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**Article**

## The Food and Wine Tourism: A Resource for a New Local Development Model

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THE FOOD AND WINE TOURISM: A RESOURCE  
FOR A NEW LOCAL DEVELOPMENT MODELGrazia Calabrò<sup>1\*</sup> and Simone Vieri<sup>2</sup><sup>1)</sup> University of Messina, Italy<sup>2)</sup> University La Sapienza, Rome, Italy**Please cite this article as:**

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**Abstract**

Any human activity needs to realize conditions purposeful to the economic objectives to be pursued and to do this, needs to modify the original environmental equilibrium. These situations are clearly observable in agricultural activities, whose development has often determined an “artificialisation” so intense to change the original appearance of entire areas.

The evolution of the territorial role of agriculture has implicated the coexistence among various economic activities, some of which have gained benefits from the “artificialisation” realized by farmers. It is the case of touristic activities and food services which take advantages from the beauty and from the attractiveness of landscapes shaped by agricultural activities.

The purpose of this paper is to verify how, for territorial realities where tourist offer found its main basis on contexts realized by agriculture, the set of economic activities can take advantages from the sustainable use of the same resource and, therefore, it can contribute to its development. To this aim, we'll take as an example the recent development of food and wine tourism, in Italy, as an important expression of tangible socio-economic systems based on the enhancement of local resources.

**Keywords:** agriculture, tourism, territorial resources, food and wine tourism, sustainability.

**JEL Classification:** O13, Q01, Q13, L83.

**Introduction**

Any human activity needs to realize purposeful conditions to its best development. This means to intervene in the original environmental equilibrium in order to make it mainly functional to the economic objectives to be pursued.

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This is particularly significant in the economic sectors having a close and complex link with the environment.

These situations are clearly observable in agricultural activities, whose development has often determined an “artificialisation” so intense to change the original appearance of entire areas. For example, the agricultural landscapes are the result of these prolonged and incisive human actions aimed at creating the best conditions to carry out agricultural activities.

For too long time, the territorial role of agriculture is no more that of economically leading sector but it has become a distinguishing element. This evolution, that marks the transition from agriculture systems to rural ones, has lead agriculture to share its rooms with other economic activities, some of which have gained benefits from the “artificialisation” realized by farmers. It is the case of touristic activities and food services which take advantages from the beauty and, therefore, from the attractiveness of landscapes shaped by agricultural activities hundreds of years old.

If in an agrarian economy the “artificialisation” realized by farmers was an agricultural productive resource, in the modern rural economies the same works become both economic resource for several other economic activities and common goods as an expression of not only economic values (Vieri, 2012).

Such a development imposes a significant change, both of the relevance attributable to territorial resources and the approach to be implemented in order to guarantee their responsible use.

In the past agricultural economy, the maintenance of the balances functional to the development of productive activities, realized through “artificialization” were assured by a conservative approach (Dwyer, et al., 2007); in the modern rural economies, where numerous economic activities contribute to the use of the same resources, their responsible use can be guaranteed only by a dynamic approach through the systemic and shared participation of all stakeholders. This means the realization of stakeholders’ sustainable behaviours, aimed at assuring the use of the same resources in the name of a common interest.

This last approach assumes the implementation of territorial development systems based on the creation of integrated socio-economic models aimed at generating widespread wealth through the enhancement of local resources.

In Italy, the potentialities offered by agritourism and, in particular, by wine and food tourism go in this direction. For these touristic activities, the rural landscape is the main resource and the maintenance of its equilibrium represents not only a priority but the way through which the use of it as economic resource could be sustainable.

The complex of economic activities representing tourist offer in rural contexts is, therefore, asked to adopt behaviours inspired by a common interest that is identifiable not only in the conservation but, above all, in the exploitation of resources deriving from the interaction between agricultural activity and natural environment.

In this sense, in the territories where tourist offer is based on agricultural outputs, it is necessary to apply development models oriented to continuously look for new equilibrium aimed at guaranteeing the responsible and sustainable use of local resources.

Therefore, territorial care assumes a fundamental tourist value as it safeguards beauty, and thus tourist attractive, and influences quality perception.

In this context, food and wine tourism, in Italy, can be considered the most important expression of the implementation of socio-economic development systems based on the enhancement of local resources.

Tourism takes the parameter of quality perception on the territorial context and, at the same time, as common element to be defended by the different economic activities, that insist on it, with the aim to guarantee mutual conveniences.

### **1. The sustainability of tourism through the equilibrium among the environmental components**

The traditional model of tourism development, characterised by “consumption” of environmental resources is open to strong criticism.

As for any human activity, tourism is an economic sector strongly dependent on environment for its development. In the case of tourism, the dependence is stronger because of the multimodal relationship between tourism and environment, according to which, in tourism, the environment is both subject and object of the economic activity and depending on their interaction, the result can be exploitation or depreciation.

As consequence, it is urgent the need to maintain an equilibrium among the different components of territorial context, in order to guarantee the long-term use, productivity and sustainability (Buckley, 2012).

When we decide to make some areas useful for tourism, and, consequently, to use the territory as a basic resource of economic activity, this implicates, inevitably, an environmental modification that on the basis of management procedures must be expressed in “imbalance”, that is exploitation, or it can lead to a “new dynamic equilibrium” that changes, without distortion, the original one, converting it in development.

Tourism sustainability is strictly connected to continuous look for new equilibrium not based on conservative approach, but on a dynamic one. The dynamic approach, thanks to the interaction among the different territorial components and to the will to maintain alive economic activities in order to make them expression of the context in which they operate, is better suitable to the market evolutions.

The promotion of a socio-economic-cultural context that ties together the different components of territorial realities, being *the facto* expression of identity and uniqueness, represents touristic attractiveness, it is the main element on which a well-balanced relationship between tourism and environment must be based (Calabrò and Vieri, 2014).

Not by chance, what is attractive from a touristic point of view is the set of intrinsic and extrinsic factors that, as a whole, contribute to determine what for everybody is the satisfaction of a specific need (Kneafsey, 2001). It can be said that beauty is an essential parameter of quality and, as such, not an abstract concept but the result of a path based on the care and respect of surrounding environment.

Therefore, the relationship connecting economy and society should not be based on exploitation and wealth concentration phenomena but on a renovated growth strategy,

based on an alternative development system, less oriented to specific interests and more attentive to the conditions of the context in which it operates.

The tourist development system carried out up to now, did not have the care and respect of nature as its fundamental value and, consequently, the beauty and quality as its main results. On the contrary, it has contributed to determine negative environmental impacts, showing to be unsustainable and the need to change direction towards an alternative tourist system based on social inclusion, adapted to the social and physical territorial structure and aimed at creating widespread prosperity (Calabrò and Vieri, 2015).

The enhancement of the peculiar characteristics of a territory provides a strong motivation for tourists to visit localities, searching for something unique and specific and coming into contact with different ways of life and thought. Tourism thus takes on the role of privileged instrument of territorial awareness, defence and enhancement.

The path toward sustainable tourism requires more attention to fundamental human values and a more strictly connections with the local and territorial context in which touristic activities take place. This symbiotic relationship can strengthen the effort devoted to improve the environmental quality and to emphasize the peculiarity of a territory (Croce and Perri, 2010).

The new model of tourism management has to give preference to a “moral” vision of human growth since nature degradation is, at the same time, cause and effect of social and human degradation. As consequence, safeguarding the environment means respecting both nature and mankind. Consequently, quality and beauty are the expression of how mankind set himself to the available things.

The ecological conversion of tourisms should be the result of a complex positive approach based on care, respect, knowledge and perseverance, that is an economic system different from that to which the prevalent economic and financial models are conform to.

In this context, taking into consideration that many of the territorial and high touristic value resources, as landscapes, derive from the wise and constant human activity, tourist offer in rural context becomes an opportunity for an integrated management of environmental sustainability. At the same time, economic activities with different economic objectives, take advantage from agriculture outcome and work together with a common interest (Hall, Kirkpatrick and Mitchell, 2005).

## **2. Agritourism and Food and Wine tourism: a way to promote territorial context**

In Italy, approximately 57% of surface is allocated to agriculture and forestry and, according to the National Development Plan, about 92% of the surface is classified as rural and more than 2/3 is composed by so called “rural urbanized districts”, characterized by a high residential density and a relevant weight of agriculture.

In these areas, agriculture plays an important role, not only recognizable in the production of material assets but, especially, in the contribution it gives to outline basic territorial features with a high touristic value.

We can say that agriculture can shape the characteristics of almost all national territory, even where it isn't an economic leading sector.

In this perspective, within a complex system of relationships, agriculture takes on the main role of promoter of a socio-cultural-environmental context that links the different components of territorial realities, favouring the creation of a system, which is expression of identity and uniqueness, and which common objective is the territorial strategic and sustainable management aimed at creating wealth and well-being. In this sense, working in a sustainable way implies a responsible and equilibrate use of territorial characteristics (Cairol et al., 2009).

The spread of niche proposals, strongly oriented to the qualitative differentiation, which competitive potential lies on the territorial identity respect and on the creation of synergic relationship among different private and public stakeholders, has represented a strategic answer to the ongoing evolution in the touristic competitive scenario, in the southern part of Italy that, although very attractive, has not been able to well exploit its resources.

The differentiation in tourism has been realized with the agritourism, in general, and, with Food and Wine tourism in particular.

In Italy, in 2014, the number of agritourism is increasingly steady, passing from 20,897 in 2013 to 21,744 in 2014; 847 more respect to the previous year (+4.1%).

Compared with 2013, the number of agritourism has increased more rapidly in the South (+13.1%) and slowly and modestly in the North (+2.4%) and in the centre of Italy (+1.7%).

Between 2013 and 2014, the growth in farms holiday number has been more concentrated in the Southern regions (+486 firms) than in Northern and Central regions (+239 firms).

Tuscany and South Tyrol, especially the province of Bolzano, with 4,052 and 3,145 firms respectively, represent the part of Italy in which agritourism is historically more significant and developed.

The majority of agritourism (1 on 3, about 35%) are managed by women.

In particular, in 2014, the number of agritourism managed by women increased in the Southern part of Italy (+16.5%) as consequence of overall growth in the number of firms while it was smaller in the North (+3.7%) and in the Centre (+1%).

Tuscany is confirmed to be the region with the highest incidence of agritourism managed by women (1,637) equal to 40.4% of the regional total; it represents the 20.9% of the national total of agritourism managed by women (ISTAT, 2015).

In comparison with the 2010 agricultural census, out of the total of farms, agritourism are more widespread in the North (47.2% out of the 24.5% farms), in the Centre (33.5% versus 15.5%) and in mountain areas (32.5% of 17%); on the other hand, the presence of agritourism is lower in the South (19.3% of 60%) and in plain (16% of 31.6%), showing that these areas have not yet fully caught the related opportunities.

The 81.8% of the national total agritourisms offer accommodation. The 2014 has seen the number of agritourism offering accommodation increased up to 43% respect to 2013. At present, the number is 17,793.

Among these, 4,440 (about a quarter of the total) offer only accommodation, 8,028 (45.1%) accommodation and food services, 2,939 (16.5%) accommodation and taste and 10,298 (57.9%) enhance accommodation with other activities (riding, hiking, sport, etc.) (ISTAT, 2015).

In 2014, the turnover was of about 1,2 billion euro and its weight as support and secondary work respect to agriculture was 902,5 billion euro, showing that agritourism is an important part of supplement farmers' income (ISTAT, 2015).

Agritourism proves itself to be a typically Italian reality in which the strict link between tourism and the general management of farm, qualify the sector as a fundamental expression of multifunctionality. It is different from the other form of rural tourism ruled by other European countries.

We must not forget that the opportunity given to farmers to carry out tourism is the result of an environmental policy action, consistent with the rural development programmes, aimed at operating on carrying capacity and originated from the need to avoid the countryside depopulation and to guarantee the maintenance of activities very important to the aim of territorial defence.

The national law governing the sector, provides for agritourism to be carried out in connection and complementarity relationship with agriculture that, however, must be prevalent and aiming at guaranteeing the maintenance of soil and environmental defence initiatives through the recovery of rural building heritage, safeguarding landscape peculiarity and encouraging and incentivizing typical products, quality productions and related food and wine traditions (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2006).

These objectives have been reached through the diversification of the services offered by means of integrated and differentiated tourist packages, focused to better qualify agritourism with regard to the territory in which it is practised.

In this sense, it is interesting the recent appeal towards the food and wine tourism, which has enriched the panorama of national tourist offer (Du Rand and Heath, 2006).

Food and wine tourism rests its attraction on the enormous "gastronomic heritage" available in Italy, that in January 2016, boasts of 278 of Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) and 523 wines with geographical names (European Union, 2015).

Food and wine heritage represents, after art and culture, the parameter of Italian destinations choice for 24.7% of Italian tourists and for the 25.1% of foreign ones, with the greater effect of European tourists (25.6%) respect to extra European (20.8%) (Osservatorio Nazionale sul Turismo, 2013).

The economic impact of incoming and outgoing tourism on Italian agribusiness sector was about 11 billion euro in 2013, that is the 16% of the tourists total expenditure, equal to 73 billion euro. Among these, about 3 billion euro were the direct and induced wine tourism turnover (Pantini, 2014).

The most interesting aspect of the phenomena is linked to the fact that the touristic experience, to be perceived in a positive way, cannot be separated from the territorial context in which it is conducted that, if well organized and preserved, gives to the product an added value, diversifying and making it unique and irreproducible (Sidati, Kastenholz and Bianchi, 2015; Asero and Patti, 2009).

Moreover, "where" the tourist fruition is experienced, meaning the territory in all its environmental and social components, influences the overall opinion about the quality of

wine holiday higher than purely tourism services (Osservatorio Nazionale sul Turismo, 2013).

In other words, the territorial context takes on an active role throughout the business organization; it becomes not only the “physical context” where the entrepreneurial activities take place, but it is an integral part of economic activity too and it can contribute to its success.

Not by chance, the reputation of a territory is itself an element of quality perception like services and products offered.

It is particularly true regarding the wine sector for which the territorial component has a determining influence both on the specificity and qualitative characteristics and the best presentation on the market in terms of image (Ab Karim and Geng–Qing Chi, 2010).

These considerations show how a mutual thrust mechanism between agricultural sector and tourist industry can represent a stimulus for local development (Kotler, 2002).

For example, Italy is a Country with great wine vocation. The grapevine is a perennial farming that plays an essential role in maintenance and conservation of rural areas. Its positive impact on landscape is explicated in the limitation of soil erosion, the flow of surface water and through the stabilization of the hill areas against the landslides.

Together with this important environmental role which is typical of agriculture there are also social and economic implications resulting from the fact that the realization of vineyards implicates the creation of landscapes of immeasurable beauty as result of the skilful work of farmers. They become attractive from a touristic point of view and, at the same time, they produce an exclusive and distinctive product- the wine- whose organoleptic characteristics, typicalness and brand awareness on the market are strictly linked to the context and the production modality, expression of a historical-environmental-cultural value (Castriota and Del Mastro, 2008).

As consequence, a product will be the more unique and typical the more ascribable to the territory of origin (Ciasullo and Festa, 2012).

These elements are so strictly connected that from the care and the beauty of an area derive the social, economic and environmental value of the product (Alant and Bruwer, 2004). Not by chance, for about 60% of food and wine tourists, vineyards contribute to give uniqueness and beauty to a landscape and makes unique the quality perception of wine consumption (Pantini, 2014).

In this perspective, the wine tourist addresses himself to the wine for its intrinsic treasure and desirability in terms of contents so that wine tourism becomes a type of tourist product and, at the same time, both a way to guarantee wide growth rates and economic development in rural areas (tourist destination) and a business opportunity for wineries (Getz and Brown, 2006; Sparks, 2007).

In this context, food and wine tourism can enable wide room for growth in rural areas, in terms of income and economic opportunities, but also employment objectives (Boyne and Hall, 2004).

In spite of above mentioned considerations, Italy has not fully yet exploited all the opportunities related to wine tourism. Out of the total of about 20 million arrivals in the

wine tourism section on a worldwide level, only 3 million are those in Italy. This quota seems rather small compared to the potentialities of Italy and this is partly due to the organizational fragmentary nature and rather small companies size; but to the lack of synergies a synergies and marketing actions able to create a strong territorial brand too that makes food and wine tourism an attractive and competitive resource (Morgan, Pritchard and Pride, 2011).

In this sense, a way to overcome the identified obstacles and guarantee a common path towards sustainability and wealth needs that provides individuals a different land use, aimed at the use of new forms of tourism.

The territory should be understood in educative sense, as a cultural tool which would provide a historical interpretation of its identity by means of gastronomic and oenological heritage and landscape attractions.

The identity becomes the primary component around which all the secondary components (services, infrastructures, business) have to be built and through which the territory, as a whole, will benefit in terms of positive externalities.

In this direction, great opportunities can arise from initiatives already put in place but not yet fully exploited such as the Wine Routes, about 154 that involves about 1,450 municipalities and 3,300 farms (ISTAT, 2015).

The Wine Routes were born in 1999 and can represent the tool trough which wine lands and related productions may be divulged, marketed and consumed in the form of tourist facilities.

They were made with the aim to promote the agricultural sector strongly in crisis making it more dynamic and differentiated.

In the light of the experience of Wine Routes, Taste Routes were developed through which those territories, who identify themselves in a particular identity or product, join together in order to launch initiatives direct to promote, divulge and market the territories and their products.

It is evident that such an initiative, to develop its potentiality, needs starting up a common and shared path towards sustainability and widespread wealth whose foundation is the organization and involvement of all the stakeholder potentially interested.

## **Conclusions**

The problem of sustainability, albeit continuously important, comes down particularly for the touristic activities carried out outside the towns, that, consequently, operating across contexts with particular environmental and socio-economic characteristics are considered to be rural.

The territory represents a resources and a reality to be managed and then needs of the development of a system that puts together stakeholders and the activities that reciprocally take advantages from it. Both agriculture, through the offer of products and landscapes, and tourism that founds in the territorial identity the best way to differentiate its offer towards sustainability, require synergies to reciprocally maintain a balanced development dynamism. These synergies have to be founded on the enhancement of resources present

locally. In Italy, an example in this direction is food and wine tourism, a high potential branch in a Country characterized by a wide range of gastronomic heritage deriving from climate and geographical dynamics but, especially, from different cultural and historical contexts that have outlined territorial identity and generated products including characteristics and traditions of a specific area.

The need to make stakeholders working together is resulted in initiatives aimed at promoting synergic actions based on the enhancement of resources present at local level.

An example of this are the Wine Routes and Taste Routes, even if there is still much to do in order to make them and any other initiatives more effective.

The use for tourism of areas modified by agriculture is a great opportunity to support production and quality in agriculture and, at the same time, to create a mutual benefit to the activities that see the possibility to exploit the agricultural result in order to satisfy the new needs and to differentiate tourist offer.

Investing in excellence, also thanks to the opportunities given by socio-structural funds for 2014-2020 in order to develop initiatives linked to the care of the territory and landscape, organizing stakeholders as a system, can allow the realization of complementarity and synergies useful for continuously search for the “dynamic equilibria”, working efficiently towards sustainability.

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