“Wine routes” as strategic means for the development of wine tourist supply
A comparative analysis between two Italian regions.

Luigi GIORDANO, Jody TUBI¹, Rita Salvatore², Emilio CHIODO²

¹’Gabriele d’Annunzio’ University, Chieti – Pescara; ² University of Teramo echiodo@unite.it

“Wine routes” have been defined by the Italian legislation (Law No.286/99) as “tourist routes, marked and promoted by specific signposts, along which natural, cultural and environmental attractions, vineyards and wineries opened to visitors are present”.

According to an “objective” description, a wine route is a physical network connecting different points of a territory, a thematic path signed through signposting and promotional activities. Each wine itinerary is characterized by the following elements: products (wines, vines, typical products), region (physical space, human space, history and cultural values), ecosystem (landscape and environmental quality), subjects (wine producers, tourist operators, associations, institutions).

In a broader sense, instead, wine routes constitute an organisational model to manage territories development and to organise the supply of wine and food tourism. For this reason, they can represent “subjective elements” that cross the landscape in a functional manner, offering to wine tourists new experiences, knowledge and needs satisfaction (Hausmann, 2005). With special concern to stakeholders, rather than simply marking an itinerary, wine routes may represent:

- A network strategy, that is an integrated project developed by a “network of enterprises”, aiming to take advantage in an organised manner of a production process for tourist purposes (Berti et al., 2011);
- A territorial marketing tool, that is a set of collective actions driven by both public and private actors in order to attract new economic activities, to favour sustainable development of local enterprises and to promote a positive image of an area (Texier et al., 1992).

As far as all these aspects are concerned, wine routes clearly go beyond the simple function of a tourist itinerary. They are coordination structures for creating and managing networks of public and private agents in wine regions, aiming at promoting regional development and marketing (Bràs et al. 2010, Bregoli et al., 2014).

Nowadays Italy is the European country with the largest number of wine itineraries (Pastor, 2006; Vaquero Piñeiro, 2015), counting 139 wine routes, compared with 19 in Spain, 15 in France and 11 in Portugal (Vaquero Piñeiro, 2015).
To analyse the strategic role of wine routes for the development of Italian wine tourist supply, a direct survey has been realised among wineries and wine growers in two of the most important producing Italian regions, Abruzzo and Tuscany. Despite the similar level of wine production (in terms of hectares of surface under vines and hectolitres of produced wine) the tourist development of the two regions differs considerably, as their wine tourism organisation does. The survey, realised through a web-based questionnaire, has aimed at analysing, on one side, the characteristics of the wine tourism and, on the other, the management of the wine routes in the two regions. The main aspects investigated are: the wine tourists’ profile and their purchasing behaviour; the tourist services offered by the wineries and the initiatives realised by the wine routes; the strengths and weaknesses and the development potential of the wine routes; the level of satisfaction and the availability of the wine enterprises for further investments in the wine routes.

The respondents were 24 wine enterprises (over 42) operating along the 6 wine routes of the Abruzzo Region, and 20 wine enterprises in the Tuscany Region (of which 12 belonging to the “Chianti Classico wine and olive oil route”). The average dimension in terms of number of working units between the two samples is similar (14.5 working unit vs. 13.5).

The main results and highlights of the analysis can be synthetized as follow:
- Even if the offer in terms of products (wine, olive oil, typical products) and services (guided tours in cellars and vines, direct selling, taste itineraries, agritourist and didactical activities, natural and cultural itineraries, cooking classes) does not differ substantially between the two groups of enterprises, the average effect over the revenues is considerably stronger for Tuscany enterprises than for the Abruzzo ones.
- Wine tourist flows differ substantially in terms of ratio between Italian and foreign visitors (with a daily expenditure from foreign visitors higher than from Italian ones), seasonality (for a comparison with the Spanish case, see Escolar & Morueco, 2011) and distribution of visitors during the week, favouring the Tuscany area.
- The organisational level of the wine routes also differ substantially. Investments in Abruzzo wine routes are mainly in infrastructures (i.e. signposts and itineraries) meanwhile in Tuscany they are oriented towards immaterial and marketing activities (i.e. website management, press offices, contacts with tour operators, press and blog tours). A consequence is that in Tuscany many visitors reach the wine enterprises moving along a wine route (85% of positive answers) and in Abruzzo only few (41.7%) or even none (58.3%).
- The Tuscany sample agree (80%) with the consideration that the wine routes played a substantial role in developing wine tourism at local level and farm exposure; on the contrary, the Abruzzo sample completely disagrees (87.5%).

- Meaningful differences in enterprises’ behaviour can be identified: 70% of Tuscany respondents consider the cooperation among enterprises an actual strength of the wine routes (against 29% in Abruzzo) and 70% of Tuscany enterprises (29% in Abruzzo) contributed with their own financial resources to the development of wine routes in the past years. In both situation public / private cooperation is indicated like a weakness of wine routes management.

- Nevertheless, both samples expect that investments in the wine routes could have a positive effect on enterprise revenues in the future and are available to invest their own resources (Abruzzo: 66%; Tuscany: 85%) in contributing to the wine routes strengthening.

Strong touristic appeal, together with investments in marketing and other immaterial interventions (territorial marketing strategies) and enterprises’ cooperation (network strategies) seem to be key factors of the Tuscany wine routes success, confirming the importance of embracing the broader definition of wine routes like a coordination structure for creating and managing networks more than a simple tourist itinerary construction and promotion. Tuscany experience can be considered a base for elaborating a model useful to Abruzzo and other wine regions.

Keywords: wine routes, networks, territorial marketing

JEL-Code: L2 Firm Objectives, Organization, and Behavior, M3 Marketing and Advertising, Q13 Agricultural Markets and Marketing; Cooperatives; Agribusiness

References


