



INNOVATION IN THE MANAGEMENT OF INTERORGANIZATIONAL OENOLOGIC TOURISM PROJECTS. THE CASE OF PLA DE BAGES WINE AREA (BARCELONA, SPAIN)

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Abstract

Oenologic tourism has a long history, although it seems to be quite recent and innovative. Wine quality certifications have widely contributed to the worldwide wine tasting and vacation trends, increasing the interest of wine culture. Therefore, traditional visitors' behaviors change; also their motivations do. Visitors have a wide traveling culture and claim to new experiences, authentic services, particular and exceptional activities. The leading subject of any tourist service focuses on creativity and innovation. Design thinking is the strategic methodology to obtain differentiation. In that sense, Richards (2011) conceives creative tourism as an extension, an annex to cultural tourism. It is defined by quotidian and intangible aspects that are rooted in the culture of the resident community, to create experiences full of authenticity and identity traits. In this sense the named "identity tourism" aims to restore the past, reproduce the experiences of their people, soak up the essence of the territory, penetrate into the character of their community identity. In the specific case of tourism and enology, this creative and identity question becomes essential and offers many business chances and options. The specific case of wine origin certification in the regional area of *Pla de Bages* (Barcelona) and the case of the involved organizations illustrate the targeted concepts.

Key words: *oenologic tourism, design thinking, innovation, tourist experience, Barcelona*

JEL code: O310, Z320, Z130, R590

Introduction

This paper looks for the current key aspect in oenologic tourism projects. It tries to answer how to reach authentic, singular, memorable activities; how to create tourist identity products. Therefore, it focuses on the design thinking expressed by the business management of oenologic tourism projects in regional areas. In fact, the aim is to delve into the development of tourism projects related to the wine culture, economy and identity of a destination with the participation of public and private organizations. It intends to demonstrate how the tourist entrepreneurship and the collaboration with the administration can boost the economy of affected areas by the crisis, designing and creating competitive, different, authentic, sustainable, innovative experiences (Exceltur, 2003, 10-11). The case of the Pla de Bages wine region, nearby Barcelona (Spain) and the bagesterradevins.cat enterprise illustrate it.

The European Network of Wine Cities-RECEVIN is a European Union project to implement the co-operation among countries and wine territories. The European Charter on Enotourism is a RECEVIN project that aims the recognition of vine and wine tourism in Europe. This Charter on Enotourism defines the concept of wine tourism at the European level and establishes a common strategy for all the wine tourism regions in Europe and emphasizes the concept of "wine-growing culture". That is, the opportunity to use wine as a tool to promote the local tourism. This implies a significant number of participants, from the public and private



sectors to the ordinary inhabitants of the wine tourism destinations. There are some inherent values: sustainability of the enterprise economic activities and local development promotion; the need for cooperation among various organizations, a collective vision; promoting restoration of buildings instead of new constructions; utilizing local human resources and improving quality of life of the local residents. This project also emphasizes the authenticity, which is essential for the enotourism experience and one of the key values of the winemakers (and wine cellars).

The increase in the demand for tourism and leisure, as well as the tendency of destinations to seek new sources of income and growth, leads to the current race to position the territories in attractive enclaves for consumption. This reorientation is mainly based on policies of productive and territorial restructuring, proving how culture is configured as an excellent vehicle of attractiveness, as well as an important economic development driver (Miles & Paddison 2005; Smith, 2007; Zukin 1995; Florida 2009; Domínguez-Pérez et al, 2015). The "scene" that the visitors consume is composed of a kaleidoscope of experiences and emotions, outside the daily areas where tourists can wander and be involved into (Lloyd & Obrien, 2000: 33).

Therefore, destinations are launched to the promotion of their cultural and tourist heritage to capture new investments in a framework of prevalence of the cultural paradigm (Touraine, 2005; Bauman, 2011). The objective is that the local economy is stimulated through the culture, since the culture is placed at the center of social, economic and political discourse. The definition of culture includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, customs and any other aptitude and habit acquired by man as a member of a society (Tylor, 1871). Culture is somewhat stable, consolidated and it changes very slowly. It constitutes the idiosyncrasy of people.

When cultural tourism predominates, it is difficult to distinguish spaces for "visitors" from those "local" spaces, since the leisure, entertainment and cultural sectors are considered as crucial for both neighbors and outsiders. On the one hand, residents increasingly act as tourists in their own geographical spaces (Lloyd and O'Brien, 2000: 7), emphasizing the cultural, relational and interactive sphere. On the other, it is born a kind of tourism more and more linked to experiences and emotions. Therefore the intangible heritage dimensions are increasing day by day in tourism products (Wearing, Stevenson & Young, 2010). Hence, it highlights the culture and economy union in the consumption of symbols and products. Therefore culture, lifestyle, habits are promoted by destinations as the great attractive icon.

In that sense, the destination identity is created and transmitted using an image, an icon, supported by the identity (Alvarez Sousa, 2010). The identity is that set of tangible and intangible attributes that a space recognizes and uses as brand images to launch abroad. These images also contribute to the involvement of the local identity and residents. This entire image race happens in a competitive environment to attract new investments, more visitors, etc. Therefore, strategic plans are needed.

Strategic plans are defined as "*an effort addressed to guide those decisions and basic actions to achieve a future vision, with all the economic and social stakeholders agreement*" (Santacana, 2008). The strategic plan does a diagnosis about the weaknesses and strengths of the area and proposes the actions to achieve specific goals. Increasingly, public institutions that have to do with the governance of its geographic area bet for the strategic promotion of tourism in their own destination and the market demand. They use the classical communication aspects of any destination (based with attractive routes, itineraries, museums, etc.) and incorporate a portfolio of priced products, activities and trips with the aim of promoting the tourism. This last aspect implies a new approach based on experiences and emotions, with a segmented demand



related to their motivations, expectations, and travel profile.... Therefore, they need the private sector complicity.

Public-private partnership refers to the different forms of cooperation between public authorities and the private business world, whose objective is to guarantee the financing, construction, renewal, management or maintenance of an infrastructure or the provision of a service (European Commission, 2003). There are multiple and varied forms of cooperation and usually have a relatively long duration. The project-financing model is partly guaranteed by the private sector and optionally supplemented by public funding; that is, sharing risks and power between the public and private partners. Therefore, there is no doubt that mixed entities generate positive externalities that all tourism suppliers share and appropriate, but for which only some are paid, due to the emergence of free-riders (Cambrils, 2016: 153). The aim is to expand the scope of action with the presence of private partners, pursuing a better knowledge of markets, greater consensus and share the strategy of the destination. However, it still remains a lack of trust between the private sector, for the appropriation of ideas and business. The value or utility of mixed entities is greater for the criterion "consensus and strategy" than for "efficiency" (Cambrils, 2016: 161). For the cases of Spain, there are no general formulas of contractual and institutional agreements, but there is a long tradition of collaboration based on trust, mutual benefit and co-responsibility.

In a nutshell, a new promotion strategy involves a new destination management model based on a close relationship with the private sector. It is a strategy that needs the joined work to design and create competitive products. That is, it implies to start a new relationship that helps the private sector to originate new tourist products to integrate the cultural identity, the emotions and the memorability. A new policy based on market niche specialized product to make the destination more competitive, differentiated, sustainable and full of quality. All these set of elements generate high added value. They entail being different from the competence and specializing the destination and its supply. Therefore, these new specialized products create and boost the tourist destination by designing plans of stimulation and marketing, based on experiences and emotions. Design thinking is the strategic method and tool that designs and creates innovative products and services. It supposes a holistic and global vision of the client; it means to know their functional needs, as well as their cultural, social and emotional requirements. Therefore, design thinking focuses on the client; that is, the key needed elements are empathy and interdisciplinary team works.

Oenologic tourism projects

Wine tourism is based on visits to vineyards, wineries, festivals and wine shows in which tasting, learning and experiencing of the attributes of the wine are the main factors of motivation and recreation for visitors (Dodd, 1995; Hall & Macionis, 1998; Getz 2000; Telfer, 2001; Mitchell & Hall, 2001; Cohen & Ben-Nun, 2009; Bruwer & Alant, 2009; Bruwer & Lesschaeve, 2012). Thus, visits to wineries, fine tastings, vineyard landscapes, and workshops for amateurs and specialists, etc. constitute the center of interest of lovers of oenological tourism. This interest in wine also tends to be accompanied by a pairing with gastronomic dishes that characterize and define the territory. Furthermore, oenotourists' motivation also includes the knowledge of the natural and cultural landscape, lifestyle and inhabitants' idiosyncrasy, their past and identity.

All these emotional activities involve daily and intangible aspects rooted in local community, creating authentic and memorable experiences. A memorable wine destination



means that some part of its value channel has an added merit, a set of feelings that suggest, remember a specific moment. And all these remembered moments bring positive attitudes related to the visited destination, building important ties and belonging feelings.

Private and public strategic plans look for building this transcendent experience, this memorable remembrance, and this emotional aspect. The oenotourism has lots of emotions joined to the taste, smell, sight, touch and even hearing. Any wine can be aggressive, kind, honest, sincere, strict, faithful, spiritless, and charming... They are plenty of sensitive attributes and imply great, unique, memorable experiences. Tourist memorable experiences have to include hedonism, participation, novelty, significance, tasting, local culture and knowledge (Tsai, 2016).

In the specific case of wine, the image and brand for an oenologic area is the designation of origin (DO). Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographical Indications (PGI) constitute the system used for the recognition of a differentiated quality, due to its own specific characteristics. It is a way to appreciate and recognize the importance of oenologic destinations and wine-growing zones. The use of the brand linked to the territory highlights its unique and competitive character (Blain et al, 2005; Gomez et al, 2015), and necessarily promotes knowledge of the local environment and development, through strategic public-private alliances.

Research results and discussion

Methodology

A Catalan regional area is used as illustrative case to analyze the main attributes of oenologic tourism projects to be successful and contribute to the crisis end. Therefore, this research is based on qualitative methodologies as the participant observation and the experts' opinion, using the Focus Group technique to deeply interpret the current tourist and oenologic situation in the Bages territory. The methodology consists of semi structured and collective interviews (6 participants) with different tourism responsible managers of public and private organizations. These sessions took place between the 3rd and 4th June in 2015 with a maximum duration of 90 minutes' time to collect the opinions of the participants and consider an eventual saturation of the information. The sessions were videotaped, transcribed and treated based on the analysis of the discourse (Critical Discourse Analysis - CDA-, Chiapello & Fairclough, 2002), which allowed to collect the diversity of the answers, different points of view and qualified opinions.

The participants had previously received by email the guidelines for the topic discussion, that is, the evolution of tourism and oenology in the territory. The choice of the participants was due to their knowledge of the tourism and oenologic sector (managers of two public institutions: Turisme del Bages and Pla del Bages DO), the responsible of the Natural Park of Sant Llorenç del Munt i l'Obac and 3 cellar owners. The extensive professional experience and diversity of disciplines of the participants enriched the work team and the points of view, in order to develop a data collection as comprehensive and diverse as possible.

Moreover, it has been analyzed data collected from these aforementioned public institutions that have provided the context to develop the guidelines for the interviews. And finally, the participant observation of the owners of bagesterradevins.cat during the tourist visits in the wine cellars of the area and the analysis of the demand's interests. All these methods are included under the global term ethnographic methods that are the base of the design-thinking



tool to create business value.

The case of Pla de Bages wine area

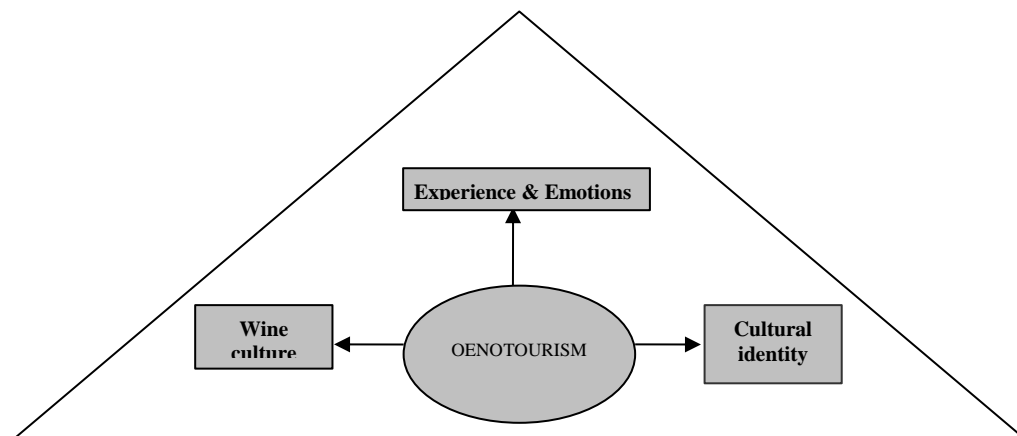
The Bages area is a Catalan region of wine, with the DO Pla de Bages (since 1995) and the development of wine tourism from its wineries and other leisure enterprises. The certification of a DO shapes a very marked and unique identity, something that many other regions of wine lack and which gives it a specific added and differentiated value.

The wine production of the Pla de Bages Denomination of Origin extends between some mountainous formations that have been declared Natural Park. So this region has a prominent role not only for its wines, but also for the landscape. Furthermore, it should be noted that the region has been declared *Geopark of Central Catalonia* (in 2012). A Geopark has a remarkable geological heritage and carries out a development project based on its tourism promotion, with initiatives of conservation and dissemination, and that favor socio-economic and cultural development at the local level.

As for tourism and wine, the 12 Bages wineries have own vineyards and produce wines impregnated with balsamic notes of lavender, thyme and rosemary. The autochthonous grape variety is the *Picapoll*. Through this grape variety, it is produced a fruity white wine with a fresh aroma, splendid texture and personality. This grape has become a symbol of Bages' identity since it is the only place in Spain where this precious variety is cultivated. As for the black grapes, it highlights the indigenous varieties black *Picapoll*, *Sumoll* and *Mandó*, which help to consolidate the particular profile of the area. Furthermore, this section is complemented by unique architectural constructions of dry stone that is large jars built for decades by wine producers in the region.

Following the aforementioned tourist strategic aspects, the pillars of the oenotourism in Bages are the wine culture, the cultural identity and the proposed tourist experience and emotional activities. The Figure 1 shows these pillars.

Figure 1. Pillars of successful oenotourism development



Source: Own elaboration

All these strategic aspects have been taken into account by bagesterradevins.cat when



designed its main wine activity. Bagesterradevins.cat is the pioneer company in the Bages linked to oenologic tourism. It has developed an oenotouristic product based on visits to the wine large jars. These large jars are located at the foot of the ancient vineyards. These jars are unique and unusual architectural heritage that explain a very relevant period in the region's wine history, when due to the arrival of phylloxera in Europe, Bages became one of the country's largest wine producing areas. These visits intend to connect the region vineyard reality with its past through the "journey" offered by the landscape and these dry stone forgotten constructions, recently recovered. The connection is made on the way when the visitor can imagine the jars in a landscape full of vineyards (now only populated with pine trees and some young oaks), explaining the use of these constructions, their particularities and the reasons that make them unique, to end up enjoying a tasting with the DO Pla de Bages wines and gastronomic products of the area. This historical-gastronomic configuration of the activity, besides the experiential and emotional level, allows highlighting the identity of the current winegrowers, their wineries and their wines, the socioeconomic situation that explains their characteristics, and even the use of varieties in their wines.



Large wine jars

In that case, walking through the Bages wine large jars, visitors connect with the past, the identity and the history of the local residents. They imbibe the idiosyncrasy of the old wine producers, participate on the reconstruction of the history, taste DO wines, local cheese and cold meat and have a fun time, talking about so many interesting things. All these set of aspects make the moment becomes special, magic, and memorable.

Finally, Turisme del Bages, the public administration responsible of the tourism promotion in the area, is working on a tourist strategic plan adding these variables in its proposals, trying to point out the identity, culture and gastronomy of the territory. The starting point has been bagesterradevins.cat. To surprise, to move visitors is the key.



Conclusions, proposals, recommendations

The use of design thinking in the tourist products is perceived as totally necessary. The current trend and tourists' interest centered on emotional tourism activities make totally mandatory the use of ethnographic methodologies to create innovative experiences.

Design thinking is a tool that allows the development of new products and services in which emotion and memorability are contemplated, since empathy is the basis of any creation. Design thinking is projected as indispensable to current tourism challenges, where emotions and life experiences are essential, for which empathy in the process of creation and design are key aspects.

The cultural context, the geographic, social and historical environment of a destination, the particular idiosyncrasy of each territory is essential elements in the design and creation of products, either in the starting phase or the consolidation and saturation phases. For all these phases, this strategic tool serves to find ingenious business tourism opportunities.

Tourism strategic plans are regularly developed in public administrations and serve as a reference and support for private businesses. In the case of the Bages area, the recent strategic plan proposal takes as reference the inspiration of a private company in the creation of oenologic products and experiences. The most linked municipalities to the wine region lead this Bages strategic tourism plan. Bagesterradevins.cat is the company that took profit of the opportunity and firstly created the identity wine tour. Tourislab is the consulting company that is elaborating the tourism dynamization plan. This strategic plan is developed, in part, from the private initiative and the entrepreneurial project of bagesterradevins.cat and gives form to projects that necessarily involve different organizations, public and private. The need to create synergies between different products and entities is critical.

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