<sub>(1, n=515)</sub> = 15,141, P = 0.000). For the rest of the motives, there was no statistical difference between the two groups.

The remaining variables that concerned the relationship with wine and wine tourism were Likert or semantic differential type and consequently, t-tests were used for the examination of differences between the two sub-samples. First of all, four questions were used to measure product category involvement; t-tests revealed that there was no statistical difference on these four variables. The product involvement scale was adapted from Yoo et al. (2001) and measured wine consumption ( $t(515) = 0,317$ , P=0.751), involvement with wine ( $t(515) = -0,585$ , P=0.559), expertise on wine issues ( $t(514) = 0,982$ , P=0.327) and interest in wine ( $t(514) = 1,394$ , P=0.164). Then, two additional variables were examined: overall satisfaction from previous wine

tourism experiences and initial expectations for the current winery experience initial. T-tests revealed no statistical differences for previous satisfaction ( $t(343) = 0,897, P=0.370$ ) and initial expectations ( $t(515) = -1,481, P=0.139$ ).

Another interesting issue was to examine initial attitudes and pre-visit relationship of the winery visitors with the winery and its brands. Initial attitudes appeared to be more positive for Greeks both towards the winery (average 4.91 versus 4.24,  $t(286,566) = -4,565, P=0.000$ ) and towards the winery's brands (average 4.99 versus 4.22,  $t(515) = -5,672, P=0.000$ ). Overall attitudes also differed in the same way (average 4.48 versus 3.77,  $t(293,082) = -5,698, P=0.000$ ). As it was expected, Greeks had higher levels of initial awareness of the winery's brands (average 3.89 versus 3.36,  $t(312,123) = -3,495, P=0.001$ ) and higher initial loyalty levels (average 4.13 versus 3.27,  $t(309,257) = -5,563, P=0.000$ ).

#### *Evaluation of the winery experience and post-visit effects on consumer behavior*

The winery experience was evaluated by respondents in terms of service quality and satisfaction with the use of multi-item scales. A comprehensive 14-item scale proposed by Christou and Nella (2010c) was used to measure service quality in the winery setting while satisfaction from the winery experience was measured with 4 Likert statements, adopted from the scale of Fisher and Price (1991). The post-visit effects on visitors' consumer behavior were also measured by multi-item scales. More precisely, the multi-dimensional 10-item scale proposed and validated by Yoo and Donthu (2001) was used to measure Customer Based Brand Equity (CBBE) while post-visit attitudes towards price flexibility and brand extensibility practices were adapted from Wang et al. (2008). Future behavioral intentions were also examined in terms of intentions to revisit the winery, to create positive word of mouth (to encourage friends and relatives to visit the winery) and to enhance their preferences for wine instead of other alcohol drinks.

T-tests showed no statistical difference between domestic and international visitors in terms of service quality perceptions ( $t(515) = -1,522, P=0.129$ ). On the contrary, statistical differences were supported for satisfaction from the winery experience with domestic visitors appearing more satisfied in comparison with foreigners (average 5.69 versus 5.45,  $t(515) = -2,294, P=0.022$ ). Additional differences appeared for the evaluations of customer based brand equity (CBBE) for the winery's brands (average 4.45 versus 4.94,  $t(515) = -4,849, P=0.000$ ) and for the average variable of behavioral intentions (average 5.57 versus 4.86,  $t(515) = -5,978, P=0.000$ ). A more detailed examination of the three behavioral-intentions items revealed the existence of statistical differences between the two groups. Domestic visitors appeared to be more willing to revisit the winery (average 5.38 versus 4.68,  $t(515) = -5,170, P=0.000$ ), to encourage friends to visit the winery (average 5.77 versus 5.17,  $t(515) = -4,515, P=0.000$ ) and to have enhanced preferences for wine after the winery visit (average 5.56 versus 4.76,  $t(515) = -6,052, P=0.000$ ). Another statistical difference appeared for the variable that measured visitor perceptions on brand extensibility (average 5.07 versus 4.59,  $t(515) = -4,177, P=0.000$ ) while there was no statistical difference for price flexibility perceptions ( $t(515) = 0,131, P=0.896$ ).

### **CONCLUSIONS AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

The limited number of existing empirical studies examining non-local travel markets suggests the existence of many opportunities to strengthen the international component of the wine tourism markets (Williams and Dossa, 2003). Thus, the present study and the identified differences have important marketing implications for winery and wine tourism destination managers. Differences in terms of motives should be taken into account in order to design appropriate winery services and offer wine tourism experiences that meet visitors' expectations. For example, in the present study Greeks appeared more motivated to buy wines, to meet the producer and to have a winery tour and/ or experience the atmosphere of a winery. Foreigners, on the other hand, appeared more motivated to participate as members of a group visit and to make an excursion/short trip/ to escape. These aspects of winery visitors' motivation can help winery managers to augment or enrich the wine tourism experience according to the needs and motives of these target groups.

Moreover, the facts that foreign visitors were at a better financial status on the one hand and that they seemed less satisfied from their winery experience could be a basis for the design of a premium wine tourism packages. For example, wineries could examine whether group visit packages can be improved by reducing of the number of participants per group and by charging higher prices for smaller groups or even by adding additional services of high value to the basic experience. The fact that domestic visitors had relatively lower monthly incomes and lower average wine spending, could be a decision basis for wineries to offer discounted prices for direct purchases at the cellar door or even special offers for certain wines.

Another interesting finding involves the initial brand attitudes and the behavioral intentions of winery visitors. Winery managers could seek ways to enhance initial attitudes and awareness towards their winery and its brands, as this was significantly lower in the case of international visitors. One way to achieve this is by trying to achieve better market penetration in foreign markets while another option refers to building synergies with other tourism organizations. For example, collaboration of wineries with local hotels and restaurants could help tourists become acquainted with the wine brand before the visit or even to urge them to perform a non planned winery visit. Promotional and advertising material available at all possible tourist points can assist in this direction. At this point, it is important to stress the importance of word of mouth as one of the most important sources of information for winery visitors (Dodd, 1998, 1999). As domestic visitors appeared more eager to revisit the winery and create positive word of mouth about the winery and its brands, winery owners can draw the conclusion that satisfied visitors can support repeat visitation and help the winery enlarge the pool of visitors and loyal domestic customers. Findings support that for the internal market brand building can be supported through winery visitation.

The main conclusion of this study is that wineries should carefully examine the profile and the characteristics of their domestic and international visitors, in order to understand their needs and expectations and design tailor-made winery experiences. Quite apart from that, market knowledge can assist wineries to take and implement strategic decisions concerning the desired target groups and the appropriate positioning. Thus, the proper marketing mix can be designed on a solid basis.

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