

ABSTRACT

This study examines how an established wine tourism subarea continues to adapt to an increasingly competitive wine tourism destination market from the perspective of wineries in Spain's Rioja Alta subarea. Furthermore, aligned with the chosen inductive approach, the study develops a reflective model through considering the dynamic capabilities approach as a theoretical foundation to examine the various dimensions affecting wine tourism. Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with predominantly winery managers, on-site observations were conducted. In addition, wineries' archival information was examined. Strong alignment between wineries' strategies and reconfiguration/transformation were revealed. This dynamic capabilities-related cluster was manifested through "customisation," where wineries offered unique product/service elements, thereby adding value to the winery visitation. The developed model highlights important implications for the long-term competitiveness of a region's wine tourism.

Introduction

In the last decade, the body of wine tourism research has significantly diversified, highlighting the development, potential opportunities, and challenges, in both Old World (e.g., Canovi et al., [2020](#); Gómez et al., [2015](#)) and New World wine regions (Bruwer et al., [2013](#); Jones et al., [2015](#)). One key theme emerging from wine tourism research is the significance of the destination image for wine regions. Echtner and Ritchie ([1991](#)) conceptualize destination image as "not only the perceptions of individual destination attributes but also the holistic impression made by the destination" (p. 7). Pratt and Sparks ([2014](#)) explain that destination image comprises functional, tangible, and intangible attributes together with those of an affective nature, such as emotions or feelings toward an activity or destination. Indeed, as Williams ([2001](#)) posits, the ability of regions to project an appealing image is fundamental in attracting visitors.

Concerning wine tourism, Scherrer et al. ([2009](#)) underscore the rural dimension, where most wine tourism activities take place, the historic associations with winemaking, and the involvement of different tourism sectors developing a holistic and coordinated approach, as important factors for developing a wine tourism destination image. More recently, R.M. Back et al. ([2021](#)) confirmed visitor satisfaction as a compelling

reason for revisitation. However, as a study in the Okanagan Valley (Canada) by Carmichael and Senese ([2012](#)) illustrates, the production of wines can sometimes be relegated to extensive focus on wine tourism experiences, with tasting rooms, festivals, winery tours, dining, concerns, or on-site accommodation becoming more widespread. With the increasing number of wine regions (Carmichael & Senese, [2012](#)), operating in a very competitive and changing wine industry (Morrison & Rabellotti, [2017](#)), and alongside changing consumer trends (Pomarici et al., [2017](#)), extending the perceived appeal of a wine region, and considering ways of doing so, are crucial to many wineries' present and future competitiveness, survival, and long-term sustainability.

While the extant literature discussing destination image in wine tourism is very valuable, equally important is keeping abreast of potential developments in the destination image front. Moreover, identifying some of the contributing factors in preserving the wine destination image, which include improvements or introducing new ways of captivating visitors, could inform and provide valuable insights to already established, as well as still developing, wine regions that are seeking to adapt and grow. For example, Famularo et al. ([2010](#)) recognize the strategic value of investigating consumers' self-education of wine, their information seeking process, and their interaction with wine tourism. Understanding these elements will not only enable wine marketers to distinguish product offerings, but also implement strategies based on wine and wine tourism knowledge that can subsequently enhance awareness and importance of each wine region (Famularo et al., [2010](#)).

The main objective of the present study is to extend previous research on the wine tourism destination and examine adaptation strategies undertaken by wineries in light of more recent contemporary issues and changes. Moreover, by examining the following overarching research question (RQ), the study seeks to make contributions to wine tourism literature, and more specifically, research on wine tourism destination image:

RQ1: How do wineries operating in an already established wine subarea seek to maintain their established image as a wine tourism destination?

The geographic context of the study is the subarea of Rioja Alta, northern Spain. This subarea is one of three in La Rioja wine region, with the other

two being Rioja Alavesa, and Rioja Oriental (Gil et al., [2020](#)). While visitor numbers are much more modest compared to other countries, such as Australia or the United States, wine tourism in Spain has become a highly favored wine tourism destination (Gázquez-Abad et al., [2015](#)). Figures from the Wine Routes of Spain ([2020](#)), indicate that, in 2019, 3.07 million individuals traveled to 31 wine routes across the nation, with 72.9% representing winery visitors, and 27.1% wine museums. As illustrated in Table 1, in 2019, Rioja Alta (313,497 visitors) ranked only fourth behind Spain's most visited wine routes, with several wine routes experiencing rapid growth.

Table 1. Spanish wine route visitation – 2019 Figures

[CSVDisplay Table](#)

From a theoretical perspective, there are clear links between efforts to preserve the destination image of a wine tourism region, against the reconfiguration/transformation processes of the dynamic capabilities approach (e.g., Teece, [2007](#)). These links suggest the usefulness of considering the dynamic capabilities framework as the focal discourse of the study. In line with the inductive approach undertaken, the study will also develop a model to extend the understanding of processes involved in preserving a wine region's destination image, and how these can make a contribution to the wine region's competitiveness.

Literature Review

The Dynamic Capabilities Approach

The dynamic capabilities approach (DCA) is an extension of the resource-based view (RBV) of the firm (Paarup Nielsen, [2006](#)), which predicates the strategic significance of valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable, and non-substitutable resources contributing to a firm's competitive and sustained competitive advantage (Barney, [1991](#)). Moreover, within the RBV paradigm, firms are perceived as a combination of resources, including skills, knowledge, and technological expertise (Paarup Nielsen, [2006](#)). Similarly, the DCA emphasizes the importance of high-level competencies of a firm (Teece, [2012](#)). These competencies enable the building, integrating, and reconfiguring of competences in order "to address rapidly

changing environments” (D. J. Teece et al., [1997](#), p. 516). These competencies can help determine the extent, or the speed at which “a firm’s particular resources can be aligned and realigned to match the requirements and opportunities of the business environment” (Teece, [2012](#), p. 1395).

Alongside the expansion of trade, the significance of dynamic capabilities has increased (Teece, [2012](#)). The growth of trade has resulted in higher degrees of specialization, as well as the need for prompt competitive responses (Teece, [2012](#)). More specifically, dynamic capabilities critically emerge through three essential adjustments or clusters of activities (Teece, [2012](#)) presented as follows:

1) Sensing relates to the assessment or identification of opportunities (Teece, [2012](#)) as well as threats. Sensing fundamentally consists of interpreting, learning, creating, and scanning for the availability of opportunities (Teece, [2007](#)). Typically, investments in research and its associated efforts as well as initiatives are a necessity in the sensing process (Teece, [2007](#)). Among other forms of sensing, Teece ([2018](#)) explains that for the more innovative enterprises an initial step entails the sensing of customers who have unmet needs; this early activity can also be an initiating step for the firm to change or develop a business model.

2) Seizing consists of the mobilization of resources to capitalize on the “sensing” activity, addressing opportunities and needs (D. Teece et al., [2016](#)). Thus, there is a strong linkage between the sensing and seizing clusters (Katkalo et al., [2010](#)) beyond mobilizing strategies, to include organizational infrastructure, and the requisite resources needed to exploit existing opportunities.

3) Reconfiguring is conceptualized as the ability of firms to bring about strategic moves (Mikalef & Pateli, [2017](#)), emphasizing continuous renewal (Katkalo et al., [2010](#)), while similarly being underpinned by incremental innovations that help the firm to adapt, and to adjust to new routines in light of changes in the business environment (Teece, [2009](#)). Moreover, because capabilities are built on individual as well as collective skills, and because these tend to change (Teece, [2012](#)), firms with strong dynamic capabilities are able to build and renew assets and resources, as well as reconfigure them to respond to changes in the market, innovating as required (Teece, [2018](#)).

The Dynamic Capabilities Approach and Wine Tourism

Sensing: In the domain of wine tourism, and in line with Teece ([2018](#)), sensing could emerge through identifying and satisfying the needs and wants of existing or new visitor/consumer groups. Moreover, understanding the importance of various inter-related aspects that can draw visitors' attention and interest to a wine region is a key antecedent of opportunity identification. Brown and Getz ([2005](#)), and Getz and Brown ([2006](#)) suggest both tangible and intangible elements, such as a region's natural scenery, the local culture, the quality of the wines, or the potential educational value that the winery experience can provide. In addition, Sparks ([2007](#)) emphasizes the value in creating uniqueness and distinctiveness, namely, through wine tasting opportunities where unique wines to the region can be consumed.

In the context of Spain, where the present study was conducted, sensing takes different pathways. First, Marzo-Navarro and Pedraja-Iglesias ([2009](#)) explain the significant potential of Spain to benefit from wine tourism, where the nation "is taking the first steps to develop wine tourism" (p. 830). This potential is based upon Spain's leadership as one of the world's major wine producers, tourism "powerhouses" (Marzo-Navarro & Pedraja-Iglesias, [2009](#)).

In featuring the case of a traditional Spanish winery, Park et al. ([2019](#)) identify various pointers that suggest specific ways in which sensing and future opportunities are connected. For instance, sensing is highlighted through the costly redevelopment (€70 million) of a "City of Wine" at the Marqués de Riscal winery, where a new, innovating visitor experience is offered, notably, through "stunning architecture," as well as added services and amenities (Park et al., [2019](#)). Marqués de Riscal is located in Elciego, a town in the Rioja Alavesa subarea, which borders Rioja Alta. The physical appeal of the winery as a potential "sensing" factor within the same winery context is further reinforced by Bufquin et al. ([2018](#)), and even in research conducted in Australia (Bruwer & Gross, [2017](#)). Also, from an experiential viewpoint, recent research (Park et al., [2019](#)) recognizes the fickle nature of winery visitors, whose revisit intention tends to decrease after initial visitation. Nevertheless, highly satisfied visitors' intention to revisit is less affected as compared to visitors who perceived less satisfaction (Park et al., [2019](#)).

Seizing can be associated with the successes that emanate from this leisure activity. In fact, and as with sensing, the quality of wines, service, and experiences, and the opportunity to taste quality wines emerged as the prevalent motivational elements among winery visitors (Brown & Getz, [2005](#)). Similarly, the quality of the wines (R.M. Back et al., [2021](#)), or the importance of cooperation between wine and tourism industries in marketing and developing wine tourism (Hall et al., [2009](#)) are proven key success factors.

From the perspective of a developing Spanish wine region, Scherrer et al. ([2009](#)) agree that the creation of value-added associations and knowledge of the links between rurality and history behind winemaking, are vital in achieving success in wine tourism development. Similarly, Serra-Cantalops et al. ([2021](#)) notice the promising potential for wine tourism development, and its contribution to rural development, in the Balearic Islands. More in general, however, there is evidence that Spain has come a long way to “seize” opportunities from wine tourism. First, at a national level, Vorobiova et al. ([2019](#)) recognize that, “since the mid-2000s, Spain has been boosting its promotion of wine tourism” (p. 357). Second, and at a regional level, R.M. Back et al. ([2021](#)) agree that La Rioja made strides to become an important tourist destination. Third, at a subarea level, Vorobiova et al. ([2019](#)) note the well-established festivals and traditions that strongly connect local wine production, for instance, illustrated by June’s “wine battle,” which takes place in Haro, Rioja Alta.

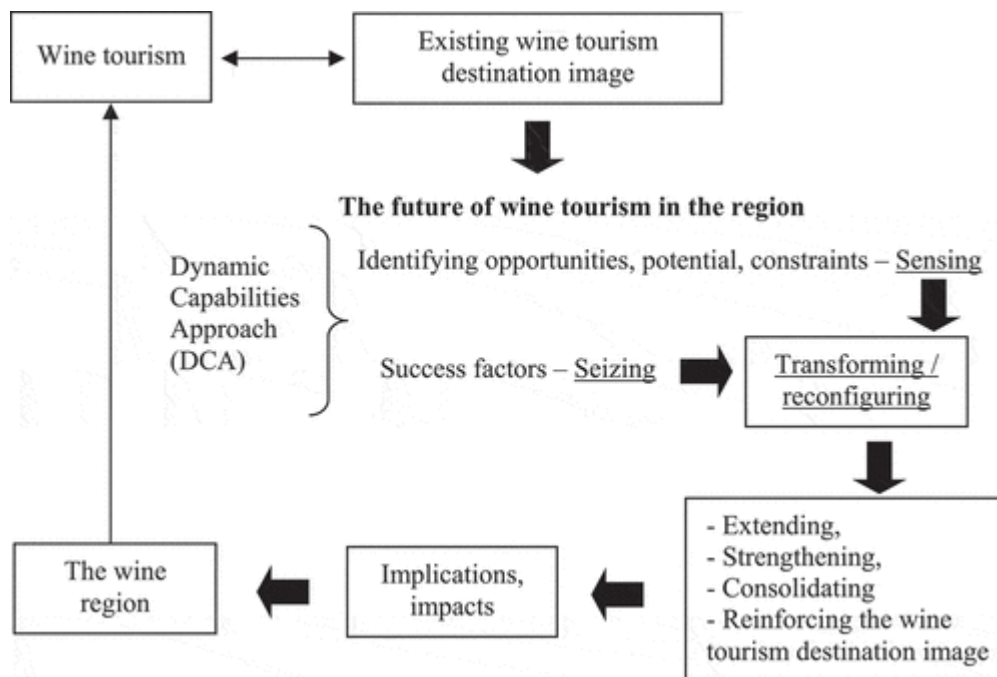
Transforming/reconfiguring: While many wine regions already enjoy leadership status, reconfiguring should be considered moving forward, according to Park et al. ([2019](#)), even in cases where a winery destination features experiences and activities, “managers cannot afford to ‘rest on their laurels’” (p. 237). In discussing the consolidation phase of Spain’s wine routes, López-Guzmán et al. ([2009](#)) underline the importance of certification by tourism authorities. Certification is geared toward offering products that would elicit high levels of visitor satisfaction, requiring the training of the wineries’ human resources, specific infrastructure (e.g., public services, signposting), after sales service, and adapting to new visitor requirements (López-Guzmán et al., [2009](#)). Certification further entails inspections to ensure compliance with requirements, where, depending on the outcome, wineries can either retain their certification or be subject to a probationary period (López-Guzmán et al., [2009](#)).

Elsewhere, Novo et al. (2019) refer to the consolidation phase in Mexico's wine tourism industry. This phase is based upon the strong integration between wineries and specialized services, the supply of high-quality service, and the involvement of private and public bodies in implementing joint strategies and activities geared toward marketing and promotion (Novo et al., 2019).

Proposed Conceptual Framework

Based upon the above discourse and its strong reflection and associations with sensing, seizing, and transforming, a framework illustrating the links between the DCA, wine tourism, and aspects associated with the subarea's destination image are presented (Figure 1). For instance, the DCA became apparent with regard to the future of wine tourism in the subarea, where offerings and infrastructure have been developed for decades. Sensing emerges not only from already known aspects of winery visitation (Brown & Getz, 2005; Getz & Brown, 2006), but also through the identification of distinctive core aspects (e.g., Sparks, 2007), and potential future opportunities, represented through new or emerging markets, or through a stronger destination image developed over the years. Challenges, such as competition from Spanish or international wine tourism destinations (Goncalves et al., 2022), or changing consumer trends, also need to be considered.

Figure 1. Proposed model



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Seizing, which is hypothesized as the end result of identifying opportunities and challenges, is similarly illustrated through the various success factors identified in the literature (e.g., Beames, [2003](#); Brown & Getz, [2005](#); Marzo-Navarro & Pedraja-Iglesias, [2009](#)). Finally, transforming is conceptualized as a continuous process of reflection, whereby the winery operators not only seek to consolidate the winery's achievements (e.g., Novo et al., [2019](#)), but also continue to strengthen, and ultimately, reinforce the wine tourism destination image.

Importantly, D. Teece et al. ([2016](#)) explain that engaging with each sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring can be a semi-continuous or continuous process, and not necessarily sequential. Hence the importance for wineries and wine regions to be prepared to invest and be attentive to changes and ways to respond to wine tourism, as well as other market and tourism dynamics.

Methodology

This study examines ways in which wineries in an established wine subarea seek to maintain and/or enhance their wine tourism destination image. Therefore, the study's unit of analysis is represented by winery operators' perceptions of ways in which their wine subarea can extend/preserve its appeal. Theoretically, the study adopts the dynamic

capabilities approach as a vehicle to understand and recognize key aspects associated with the studied dimension, with clear implications for a wine region's long-term competitive advantage and therefore its continued sustainability. Furthermore, the study proposes a framework explaining the significance and association of dynamic capabilities, particularly concerning their transformation/reconfiguring activities.

To gather data that would assist in gaining a strong appreciation of how wineries are working toward the enhancement of their wine tourism destination image, the study adopts a purposive sampling method, which would be based on information-rich cases (Patton, [2015](#)). This technique entails the deliberate choice of participants based upon qualities they possess (Tongco, [2007](#)). Thus, the purposive method stresses the significance of individuals with specific characteristics that would be able to contribute toward the research (Etikan et al., [2016](#)). In the case of the present research, the participating winery managers or owners possess ample knowledge and expertise, and therefore were able to answer fundamental questions associated with the study's aims. To confirm interviewees' level of knowledge and expertise and therefore their inclusion to partake in the research, the following pre-selection criteria were established:

- Have at least three years of experience working in the field of wine tourism.
- Hold a managerial or ownership position.
- Be engaged in wine tourism activities at the time of the study.

To elicit information from experienced individuals involved in wine marketing and wine tourism, a decision was made to conduct semi-structured, face-to-face, in-depth interviews with these individuals. Interviews have several advantages, including a synchronous communication vehicle that allows for more spontaneity, more concentration on the part of the interviewee, and the emergence of social cues, such as body language or voice (Opdenakker, [2006](#)). Alongside purposive sampling, gathering data through interviews aligns with the notions of inductive analyses of qualitative data (Thomas, [2006](#)), whereby raw data are read and interpreted "to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made" (p. 238). Moreover, and associated with Thomas's ([2006](#)) notions, the interview content was expected to provide

rich qualitative data, which would contribute to the development of the insightful themes and a model.

The interviews were conducted by members of the research team with winery managers and owners in the established wine subarea of Rioja Alta, Spain. Following the selected purposive sampling technique, during March of 2018, various Spanish wine route websites (e.g., Wine Routes of Rioja Wines, [2018](#)) were consulted to identify potentially suitable businesses. A total of 36 were identified and contacted through electronic correspondence, which included the aims of the study and a formal request for members of the research team to visit the winery and conduct the interviews. Eleven of these wineries accepted the team's invitation to be interviewed.

In May of 2018, members of the research team traveled to the Rioja Alta subarea. During the following days, the interviews were conducted, and digitally recorded with participants' agreement, which allowed for more accuracy as compared to (only) note-writing (Opdenakker, [2006](#)). In two cases (Table 2), the participants recommended an additional member of their winery management who also fulfilled the above sampling criteria as a potentially valuable contributor to the research aims. According to Smith and Noble ([2014](#)), one advantage of choosing purposeful, as opposed to convenience sampling, is a constant process of refinement, which not only meets a study's aims, but also reduces bias. The addition of more experienced and knowledgeable participants adheres to this principle of refinement. In addition, the validation of participants, persistent participant observation, coupled with triangulation of the data can also help to reduce bias (Smith & Noble, [2014](#)).

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of participants and the wineries

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In fact, the gathered interview data were reinforced through on-site tours and observations, as well as through the collection of winery brochures, and archival data on the wineries' websites. Moreover, these additional sources can provide strong data for triangulation, as well as bolster data saturation and, by extension, the reliability of results (Paul, [1996](#)).

Observations "can be instrumental in coalescing the data from other methods into a coherent interpretation" (Paul, [1996](#), p. 137), while archival data can help contest or substantiate subjective data gathered through

interviews or questionnaires (Paul, [1996](#), p. 138). All 13 interviewees were able to answer the questions, and provide extended comments in English; on average, the interviews lasted 90 minutes.

Apart from demographic information about participants and their wineries, the following open-ended questions were addressed during the interviews:

- How important is wine tourism to the overall strategy of this winery?
- How could wine tourism in this established wine subarea be developed further?
- How is your winery seeking to adapt to future challenges/changes in the domain of wine tourism?

These questions were perceived as fundamental in the process of eliciting information to identify the sensing, seizing, and, more importantly, the reconfiguration cluster of activities. Studies on critical success factors of wine tourism (Brown & Getz, [2005](#); Getz & Brown, [2006](#); Hall et al., [2009](#); Marzo-Navarro & Pedraja-Iglesias, [2009](#), as well as challenges in its development (Beames, [2003](#); Scherrer et al., [2009](#)), and consolidation of a wine region (Novo et al., [2019](#)) were consulted. This body of research allowed the research team to consider aspects to be examined during the study, and more specifically, provide ideas for the design of the questions to be posed during the interviews.

The recorded data were transcribed by members of the research team, who were similarly involved with qualitative content analysis. Utilizing content analysis, recurrent and prevalent issues were identified and coded into key themes. With content analysis, the researcher allocates categories or concepts describing a phenomenon, thus, affording the opportunity to refine or distil words (Elo & Kyngäs, [2008](#)). To further ensure the validity of findings, coding was cross-checked against themes by the research to ensure they accurately reflected the issues highlighted by interviewees.

Analysis of the Demographic Data

Reflecting the premise of the study, which is to examine wineries operating in an established wine subarea (Rioja Alta), Table 2 illustrates

that, on average, wineries were over a century old, with the most recent being established in 1987 and the most historic in 1879. Further, while 11 wineries accepted the invitation to partake in the study, a total of 13 individuals were willing to be interviewed. In fact, in two instances (Winery 2 and Winery 9) an exports manager and the owner, respectively, participated in this process. The majority of participants (n = 9) were managers of wine tourism operations, and females (n = 7), respectively. All participants had at least 6 years of experience in the wine industry or working at wineries, five a decade or longer, while in four cases participants had worked earlier in other industries (e.g., tourism). Table 2 also shows the abbreviations used to refer to participants in the following sections.

Results and Discussion

Perceived Strategic Importance of Wine Tourism: Sensing and Seizing

When asked about the importance of wine tourism for the winery, participants acknowledged that, while this area was not a substantial financial factor, its importance for the winery's overall strategy was nevertheless unquestionable. In fact, wine tourism was contributing to between 2% and 10% of sales. At the same time, and linked to previous research (Alamanos et al., [2016](#); Bruwer et al., [2013](#); Fountain et al., [2008](#)), through wine tourism, wineries were seeking to increase consumers, enhance brand loyalty and after-visit purchases. This strategy was also utilized to expand awareness and sales internationally, when visitors returned to their home country and sought the winery's products.

For instance, PW2A recognized the steady growth of wine tourism arrivals, with over 18 million visitors in 2018 from the more traditional tourist groups from the UK (Statista, [2019a](#)). PW2A also recognized significant growth of tourists from the United States (US). This last group has experienced remarkable growth over the last years. Indeed, between 2001 and 2014, tourist numbers from the US fluctuated between 1.1 and 1.2 million visitors; in 2017, visits grew to 2.7 million (Statista, [2019b](#)), and to 2.95 million in 2018 (Statista, [2019a](#)). As evidenced by some of the comments, US travelers also favor winery visitation. Moreover, further

supporting PW2A's comment, other participants perceived a similar phenomenon, and their wineries were seeking to seize upon this growing opportunity:

PW1: We used to make wine in this section, but we closed it [the section] as there were a lot of people visiting the winery So, we placed chairs and a screen for them to have wine tastings/lunch here.

PW3: Many US tourists are coming over; it [this group] is the biggest growing nationality in terms of wine tourism at the moment, and it [this phenomenon] is remarkable because we are not that near to the US. If you think about it, we have a lot of historic connections with the US, but for too many US citizens, and until recently, Spain was difficult to identify on a map. Now that they are discovering Spain, we are building momentum. Definitely, wine tourism is growing ...

At the same time, the interviews revealed the growing interest for wine tourism to develop further and become more financially significant; in fact, all the visited wineries offered organized tours whose price started at €8-10 per person. In addition, observations conducted also confirmed the financial significance of the cellar door and tasting room, where the post-visits in many cases led to wine purchases, as well as in the sourcing of contacts to acquire the wineries' products elsewhere.

While arguably sensing and seizing are more manageable or feasible for larger, more established wineries who possess more resources, including a manager of tourism operations and assistance, smaller operations can also develop their capabilities and seize opportunities. Indeed, PW10, owner of an urban micro-winery, reflected on a business journey, which is strongly associated with sensing and seizing. Since 2011, PW10 had been executing a plan to revive and rescue dwindling local grape varieties; based upon this extremely competitive factor, the winery was able to attract the attention of visitors and clients internationally:

If you introduce a wine made with an almost disappearing variety and is now recovering in the middle of nowhere, the history and storytelling of this wine are very interesting to the clients ... You should offer a niche ... They [consumers] are looking for terroir, for the expression of the region of the wine.

In addition, and as PW11's case suggested, a winery's historic background can also be a tool for sensing and seizing, particularly as numerous visitor

groups are drawn to the winery's culture and tradition. This situation was witnessed through the data collection process, whereby highlights of the winery tours entailed visiting some subterranean wine cellars, where wineries had maintained vintages for over a century for sampling and other purposes (not for sale). In addition, the manufacturing of barrels, a fading tradition only maintained by two of the 11 wineries visited, provided an important traditional and historical element for tour guests to reflect upon. Barrel cooperage not only translated to adding to the flavor profiles of the wine but allowed guests to identify these unique properties during tasting. This traditionally handcrafted activity, which is part of the winemaking process, has been heightened as part of sensing and seizing, to enhance the winery tour experience for guests.

The above findings illustrate the different ways in which sensing and seizing occurred, and support the following proposition:

Proposition 1: Sensing and seizing among wineries operating in an established wine region are demonstrated through the growth of different visitor groups, as well as through strong emphasis on characteristics such as the long history, winemaking traditions of the wineries, and the uniqueness of their wines.

Perceived Further Development and Adaptation to Changes: Transforming/Reconfiguring

Teece ([2012](#)) and other authors (Lovallo et al., [2020](#); Newey & Zahra, [2009](#)) stress the vital significance of reconfiguring to respond to changing technological opportunities and threats, as well as changing market conditions. Similarly, Teece ([2018](#)) observes the significance of periodically transforming elements related to culture and organization that would help a business in repositioning itself.

As previously suggested, reconfiguring activities entail strategic moves (Mikalef & Pateli, [2017](#)), which can contribute to earning higher returns "by effectively reconfiguring existing operational capabilities" (Pavlou & El Sawy, [2011](#), p. 261).

These notions are also applicable in the wine industry, which while on appearance a historic and traditional industry, change and competition are ever present issues (Morrison & Rabellotti, [2017](#)) that require a high degree of creativity, innovation, and dynamism. One fundamental way of

reconfiguring was the repositioning of the hedonic and sensorial aspects of wines; after all, the indulging of one's senses in the wine product is at the core of the wine tourism experience (Bruwer & Alant, [2009](#)). For example, PW3's comments emphasize the critical strategic significance of treating and transmitting the message of wine as being an almost ever-evolving product:

We do a lot of events, vertical tastings, or several different years of the same wine, which gives visitors a perspective of the ageing potential and the vintage. We see wine as a dynamic cycle ... that keeps changing. It [the objective] is about capturing the climactic cycle of every year and bottling it.

Through these experiences, the hedonic value of the winery visit, and wine experience can take a new level, whereby the sensorial capabilities of consumers are tested, developed or enhanced. Offering this type of experiences has clear implications for the perceived value and imagery of wines, as well as for return visits or post-visit consumption. Furthermore, while a particular wine varietal is able to adopt different nuances and develop a different taste over the years, and therefore make wine experiences different and unique, staying abreast with trends and new consumer interests and demands was also suggested as a strategic imperative. For example, during the visit to PW1's facilities, the winery offered wine samples directly from oak barrels, as opposed to uncorking wine bottles. This alternative sensorial experience was designed to link visitors more closely to the wine aging process, thereby adding more authenticity, while at the same time limiting the use of glass bottles or corks during tastings. Technologically, during the winery tour, the winery had available a virtual reality activity to educate visitors about the different processes of vine management and wine production. However, apart from offering vertical tastings, serving wines directly from the wine barrel, or using virtual reality imagery to entice visitors, transformation occurred in other alternative ways; as PW2B indicated:

The demand always leads to the development of a new product. So, from time to time, there is a need for something new ... [Now] There is a trend for rosé, to a lighter colour than 10-15 years ago. We are introducing a lighter rosé ... We look at planning ahead not only for one but for as long as 5 years ...

Related to this comment, Newey and Zahra ([2009](#)) posit that the "system of learning from product development experiences ... institutionalizes the

ability of the firm to adapt and evolve by routinizing its experience at the reconfiguration of operating capabilities” (S82). The comment also extends prior research (Williams, [2001](#)), suggesting that wine tourism destinations need to place greater emphasis on enhancing the winery experience, including through event hosting, as well as educational, cultural, and culinary activities alongside offerings that align with visitors’ interests. Some of these enhancing aspects are associated with enjoyment/pleasure, which, together with the diversity of the wines, the ambience, hospitality of winery staff, and the region’s scenery are key components of the “winescape” (Bruwer & Alant, [2009](#)). More recently, Brochado et al. ([2021](#)) also observed the significance of the wine tasting experience, as well as partaking in the winery’s culinary delights and touring activities as popular offerings.

The findings also align with research discussing segmentation strategies among winery visitors. Indeed, Molina et al. ([2015](#)) summarized earlier research and proposed three different criteria: demographics, which examines age, gender, levels of education and income; psychographics, which considers interest/knowledge in wine, motivations, values, and lifestyle, or sensation seeking; and others, which considers visitation rates to wineries.

Similarly, another study (Nella & Christou, [2014](#)) highlights the importance of segmenting visitors based upon their demographic characteristics. Here, visitors’ involvement and relationship with wine, their pre- and post-visit attitudes toward wineries, as well as their future behavioral intentions and evaluation of the winery experience are identified (Nella & Christou, [2014](#)). The above findings first illustrate that wineries strongly consider visitors’ motivations, aspects linked to sensation seeking, and increasing levels of interest and knowledge among their visitors. Second, they underline that such consideration could have important ramifications.

As some participants’ observations suggest, visitors’ winery experience could not only have a significant impact on repeat visitation, but also on how visitors relate to the winery’s brand, with implications for post-visitation purchases, including in hospitality environments. Moreover, by continuing to build on unique and differentiating strengths, wineries could adapt to future challenges in the wine industry. In this context, the case of PW10 once again provides clues on how to develop dynamic processes.

From seizing and seizing through uniqueness and niche products, the participant was executing various forms of diversification and positioning strategies to adapt to changes in his industry. For PW10, diversification and positioning started at the vineyard, and extended to include production processes, providing wine tourism experiences, and ultimately, being exceptionally selective in his approach to further develop the brand and image of his wines:

We are exporting to 4 different countries and also sell at Michelin star restaurants. When you have a product like this, you have to focus and choose people who are interested in your products. It's not easy, but usually high-end restaurants and specific clients have experience. They offer food and wine that you cannot find at a typical restaurant. That's why there's growth in this sort of wineries.

Overall, the reconfiguring strategies acknowledged by participants in this research lend support to the following proposition:

Proposition 2: Reconfiguring among wineries operating in an established wine region is illustrated through activities to adjust to new demands and to draw visitors' interest, for instance, through new/improved offerings, products, as well as through educational and sensorial initiatives and activities. These activities thereby enhance their competitiveness and the region's destination image.

Conclusion

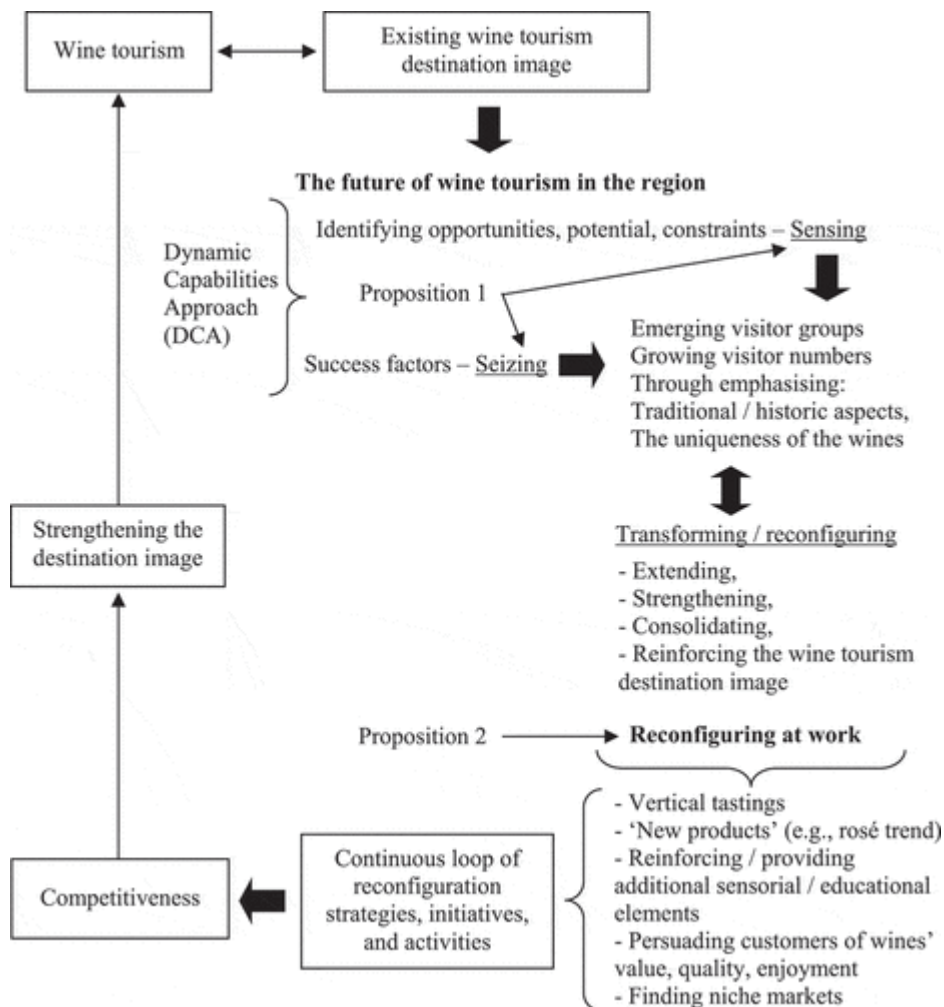
This study considers previous research (e.g., Carmichael & Senese, [2012](#); Morrison & Rabellotti, [2017](#); Pomarici et al., [2017](#)) which identifies various challenges that wineries face, including increasing competition and changing consumer trends. Departing from this notion of challenges, the study argues for the need to extend a wine tourism attractiveness, including forms in which the traditionally evoked destination image of the wine region could be revived and reinforced, as a means to maintain or further gain in competitiveness. Furthermore, by examining how wineries operating in an established wine tourism subarea (Spain's Rioja Alta) adapt to changes in their domain, this study contributes to the wine tourism destination image literature. In doing so, the study develops two frameworks, one providing an initial perspective and the second

augmenting the results, whereby the dynamic capabilities approach (e.g., Teece, [2007](#)) is adopted and extended in the context of wine tourism.

Theoretical Implications

Several implications emerge from the study's findings. From a theoretical perspective, and as illustrated through the findings and conceptual framework ([Figure 2](#)), identifying some of the contributing factors in preserving and enhancing the wine tourism destination image could inform and provide valuable insights. Improvements or introducing new ways of captivating visitors highlight the alignment of the DCA framework alongside approaches toward developing a wine destination image. More importantly, these factors, and their relationship with the different clusters of the dynamic capabilities approach, provide a conceptual understanding of ways in which wine tourism could be enhanced in established wine tourism destinations.

Figure 2. Extended model – Dynamic capabilities in an established wine region/tourism destination



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Firstly, the framework suggests the nexus between sensing and seizing opportunities, whereby identified trends and developments in the form of new visitor groups, increases in visitation, or seeking to position the subarea through its unique historic makeup and wines, are perceived as key strategic directions. Thus, discourses concerning the future of wine tourism in a region can be partly understood through the different illustrations that fall under the conceptual umbrella of sensing and seizing.

Secondly, the framework highlights the importance of treating reconfiguration as a continuous loop, whereby wineries strive to develop strategies, initiatives, and activities to facilitate their future competitiveness. This continuous loop is suggested in light of the numerous challenges wineries face in their industry, not only in terms of competition, but also due to changes in consumer trends (Pomarici et al., 2017), or even government legislation (Duarte Alonso et al., 2015). Regarding some of these challenges, PW8 underscored the almost vulnerable position in which many wineries find themselves nowadays,

including but not limited to extending the wine experience to a single event: *“The technical part is very easy ... the complicated part is trying to sell your wine and trying to convince the customer that behind your wine, behind your brand, behind your label there’s something ... ”*

Among other forms of initiating reconfiguration strategies, wineries engaged in wine tourism would gather feedback from visitors experiencing the above sensorial and educational activities, and consider their further use, as well as incorporate new elements that might emerge from interactions during or post-winery visitation. Recent research (Bruwer & Rueger-Muck, [2019](#); R. M. Back et al., [2020](#)) still identifies visitation-related pointers already established in much earlier contributions (e.g., Bruwer & Alant, [2009](#); Fountain et al., [2008](#)) as key factors drawing visitors to a winery, including tasting and buying wines, experiencing the winery’s atmosphere, educational opportunities, and finding a unique wine. As with sensing and seizing, here again this last aspect could be considered as a fundamental selling point that would support future efforts to gain distinctiveness in the eyes of winery visitors. Indeed, a niche-market wine, which is taste-, region- or winery-specific, could represent value for money, as can be the case of the uniqueness in taste (Priilaid, [2019](#)), or type, as in organic wines (Cagnina et al., [2019](#)).

Thirdly, the conceptual framework suggests that the above strategies will contribute to wineries’ competitiveness, with subsequent impacts on the wine subarea, particularly in its destination image through wine tourism offerings. The adaptation cycle based upon sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring begins once again at the stage of an existing wine tourism destination image. From this stage onwards, while winery operators can reflect on past achievements, they would also have accumulated knowledge to inform their future business decisions. Finally, the framework also underscores the need for agility and continuous monitoring of the wine tourism market; hence the need for further reconfiguration, with implications for the winery’s competitiveness, as well as the subarea’s, in enhancing and strengthening its image as a wine tourism destination.

Practical Implications

[Figure 2](#) also presents important practical implications. For instance, in planning future development, the framework conceptualizes that wine

regions could identify specific ways in which they are sensing or seizing opportunities. Once these areas are pinpointed, wineries need to plan ahead and seek to adapt to potential changes, as well as prepare and anticipate future opportunities and challenges. As part of this process, the framework also suggests avenues for organizational change and alignment, creating internal structures that facilitate stronger exploitation of dynamic capabilities. This facilitation could be in the form of a more flexible organizational structure or culture. Alongside these elements, strong channels of communication internally and with external stakeholders would create an organization that is more adept at sensing, seizing and then reconfiguring, facilitating its competitive advantage and long-term sustainability.

In the case of the present research, nine of the participating wineries operate within walking distance from each other. This situation not only suggests the strategic value of collaboration and “healthy competition,” but also the strong dependence on each other, including in contributing to the subarea’s brand image. Ultimately, there is an imperative need for wineries to work productively amongst themselves, as well as with other stakeholders (restaurants, hotels, tourism office). The results of this study and the developed framework establish the continuous need to focus on capabilities that exist internally, as well as those that can be found through external collaborations.

For more developed wine tourism destinations, the framework serves to reiterate the value of keeping abreast of their activities and the demands of the marketplace. Overall, while the framework is designed for established wine regions in their efforts to maintain or enhance their wine tourism destination image, there are opportunities for this framework to be applied more widely. The framework could be considered by lesser-known regions seeking to position themselves on the wine tourism map. In such cases, the additional concepts and elements could be utilized to guide winery operators and wine tourism representatives. Uniquely, less developed regions do not suffer from the restrictive norms that exist as part of a historic organizational legacy but have the opportunity to create new synergies and organizational structures that could reflect the notions within the proposed framework more closely, providing avenues to achieving long-term sustainability. For example, depending on the wine region’s characteristics, physical infrastructure and technology as well as

investment in human resources could be considered as part of long-term planning.

Limitations and Future Research

The study presents several limitations, some of which could be addressed in future study in this area. First, the chosen subarea features in excess of 100 wineries and although the research team contacted over 30 wineries, data was gathered from only 11 participating companies. This limitation could be potentially addressed, for instance, by having the involvement of a larger research team and collecting data from wineries across different towns in the subarea. Second, while thousands of wineries populate the Spanish landscape, this study has only focused on the leading wine subarea of Rioja Alta.

Future studies could therefore consider wineries from different regions, allowing for not only a comparative analysis but identifying consistencies within the developed framework, thereby enriching its validity and applicability. Similarly, differences in the ways in which regional wineries are sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring may be uncovered to create targeted actions and interventions for success. Future research could also gather data from established wineries and wine regions in more than one country, thus, providing a wider perspective of dynamic capabilities in the domain of wine tourism destination image. Finally, studies could test, confirm/disprove the proposed model ([Figure 2](#)), or even incorporate other elements to enhance its contribution in highlighting essential areas that would not only allow wineries to identify and exploit opportunities while avoiding threats, but also, and more importantly, continue their journey toward long-term competitiveness.