

## **THE INFLUENCE OF OLIVE HERITAGE AND OLIVE TOURISM ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TERRITORIES<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract:**

The production and consumption of olive oil have a very significant impact on the social, economic, cultural, and environmental development of territories, as it can present itself as a unique and strategic “identity” product, representing a legacy of more rural communities.

In this sense, olive and olive farming heritage can be used to promote rural regions and simultaneously raise awareness among the community and tourists about the uniqueness of the regions through olive oil (presses, historical and social context, identity, etc.).

The main objective of this work is to understand how olive oil and the existing mills that produce it are understood in the consumer's decision-making process.

To achieve this objective, in the methodology used in this work, a questionnaire survey was carried out in a rural region, located in the Center of Portugal, with a strong cultural connection to olive oil.

In this work, two olive oil mills were also explored, as a case study, allowing us to understand in a particular way, the influence that the olive and olive growing heritage sustained on the dynamics of olive growing contributes to the development of rural territories.

**Keywords:** Olive and olive farming heritage, mills, olive oil, olive tourism, territorial development

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Olive tourism is multifaceted, encompassing various types of tourism (Stăncioiu, 2011; Popescu, 2011). The diverse landscapes that exist in each region offer a unique setting for olive tourism (Popescu, 2011). The potential of olive tourism is of increasing importance as the existing tourist resources in the regions, when planned effectively, could position these regions as a reference tourist destination (Vintilescu, 2014). This is a promising approach to managing sustainable tourism (Draguleasa, 2023).

Olive farming (olive tree culture), with a traditional rural base, establishes a relationship with the development of the tourist offer, giving space for the implementation of olive tourism, as some existing literature has demonstrated, with a special focus on Mediterranean countries (Cardoso & Lopes, 2022).

A region, to express its viability as a tourist destination, must emphasize activities in the recreational, natural, and cultural fields (Cocean et al., 2002). This involves defining specific objectives and strategies, starting with the study of the motivational search for resources, in terms of their functionality in tourism and their profitability in exploitation (Erdeli, Gheorghilas, 2006).

During the last few decades, tourism has become a very important economic sector for many countries, with governments paying great attention to promoting the country's image on the international market to attract visitors and thus increase the sector's contribution to the GDP. From the perspective of tourism, rurality reflects a lifestyle, a set of values, and an environment desirable for its difference, relative isolation, and pace of life, as well as for its special aesthetic qualities and spirituality (Oliver & Jenkins, 2005). Tourism is an economic sector with infinite resources, its globalization presupposes the valorization and optimized use of these resources.

The region offers complex tourist resources whose valorization, between technical and tourist equipment, in the context of protecting the quality of the geographic environment, can give rise to a tourist activity that would allow it to be placed at the top of the tourist circuit. The globalization of tourism would contribute to the region's economic growth, improving living conditions and alleviating development imbalances.

Tourist attractions are very important to support the development of local and municipal tourism because they are the basic elements of tourist products (Radisic, & Basan, 2007; Rosentraub & Joo, 2009). Natural resources represent fundamental support for the economic growth and social and tourist development of a municipality, region or country (Kongbuamai et al., 2020).

Natural resources and economic growth can be considered vital improvements in environmental quality in protected areas (Balsalobre-Lorente et al., 2018). Consequently, natural resources constitute the main source of goods and services for human and tourist activities (Robaina-Alves, et. Al., 2016), as well as construction materials for the development of tourist infrastructure in a territory.

An exaggerated consumption of natural tourist resources within protected areas could generate multiple negative effects on the environment (Hassan, et al.; 2019). For many decades, there have been discussions about environmental degradation, representing a growing concern for the world's global problems (Zafar et al., 2019).

Tourist attractions offer new possibilities for leisure, entertainment, animation, and relaxation for tourists arriving in protected areas, to satisfy all primary and secondary travel needs.

Therefore, the use of infrastructure plays a critical role in the regional tourism development process and tourist experience (Khadaroo & Seetana, 2007). Many empirical studies have demonstrated the importance of tourist infrastructure in tourism development (Louca, 2006). Overall, tourism sites can overcome an inadequate local resource base if local economies exist to support the sustainable regional tourism industry (Yang & Fik, 2014).

The attractiveness of the natural environment is achieved by several characteristics that individualize its tourist assets. Attracting many international tourists could bring economic and social benefits, but with many changes necessary for sustainable tourism, according to tourism managers (Cândeia et al., 2009). Rural tourism is considered a form of tourism that capitalizes on the natural resources of rural families, with very strong links between tourism and rural areas. In this regard, we can point out as an example the case of Spain in which olive oil and olive growing are not only an important source of economic wealth, but also symbols of its culture and gastronomy recognized both nationally and internationally (Vázquez de la Torre, Arjona, and Amador, 2014).

In this context, also in Portugal, the olive and olive-growing heritage can be used to promote rural regions and simultaneously raise awareness among the community and tourists about the singularities of the regions through olive oil (presses, historical and social context, identity, etc.). It could even be considered a new segment in the area of industrial tourism, as it can include the entire continuous process of planting, cultivating, harvesting olives, processing them in mills, and the respective oils. It has the potential to form a basis for the development and valorization of more rural regions and has strong sustainability and profitability, being a complement to other tourist products and activities (Cardoso & Lopes, 2022).

Returning to the Spanish example, it is observed that in rural areas where olives are the main source of income for resident families, proposals for activities are sought that break with the seasonality of income represented by dependence on agriculture. Oil tourism is beginning to gain ground due to its culinary tourism aspect. This is due to its uniqueness and can also be considered a sustainable rural tourism initiative (Vázquez de la Torre, Arjona, and Amador, 2014).

The creation of conditions for olive tourism and its importance for the development of rural territories can acquire an effect of singularity and differentiation. Becoming a potential rescue for the traditional olive growing collection, repositioning it in a context where more competitive tourist products are required (Cardoso & Lopes, 2022).

Entertainment and leisure activities such as the involvement of visitors in the olive picking and milling processes, as well as gastronomic tastings related to cuisines associated with this product and with traditional origins in the territory, can constitute active influencers of the olive-growing heritage and the olive tourism in the development of rural territories.

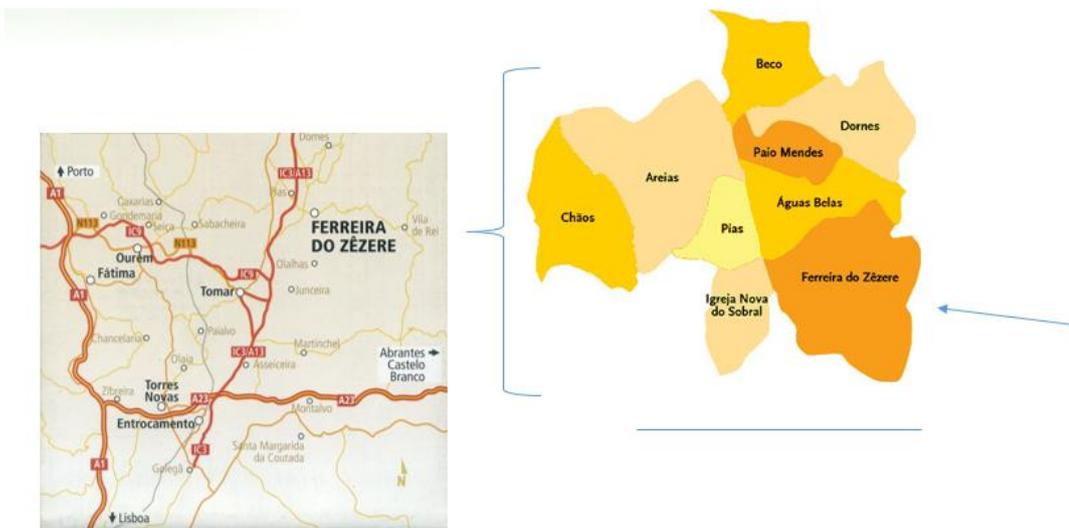
## 2. CHARACTERIZATION OF THE STUDY AREA

The study area involves the municipality of Ferreira de Zêzere, which is in the extreme north of the district of Santarém. It is a geographical transition territory between Ribatejo and Beiras, between the wetlands and the pine forests of the interior and is 150 km from Lisbon and 184 km from Porto. With an area of around 190 km<sup>2</sup>, it is made up of 7 parishes: Águas Belas, União de Freguesias de Areias, and Pias, Bêco, Chãos, Ferreira do Zêzere, Igreja Nova do Sobral, Nossa Senhora do Pranto. It is limited to the north by the municipality of Figueiró dos Vinhos, to the northeast by Sertã, to the east by Vila de Rei, to the south by Tomar, to the west by Ourém and the northwest by Alvaiázere.

It is a territory of great richness and diversity, with diverse landscapes, due to its type of forest, vegetation, soil, and agriculture. The municipality stands out for the natural and scenic beauty provided by the Zêzere River (Albufeira de Castelo de Bode) and the vast forest area that gives it excellent tourist potential.

Heritage and culture contain distinctive features of the territory that define its local identity and constitute important assets, whose contribution to the development of the municipality of Ferreira do Zêzere (Figure 1), is invaluable.

**Figure 1.** Municipality of Ferreira do Zêzere



Source: Lopes, 2024. Maps - eugostodesantarem.pt

The municipality presents a set of relevant heritage elements from different historical periods (prehistoric, Roman, Visigothic, medieval, and referring to the Order of the Templars/Order of Christ, with connection to Tomar), which constitute important points of tourist interest, together with notable historical personalities such as Alfredo Keil and Ivone Silva, whose life path is closely linked to the municipality. Concerning natural heritage, the territory is marked by the Castelo de Bode Reservoir, of unquestionable environmental, economic, and social importance. For its tourism enhancement, the Castelo de Bode Nautical Station was created, which is a center that stimulates the nautical tourist offer and other offers, existing in the municipalities covered by the reservoir (in addition to Ferreira do Zêzere, it includes the municipalities of Abrantes, Sertã, Tomar and Vila de Rei), with the aim of integrated valorization of the resources present in the territory.

The municipality also offers canoeing routes along the reservoir and routes classified as Small Route (PR), which cross several locations, passing through places of tourist interest. One of the territory's greatest challenges is the definition of integrated and strategic policies that promote the identity of the municipality and its community.

The olive-growing heritage is a significant aspect of Mediterranean culture, extending its influence on other regions (Alonso, 2013). The olive grove landscape is a unique cultural and natural heritage, representing a mix of tradition and modernity (López-Guzmán & González-Fernández, 2011).

Heritage resources linked to olive trees and olive oil require conservation. The mills existing in the municipality of Ferreira de Zêzere and the production of olive oil are relevant and should be analyzed from the point of view of their importance for the social development and environmental sustainability of rural areas.

In this sense, two olive oil mills that are currently “industrial”, but originating from traditional mills, were explored in terms of olive oil production, products, and cultural identity associated with the social and environmental development of the region. Olive and olive farming heritage also evokes images, memories, and pride, or motivates habitual consumption, while in other cases it can become a lifestyle or even a source of income.

The olive grove landscape is a paradigmatic cultural landscape, which perfectly integrates the tangible and the intangible. It is a remarkable testament to a form of exploration that dates back millennia in humanity's calendar. Olive farming also remains active today in many regions with the same techniques and traditions and, at the same time, is a thriving industry where new technologies and knowledge are applied.

### **3. INDUSTRIAL OLIVE OIL MILLS**

#### **3.1. Lagar Explazeite**

Located in Freixial, is a family business, originating from a traditional press mill, which gave way in 1997 to a modernized system of continuous extraction, the mill is a "laboratory" of creation and experimentation. For better observation when visiting the mills, it is possible to take some images of the interior and exterior of the mill and the machines used in the production of industrial olive oil (Figure 2-4).

##### **1.1. Lagar Carvalhais**

Is located in Carvalhais and is composed of an olive grove with about 17 hectares, most of which is filled by the olive crop. The predominant species is the Galega. Lagar dos Carvalhais is a modernized and automated mill. Here you can also see some images of the exterior of the mill as well, as the machinery used in the industrial manufacturing process of olive oil, such as its brand (Figure 5).

**Figure 2.** Lagar Explazeite



Source: Peres, 2023

**Figure 3.** Lagar Explazeite (inside)



Source: Explazeite

**Figure 4.** Lagar Explazeite (storage depots)



Source: Peres, 2023

**Figure 5.** Lagar dos Carvalhais (storage hopper and hammer mill)



Source: fundacaomariadiasferreira.org

The practice of olive tourism is strongly linked to the sustainable development of the most natural and rural areas, contributing to the appreciation and conservation of the unique identity of these places, through the promotion of traditional activities that can be experienced by tourists (Martins & Lopes, 2022).

In light of the above, communicating the scientific and educational values that exist or will be generated by olive tourism meets the challenge of maintaining traditional and organic production systems, which could affect influencing the business models of new entrepreneurs who value traditions and biodiversity and strengthening the role of tourists, who, by having access to more knowledge, could lead to healthier and more sustainable consumption habits and stimulate their curiosity about traditional products and rurality as a way of life, and consequently become more aware of an alternative type of tourism.

It is understood that a local tourism policy oriented towards sustainability is essential for the future development of a territory. Based on the assumption that a strategy aimed at developing the territory prioritizes the intelligent use of territorial capital, the olive grove as a tourist setting cannot fail to be integrated into a strategy to value the product (olive oil), particularly the product with distinctive characteristics.

Olive tourism and the heritage linked to the olive tree resource in its relationship with the territory brings together other cultural, industrial, rural, architectural, gastronomic, historical, social, and landscape activities. In this sense, olive farming can be seen as a tool for territorial sustainability and the dynamics between these two resources could contribute to territorial development.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

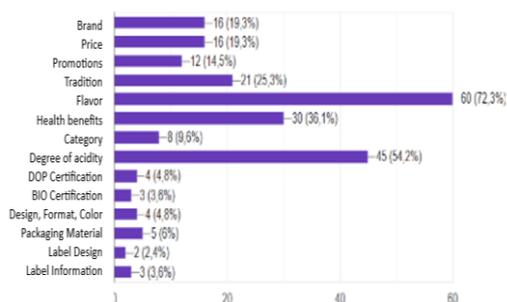
The methodology used in this work was a questionnaire carried out in Ferreira do Zêzere, a rural region, located in Central Portugal, with a strong cultural connection to olive oil. A questionnaire was administered during the months of August and September 2023 in Ferreira do Zêzere with a total of 84 respondents. The questions raised aim to understand: 1) the frequency of olive oil consumption, 2) the most consumed olive oil category, 3) what factors influence the purchase of olive oil, 4) the most consumed brand of olive oil, 5) and if it is given importance to the act of purchasing olive oil, packaging and labels.

#### 5. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

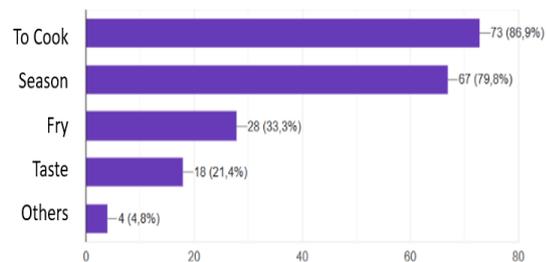
Of the respondents, 35.7% were male, while 63.1% were female. It has one level of study: 39% secondary, 20.7% bachelor's degree, 14.6% primary, and, finally, 11% professional technical training. 31.3% of respondents are married with children, 27.7% live alone, 24.1% live with their parents, and finally 9.6% live alone with children. The majority are part of the regions: 73.8% in the center, 13.1% in the metropolitan area of Lisbon, with 7.1% in the north region.

The ages fall between the following age groups: 21.7% (35-44); 20.5% (45-54); 15.7% (18-24), 14.5% (25-34), and 12% (55-64). In terms of quality, respondents evaluate the olive oil on sale in the Portuguese market as: 53.6% good quality; 35.7% average quality, and 8.3% excellent quality. We also wanted to understand what factors influence the purchase of olive oil (Figure 6), as well as for what purposes olive oil is used (Figure 7).

**Figure 6.** Factors that influence the purchase of olive oil



**Figure 7.** For what purposes is olive oil used



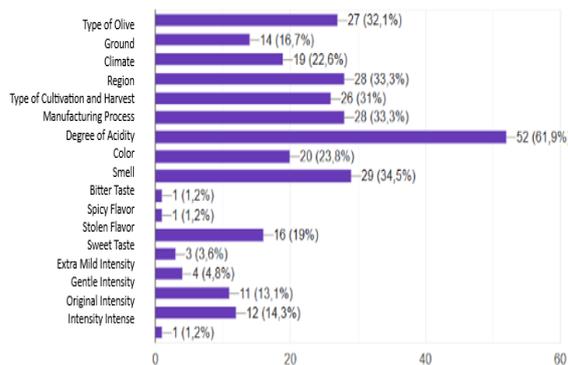
Source: Peres, 2023

It is observed that in terms of quality, the olive oil on sale in the Portuguese market is good, the factors that influence the purchase of olive oil are the flavor, degree of acidity, and health benefits. Olive oil is most used for cooking and seasoning and the

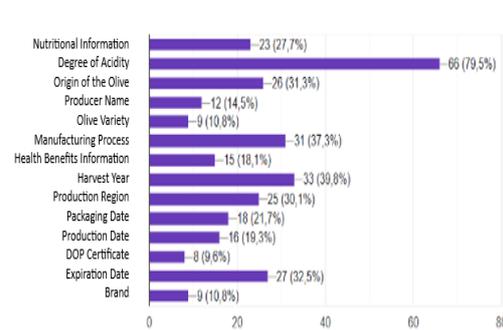
characteristics to consider important when perceiving the quality of olive oil are the degree of acidity health and smell. The most important information that appears on the label is the degree of acidity, year of harvest, and manufacturing process.

The study also tried to understand which characteristics are considered important in the perception of olive oil quality (Figure 8) and what information is considered important to be presented on the label (Figure 9).

**Figure 8.** Perception of olive oil quality



**Figure 9.** Information is important to be presented on the label



Source: Peres, 2023

On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 is “not important” and 5 “is very important”, it is considered that the production/consumption of olive oil has significant importance in the social development and environmental sustainability of territories.

The conclusions point to 41.7% (scale 4); 34.5% (scale 5) and 23.8% (scale 3). Similarly, it was also intended to understand on a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 is “not interested” and 5 is “very interested”), whether tourists/visitors are interested in getting to know the region through olive oil (presses, historical context, social, identity, etc.). The results were as follows: 48.2% (scale 4); 26.5% (scale 5) and 24.1% (scale 3), which means that the majority are interested in gaining more knowledge about the region.

Finally, as a final understanding, we intended to understand whether the respondents 1) consider that the region where they live has a strong connection to olive oil, with 71.7% answering yes and 28.9% no, and 2) know or have heard of the term olive tourism, with 73.5% answering no and 26.5% yes. It means that in parallel to this study it would be interesting to develop an awareness campaign about terminologies associated with this area of thematic involvement between olive farming and olive tourism heritage.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

In summary of this study, 63.1% of respondents are women and 73.8% are from the Central Region of Portugal. The level of studies that stands out is secondary with 39%, with 31.3% being married with children. In terms of quality, the olive oil on sale in the Portuguese market is good and the factors that influence the purchase of olive oil are the flavor, the degree of acidity, and the health benefits.

Olive oil is most used for cooking and seasoning and the characteristics to consider important when perceiving the quality of olive oil are the degree of acidity, health, and

smell. The most important information that must be presented on the label is the degree of acidity, year of harvest, and information about the manufacturing process. Also, 26.5% consider that tourists/visitors are very interested in getting to know the region through olive oil (presses, historical and social context, identity, etc.).

Regarding the production/consumption of olive oil, it is significant in the social development and environmental sustainability of territories, with 41.7% considering it important. Although Ferreira do Zêzere has a strong connection to olive oil, 73.5% do not know the term olive tourism.

In the case of the Lagares presented here in this article, integrated with the municipality of Ferreira de Zêzere, there is a communications office that is responsible for all the information that the municipality intends to make available to its audiences. This is where press releases are prepared, as well as the planning of a press conference, an inauguration, or an event. All communication and marketing are carried out by the Communication Office, which is responsible for all printing, whether posters, monthly cultural agenda in paper and digital format, flyers, press booklet, etc. posters, a monthly magazine with all events, own website, social networks (Facebook and Instagram), press and media relations. It is on the City Council website that all the news, parties, and events taking place in the municipality are displayed, thus reaching the public more quickly.

Internal communication corresponds to all communication processes that exist within an organization, particularly among its internal public. As all actions have at least one final objective, internal communications are no exception. Caroline Black (2001) points out two fundamental objectives to guarantee communication: ensuring that information spreads quickly and effectively throughout the organization; and encouraging and motivating people so that they feel truly involved and do their best. Internal audiences are all the bodies that make up the Organization, from employees to the presidential bodies and are designated as the organization's driving force. In turn, external communication takes care of the image that the company conveys to its customers and potential consumers.

The work that was investigated and which aimed to understand the influence of olive heritage and olive tourism on the development of rural territories allowed conclusions focused on results that highlight the importance of olive and olive oil heritage resources (presses, landscapes, traditional objects of olive oil production, etc.), are fundamental for the development of rural territories.

Heritage resources linked to olive trees and olive oil require valorization and conservation dynamics. The mills existing in the municipality of Ferreira de Zêzere and the production of olive oil are relevant and must be analyzed from the point of view of their importance for the socioeconomic development and environmental sustainability of rural areas.

Olive farming and the expansion of olive tourism bring together a set of cultural, industrial, rural, architectural, gastronomic, historical, social, and landscape activities. It is concluded that olive oil and its production and consumption are fundamental support for territorial socio-economic growth.

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