

Article

New Profiles and Needs of Wine Tourists in Italy— “Eno-Slow” Tourism?

Marzia Ingrassia *, Simona Bacarella , Sandro Galluzzo  and Stefania Chironi 

Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry Sciences, Università Degli Studi di Palermo, 90128 Palermo, Italy

* Correspondence: marzia.ingrassia@unipa.it

Abstract

Tourism has become a key sector of the global economy and a driver of economic growth. The Wine Routes are a specialized tourist offering that meets the needs of a segment of travelers, contributing to the enhancement and preservation of rural areas. Recent studies have highlighted that among the reasons driving tourists to choose Slow tourism is the desire to discover local food and wine as an expression of territorial culture. This study assumes that the characteristics of Wine tourists may have changed in recent years. An extensive survey was conducted on visitors of Sicilian Wine Routes. The results examine Wine tourism and Slow tourism and their overlap for tourists who travel around rural territories following the lure of food and wine. The results highlight a new segmentation and the existence of a new profile of Eno-Slow tourists with new primary motivations and needs. On a global level, the new Eno-Slow tourist fits perfectly into the international trends of responsible and sustainable tourism, strengthening the image of wine-producing regions as models of balance between culture, nature, and quality of life. These findings are very important as they provide useful guidance for policymakers and stakeholders committed to the sustainable competitiveness of rural tourist destinations, both locally and internationally.

Keywords: wine tourism; slow tourism; village tourism; sustainable tourism; rural tourism; wine regions; wine lovers; wine experience; digital communities; young food consumers

1. Introduction

In recent decades, travel and tourism have become key sectors of the global economy as drivers of economic growth and job creation and as significant contributors to national and local GDP through tourist spending on accommodation, transportation, food, and retail.

In the 1990s, tourism established itself as a global mass phenomenon, leading to the diversification of travel motivations and the emergence of different and more specialized types of tourism. In the following decades, the tourism industry continued to grow and diversify, becoming an indispensable part of the economy and a driver for the development of infrastructure and services. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the tourism industry. However, the pandemic has also led to a shift in consumer preferences, with travelers now seeking more unique and enriching experiences than ever before.

Tourism businesses and destinations are transforming and reinventing themselves to satisfy a more demanding clientele with more diverse desires, creating a new wave of opportunities for the tourism sector globally ([WTM Global Travel Report, 2024](#); [WTO, UN Tourism, UN Tourism Barometer, 2025](#)). The sector has grown by 24% compared to 2019 figures, and global tourism spending on leisure travel in 2024 was over \$5.5 trillion

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(WTM Global Travel Report, 2024). International travel is expected to be one of the main drivers of growth in the coming years. In 2024, there were 1.5 billion international tourist trips worldwide, and by 2030 this figure is expected to grow by more than 30% to 2 billion, an increase of 11% compared to 2023 (WTM Global Travel Report, 2024). The growth of the tourism sector has also contributed to the growth in demand for workers in the sector (National Observatory of Wine Tourism, 2024) with increasingly specialized skills. With reference to the last decade, it has been observed that the global tourism offering has changed its characteristics due to changes in demand. Tourist destinations and attractions are no longer considered places to visit and explore, but places of participation, encounter, and sharing using social media (Chen et al., 2025).

Travel has become an experiential journey in which visitors can participate by experiencing the place they are visiting, including through augmented reality, which is becoming increasingly common, but above all by sharing the experience with other people, including through local food and wine, which is increasingly becoming a tourist attraction (Ingrassia et al., 2022c). Travel has therefore become an experience with hedonistic characteristics that include multisensory and emotional aspects (Ingrassia et al., 2022c). This has contributed to further growth in the tourism sector since 2019 (Alebaki et al., 2022).

Italy is one of the world's largest historic wine-producing countries (L'Organizzazione Internazionale della Vigna e del Vino, 2022; International Organization of Vine and Wine, OIV State of the world Vine and Wine sector), as well as France and Spain.

Wine tourism in Italy has grown significantly in recent years (National Observatory of Wine Tourism, 2024), especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, official data from 2023 show that wine tourism in Italy generated a turnover of €2.9 billion (National Observatory of Wine Tourism, 2024).

Basing on the "Report on Italian Food and Wine Tourism" by the Italian Food and Wine Tourism Association (Associazione Italiana Turismo Enogastronomico, 2025), in 2024, wine tourism in Italy recorded growth, with over 14.5 million food and wine tourists. The sector's turnover rose to €40.1 billion, an increase of 12% compared to 2023. The most popular experiences included guided tastings (71.2% of travelers) and visits to wineries (38.1%). According to the Report, travelers tend to spend a lot, including on wine purchases and experiential activities. The most popular experiences are guided tastings (71.2% of visitors) and visits to wineries (38.1% of visitors). In addition, these tourists stay in the area for more than one day, with 6 million nights spent in nearby accommodation, such as Agritourisms (Ingrassia et al., 2023) and bed and breakfasts.

Despite some internal political and infrastructural issues, which have slowed Italy down in fully developing its potential as an extraordinary tourist destination, in a broad sense, in terms of food and wine tourism, an important step was the enactment of the 2018 Budget Law (Law No. 145/2018), aimed at modernizing tourism offerings, improving the competitiveness of the sector, and supporting existing businesses through targeted interventions. Thanks to this law, Italian Wine Routes, already established by Law No. 268/1999 and consolidated by the law on vines and wine (LEGGE 27 luglio, 1999; Law No. 238/2016), have taken on a much more important role in the local-rural tourism sector, not only in the wine sector. These developments highlight that today, in Italy, wine tourists are also largely tourists looking for a vacation in rural areas, a sustainable vacation, and a vacation with strong experiential and emotional involvement.

Sicily is one of Italy's leading wine producers. The combination of respect for tradition and a forward-looking approach has enabled Sicily to carve out a leading role in the global wine scene, holding the record for vineyard area, accounting for approximately 17.8% of the national total, and ranking among the first four regions in annual production with approximately 5 million hectoliters per year and over 100 million bottles per year

([Movimento del Turismo del Vino, Guida al Turismo del Vino, 2025](#); [Associazione Nazionale Città del Vino, 2025](#); [Associazione Italiana Turismo Enogastronomico, 2025](#)). It is considered a strategic region for Italian wine, with steadily growing exports to markets such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and northern EU (International Organization of Vine and Wine, OIV State of the global wine sector in 2022). Thanks to its diverse climate and soils (such as the volcanic soils of Mount Etna), the region produces several famous wines. The quality of Sicilian wines lies not only in its native grape varieties, such as Nero D'Avola (for red wines) or Grillo and Carricante (for white wines), but also in the territory's ability to successfully accommodate international varieties such as Chardonnay and Syrah, which find a new and authentic expression in Sicilian soils. Etna DOC, Nero D'Avola, Grillo, Cerasuolo di Vittoria DOCG, and Passito di Pantelleria DOCG are among the best-known Sicilian wines.

In recent years, Sicily has experienced a real renaissance in the wine tourism sector. Thanks to a long history of wine production dating back over 3000 years, Sicily is now one of the most popular destinations for wine lovers from all over the world, and the region ranks fifth among the most popular Italian destinations in this field. Food and wine tourism in Sicily is constantly growing, with over 14 million visitors per year ([Movimento del Turismo del Vino, Guida al Turismo del Vino, 2025](#); [Associazione Nazionale Città del Vino, 2025](#); [Associazione Italiana Turismo Enogastronomico, 2025](#)), attracted not only by the region's wine-making tradition and the quality of its wines, but also by the charm of its artistic heritage and natural beauty.

According to a study by "Nomisma Wine Monitor 2025" ([Nomisma Wine Monitor, 2025](#)), around 75% of tourists consider the wine experience to be one of the main reasons for their trip. However, recent studies highlight the existence of many so-called "secondary motivations" for today's wine tourists. At the same time, other recent studies have highlighted that today, among the reasons that drive tourists to choose "Slow Tourism" (which includes cultural and religious routes, naturalistic tourism, rural tourism, tourism in ancient villages, or food and wine tourism in rural areas) is the desire to discover local food and wine products, as well as other natural and artistic beauties that make up the tangible and intangible heritage of a rural area, which are an expression of the culture and traditions of the places visited ([Bellia et al., 2021](#)). In 2025, Sicily remains a highly desirable destination for wine and slow tourism ([Movimento del Turismo del Vino, Guida al Turismo del Vino, 2025](#); [Associazione Nazionale Città del Vino, 2025](#); [Associazione Italiana Turismo Enogastronomico, 2025](#)) because it is a land where every sip of wine tells a thousand-year-old story of culture, art, and uniqueness, including gastronomy. Nowadays, Sicilian wineries offer increasingly sophisticated experiences, such as guided tours of historic vineyards or exclusive tastings on estates nestled between the sea and the mountains. Discovering Sicily through wine, therefore, means not only visiting wineries, but also enjoying a well-rounded experience. The academic literature offers numerous insights supporting the thesis that wine tourism aligns with the principles of slow, sustainable, and cultural tourism ([Hall & Prayag, 2017](#); [Dixit, 2019](#); [Sigala & Robinson, 2019](#)).

These figures have led us to assume that the traditional profile of wine tourists in Italy has changed compared to the past, as the motivations and needs of this type of tourist seem to have changed somewhat compared to those traditionally observed until now.

Therefore, we hypothesized that the profile of wine tourists in rural wine-producing areas may also have changed in terms of motivations and characteristics, and that this empirical observation could reveal the existence of new profiles of wine tourists, in step with the times. For example, a wine tourist whose motivational priorities may have changed from the traditional ones of the past, which were visiting wineries and tasting wines, and secondarily enjoying spending free time surrounded by nature learning about

history, culture, and people of the territories where well-known wines are produced (Alant & Bruwer, 2004; Alebaki & Iakovidou, 2010, 2011; Alebaki et al., 2022), may, in general, seek sustainability, similarly to general tourists that are looking for sustainability and relaxation in the countryside (Ingrassia & Chironi, 2010; Sigala & Robinson, 2019; Dixit, 2019; Ingrassia et al., 2019, 2022b).

Of course, wine tourism is not always slow tourism, but it is strongly in line with the philosophy of slow tourism, especially when practiced along the Wine Routes, and is increasingly approaching it, according to tourism data, focusing on conscious and engaging experiences rather than hurried sightseeing, emphasizing local culture, the landscape, and authentic connections, even if some rushed and mass tours still exist. Although some visitors may arrive on organized coach tours, the trend observed is towards longer stays and deeper engagement with the history, gastronomy, and environment of the wine region, making it an excellent example of experiential and slow tourism.

It is therefore possible to hypothesize that in recent years, wine tourists and slow tourists have become a single segment of demand, insofar as they can be considered complementary expressions of a single paradigm of conscious travel, where the vineyard is no longer a simple stopover but a stage for deep immersion in the territory.

However, after a careful review of the existing literature at present, there are no studies that empirically demonstrate the existence of a new profile of wine tourists with characteristics more similar to those of tourists we might define as “slow,” i.e., travelers whose primary interest is the search for authenticity, supporting local economies, and preferring the quality of the experience over the quantity of places visited. Tourists who, beyond wine, favor deep and sustainable travel experiences over the speed of mass tourism choose less-traveled routes, eco-friendly means of transportation (such as bikes and trains), and a longer stay in one place to immerse themselves in nature and local culture, including food and wine.

An interesting study by Tavares and Azevedo (2011) explores the perceptions of Generations X and Y, due to their segment size and buying power, to understand these market segments’ perceptions and determine their demographic and psychographic profiles, in order to assess their expectations about cellar tour experiences. However, so far, there are no empirical studies that highlight emerging segments of wine tourists in certain areas with strong wine tourism appeal and that describe their characteristics.

Moreover, at this time, there are not any studies, like previous illustrious studies, such as those conducted by Alant and Bruwer (2004) and other distinguished authors (Bruwer, 2003; Alant & Bruwer, 2004; Karafolas, 2007; Bruwer & Alant, 2009; Alebaki & Iakovidou, 2010; Hojman & Hunter-Jones, 2012; López-Guzmán et al., 2014; Bonarou et al., 2019; Bruwer & Rueger-Muck, 2019; Festa et al., 2020; Dayoub et al., 2020; Back et al., 2021; Cunha et al., 2023), that reveal a precise, complete, and clear picture of the hierarchy of motivational factors and needs of these potential new wine tourist profiles. That is to say, a new type of Eno-Slow tourist who may be more interested in the “slow” and inner aspects of tourism in wine regions, i.e., longer stays, focus on authenticity, choice of lesser-known destinations, sustainable mobility, support for the local economy, conscious approach, etc.

Therefore, to fill these gaps, this study aims to answer the following questions starting from an empirical survey conducted in Sicily (Italy) between 2023 and 2024:

Has the wine tourist’s hierarchy of motivations for visiting a winery in a wine route changed compared to the pre-COVID-19 era with regard to the need for holidays surrounded by nature?

Have the profiles of today’s wine tourist changed compared to the past?

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Background

Wine tourists are true enthusiasts of the world of wine and everything that revolves around it. This category of tourists visits wineries and wine-producing areas, not only to purchase wines and take guided tours, but especially to experience the territory of production in a unique way, through a glass of wine, able to tell its origins and the winery's history (Chironi et al., 2020). Wine tourists aim to learn about the places where vineyards are cultivated and where the wineries are located (Bacco et al., 2019; Martínez-Falcó et al., 2024). Wine tourism in wine territories, which is a form of experiential tourism linked to the rural environment, sustainability, and the promotion of local areas and products, allows visitors to enjoy a complete experience, culminating in the tasting of wines and typical products.

Sustainable tourism is a model of travel that respects and protects the environment, cultures, and local economies, while meeting the needs of visitors and host communities. It is based on enhancing the value of the area and its resources without compromising them for the future, minimizing negative impacts and maximizing positive ones. Speaking of environmental sustainability, some studies have highlighted the relationship between tourism development, economic growth, and CO₂ emissions (Paramati et al., 2017; Bella, 2018; Gao et al., 2021).

The concept of sustainable tourism has evolved and adapted to different contexts and circumstances, changing over time. It is not limited to the environmental aspect alone, but is an inclusive notion that encompasses the social, economic, cultural, ethical, and political sectors. In 2015, further emphasizing the importance of sustainable tourism, the United Nations developed the Sustainable Development Goals with the aim of “ending poverty, protecting the planet, and ensuring prosperity for all” by 2030. Since its inauguration, research on sustainable tourism has become more relevant than ever. Since then, studies have intensified thanks to their fundamental contribution to the economy, society, and the environment in general. An interesting recent review has excellently described the state of the art of past, present, and future trends in sustainable development (Fauzi, 2025).

Sustainable tourism is linked to “slow” and “rural” tourism through common practices and principles. Slow and rural tourism are ways of achieving sustainability, focusing on authentic contact with the local area, a slower pace, and the promotion of local communities.

The three concepts merge into the concept of responsible travel, or “low-impact” tourism, which aims to minimize environmental impact on and maximize social and economic benefits for destinations, especially lesser-known ones.

Slow tourism is a travel philosophy that focuses on a deeper and more conscious experience, regardless of the destination. Slow travel through the countryside and visiting farms can raise awareness of the value of authentic traditions and local food and wine products in inland or marginal areas.

Rural tourism is a specific type of tourism that takes place in rural areas, promoting their natural and cultural heritage. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines rural tourism as “a type of tourism activity in which the visitor's experience is linked to a wide range of products generally related to agriculture, rural lifestyle/culture, nature activities, fishing, and landscape visits.” This is what is meant by farm holidays or agri-tourism (Ingrassia et al., 2023). Agricultural activity is changing its organization to meet the needs of modern consumers and the market, in relation to the opportunities offered by regional, national, and EU agricultural policy in terms of health aspects, the promotion of typical products, the multifunctionality of agriculture, and the protection and enhancement of the territory.

Therefore, rural tourism can be considered a subset of Slow Tourism, as it is often practiced slowly and authentically.

Wine is capable of recounting and bringing to life the history, culture, and scenery of a region (Chironi et al., 2020; Ingrassia et al., 2022b); in this case, the experience is not only a consumption experience, but also a hedonistic experience that encompasses multisensory and emotional aspects (Ingrassia et al., 2022c). According to some authors, there are many characteristics in common between wine tourism and rural tourism (Ruiz Pulpón & Cañizares Ruiz, 2025), e.g., the interconnection between nature, tradition, craftsmanship, and agricultural activity. Based on the literature, Wine Tourism in wine territories may be considered a prominent segment of rural tourism, offering experiences that combine agricultural heritage with cultural and gastronomic attractions or rural territories (Kastenholz et al., 2022), with particular reference to wine.

Historical tradition and current wine-growing landscapes provide intrinsic environmental values that give meaning to exploitation and express the conservation of natural resources. Strategies for the conservation and enhancement of the rural landscape have been of growing importance in the policies of individual European Union countries. In the past, the landscape was considered exclusively as a place of primary production, but today it is a multifunctional container capable of promoting the modernization of agricultural structures and the enhancement of territorial resources (environmental, tourist, social, etc.) while fully respecting the environment (preserving biodiversity), the climate, and the health of rural inhabitants and consumers of the food products grown there (Pappalardo et al., 2018).

Several studies have already addressed the link between local development and tourist itineraries from different perspectives, concluding that this type of tourism has a positive impact on rural areas (Reyes, 2012; Ingrassia et al., 2022b). According to Demirović Bajrami et al. (2020), “elements of the local community, especially those whose development can be directly influenced by tourism development and which can improve the quality of life of residents, such as infrastructure, entertainment opportunities, and preserved culture and tradition, can encourage local people to have a positive attitude towards tourism development in their environment”. Vázquez et al. observed the role of wine tourism as a driver of economic growth and job creation in Spain (Clemente-Ricolfe et al., 2012; Vázquez Vicente et al., 2021). Other studies confirm the direct relationship between economic growth, employment, and tourism (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018; Hall, 2019), highlighting the need to consider a range of aspects related to the economy, tourism profile, and environment that characterize the host region.

Therefore, a territory characterized by agricultural landscapes, historic estates, cultural traditions, and wine heritage can have a significant competitive advantage in attracting tourists (Vaquero-Piñero et al., 2025).

In Italy, as in other similar territories, wine tourism has excellent potential for becoming, together with gastronomic tourism, the perfect complement to a broader program of high-quality domestic tourism (Ruiz Pulpón & Cañizares Ruiz, 2025).

Wine tourists, as is well known, may have different travel purposes. Recent studies have highlighted how the vision of wine tourists has changed today, with respect to the past, with tourists increasingly seeking to experience WR destinations where they can find tranquility, socialization, and contact with nature (Ingrassia et al., 2022b). Today, WRs have become a tourist offering that can play an important role in meeting the demands of tourists whose main needs are those of a countryside vacation, as opposed to mass tourism, accompanied by art, culture, leisure, and conviviality. Studies by Kritikos et al. (2025) emphasize that other forms of tourism, such as wellness, ecological, or religious tourism, are driving the evolution of regional development strategies, particularly in island communities focused on sustainable innovation.

In this vast scenario, the question today is whether the profile of wine tourists in wine-producing areas has changed, perhaps because of new characteristics among wine tourists, new preferences for non-mass, slow forms of tourism, or simply as a result of people's greater focus on sustainability or the search for a more meaningful travel experience. In other words, a vacation with different basic characteristics, in which wine becomes a motivation common in other forms of tourism that we can define as "slow," shows that the primary motivations of slow tourists are now motivations and needs in common with "enotourists," for whom wine is no longer the only main motivation of their travel/visit, as in the past. Or we might ask ourselves whether there are motivations and needs common to both wine tourists in rural areas and slow tourists, such as seeking out ancient villages, religious pilgrimage routes, typical Italian gastronomic products in the areas where they are produced, or simply contact with nature during an agritourism vacation.

2.2. Wine Tourism

Wine Tourism is framed inside the wider context of promoting and developing rural areas of a territory. As is well known, wine tourism is a tourist offering that meets the needs of a particular segment of travelers and contributes significantly to the enhancement and preservation of the landscape, as well as the environmental, cultural, economic, and social heritage of rural areas (Ingrassia et al., 2022b). There are numerous definitions of wine tourism by various scholars on the subject, but they all refer to the concepts of conservation of the territory and natural resources (Poitras & Donald, 2006; Santini et al., 2013; Grimstad & Burgess, 2014; Gázquez-Abad et al., 2015; Gilinsky et al., 2015).

Initially, wine tourism did not exist as a structured sector. In France and Italy, wineries were closed production facilities. Only a few connoisseurs or merchants visited the châteaux of Bordeaux or the estates of Tuscany.

When wine tourism first began to spread, it was more of a lifestyle, an experience of personal growth, rather than a mere leisure activity (Beames, 2003), that has its historical roots in the ancient aristocratic routes, but which has been structured in a modern way since the 1930s in Germany with the creation of the first "wine routes" (WRs) (Yadav & Dixit, 2022). In 1934, the Deutsche Weinstraße (German wine route) was established in Germany, one of the first attempts to create a wine-related tourist route to boost the local economy (Yadav & Dixit, 2022). Its evolution began in the 1950s with the "Routes des Vins" in France in the Bordeaux area, but a fundamental turning point came in the 1960s and 1970s in Australia and in California, United States (Napa Valley), with the introduction of a truly professional and commercial hospitality model that uniquely distinguished wine tourism from other forms of nature or rural tourism (Taplin, 2021), followed by Italy, which, between the 1980s and 1990s, established the Wine Routes (WRs) with Law No. 268 of 1999, and democratized the sector through a series of initiatives such as "Cantine Aperte" (Open Cellars), which encouraged contact between producers and consumers, transforming this form of tourism from an elite activity (not only for wine experts and the wealthy) to one open to a wider range of tourists/consumers (Colombini, 2015). This opening up has led to greater awareness among people of quality wine and its status as a product that is born, shaped, and tells the story of its territory of origin.

Twenty years ago, Alant and Bruwer (2004) segmented wine tourists into those who travel to wine regions and stop only to buy wine, and those who are general tourists who have traveled to the wine region where their favorite wine is produced.

This category includes not only all wine tourists but also people who enjoy spending their free time in places surrounded by nature to learn about the areas where well-known wines are produced and their history, culture, and people.

However, these motivations were still secondary to the main one of visiting the winery and tasting the wines.

Over the course of twenty years, the link between wine tourism and environmental sustainability has been increasingly emphasized. Wine tourism satisfies wine lovers' desire to discover the places where vineyards are cultivated and wineries are located, allowing them to experience the strong link between wines and their territory of origin (Bacco et al., 2019; Martínez-Falcó et al., 2024).

Wine Routes in Italy and Sicily

The Wine Routes (WRs) around the world can be classified as a specialized tourist offering (Alant & Bruwer, 2004; Alebaki & Iakovidou, 2010, 2011; Ingrassia & Chironi, 2010; Sigala & Robinson, 2019; Dixit, 2019; Ingrassia et al., 2019; Alebaki et al., 2022; Ingrassia et al., 2022b). They are marked trails, recognized as cultural and environmental heritage sites in wine-producing regions, where wine tourists can travel independently, by car or bicycle, to visit wineries, taste wine, and purchase bottles; therefore, they are a form of experiential and sustainable wine tourism with a high emotional involvement (Sharples et al., 2000; Hojman & Hunter-Jones, 2012; Molina et al., 2015; Brida et al., 2020; Nunkoo et al., 2020; Peña-Sánchez et al., 2020; Ingrassia et al., 2022b). Wine routes should allow the promotion of wine tourism and the enhancement of the rural territory, offering a particular integrated system of tourism supply that winds through a specific territory and operates as a center of multiple services (Sharples et al., 2000; Hojman & Hunter-Jones, 2012; Molina et al., 2015; Brida et al., 2020; Nunkoo et al., 2020; Peña-Sánchez et al., 2020; Ingrassia et al., 2022b). So, wine routes also have social importance, as the passage of visitors helps to revitalize rural areas, counteracting depopulation and supporting the economy of these territories (Ingrassia et al., 2022c). Therefore, wine routes are considered an important opportunity for the economic development of most wine regions as they are the connector between the tourism sector and the wine industry (Sharples et al., 2000; Hojman & Hunter-Jones, 2012; Molina et al., 2015; Brida et al., 2020; Nunkoo et al., 2020; Peña-Sánchez et al., 2020; Ingrassia et al., 2022b).

Thanks to Italy's natural characteristics, more than 150 WRs have been established to date, with the most popular ones located in Sicily, Veneto, Tuscany, Piedmont, and Lazio. As mentioned above, in Italy, Law No. 268 of 1999 established the Italian Wine Routes (WRs), defining them as "itineraries marked and advertised with special signage, along which natural, cultural, and environmental values can be encountered." The legislation also emphasizes that these routes are a means of promoting wine-producing areas and their products, making them accessible and enjoyable for visitors as a particular form of tourist attraction. Following the national law, most Italian wine-producing regions have received their own decree recognizing WRs through specific legislation (Ingrassia et al., 2022c).

The Sicilian WRs (SWRs) were established in 1999 to offer wine producers a new opportunity to diversify their offerings. The Sicilian WRs include wineries located in the wine-growing territories that offer tourists and visitors the opportunity to take advantage of different services complementary to the wine, proposing a form of experiential tourism with powerful emotional involvement, as it combines gustative elements with naturalistic (e.g., wine landscape), recreational (e.g., socializing), and cultural activities. In Sicily, a region with special legal status, the Sicilian Parliament issued the Regional Law No. 5 of 2 August 2002 (*Regione Sicilia Legge Regionale 2 agosto, 2002*), which promotes and regulates the creation of Sicilian wine routes. According to this law, "the routes are tourist itineraries along which there are vineyards, wineries, farms, wine shops, vine and wine museums, information and reception centers, companies specializing in typical and quality products, tourist accommodation facilities, and natural, cultural, and environmental assets."

The SWRs include not only wineries, but also restaurants, bed and breakfasts, hotels, resorts, farmhouses, and municipalities located along the routes (Ingrassia et al., 2022c).

In recent years, a group of Sicilian agri-food entrepreneurs and SWRs organized and founded the “Federazione Strade del Vino, dell’Olio e dei Sapori di Sicilia” (Federation of Sicilian Wine, Oil and Food Routes) (Winery Tasting Sicily, 2025), with the aim of promoting Sicilian excellence both nationally and internationally. Today, the Sicilian Wine Routes are among the main tourist destinations for wine tourists. The reasons for this appeal are linked to several factors that make them extremely different from the wine routes of other territories and even from each other. Sicilian wine routes aim to promote not only wines but also the cultural, artistic, and landscape heritage of the areas through which they wind. In addition, they offer itineraries that include visits to wineries, tastings of wines and typical products, and the discovery of local cuisine. Each itinerary is linked to a specific wine or geographical area, offering experiences ranging from the volcanic vineyards of Etna to the baroque villages of the Val di Noto. The wine routes of Etna, Val di Noto, and Western Sicily, for example, offer unique itineraries that cross territories of rare beauty, where the discovery of wine blends with history, gastronomy, and local crafts.

Since the enactment of the Sicilian Law, the following thirteen WRs (also known as “Sicilian Wine and Taste Routes”) were established:

1. Wine Route of Terre Sicane, which runs between the Valley of the Temples and the whole province of Agrigento;
2. Wine Route Val di Mazara;
3. Wine Route Marsala-Terre d’Occidente, this itinerary ideally connects two geographically distant and separate territories: the westernmost tip of Sicily and the island of Pantelleria;
4. Wine Route Erice Doc wine route from the city of Erice, founded by Trojan exiles and later one of the most beautiful medieval Arab–Norman towns in the world;
5. Wine Route Alcamo Doc;
6. Wine Route Monreale Doc, a territory that bewitches tourists with the architectural splendor of the Cathedral of Monreale, the greatest example of Norman architecture in Sicily;
7. Wine Route on the road of the “Targa Florio,” in an area close to Madonie Park, characterized by the route of the Targa Florio, the most famous automobile races in the world;
8. Wine Route of the Province of Messina with an itinerary around the archipelago of the Aeolian Islands (a UNESCO World Heritage Site);
9. Wine Route of Etna, which spans around the largest volcano in Europe (Etna Mountain), now on the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites;
10. Wine Route Val di Noto, characterized by the presence of baroque towns;
11. Wine Route of Cerasuolo di Vittoria, including the provinces of Ragusa and Syracuse, among the baroque beauties of another UNESCO World Heritage Site: La Villa del Casale with Cerasuolo di Vittoria DOCG wine;
12. Wine Route of Castelli Nisseni (the Nisseni Castles) in the heart of Sicily;
13. Strada del Vino e dei Sapori della Valle dei Templi (Route of Wines and Flavors of the Valley of the Temples) in Agrigento, including the famous archeological park “Valley of the Temples” (Greek temples), one of the sites declared as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

2.3. Slow Tourism

Slow tourism is defined as a way of traveling more slowly, enjoying the view, and immersing oneself in the local landscape. Slow tourism is a concept modeled on the slow

food and slow city movements (Heitmann et al., 2011). Scholarly frameworks identify its core as “consumer deceleration,” a process involving the reduction of technological and episodic intensity to achieve a meaningful connection with local landscapes, heritage, and communities. This approach is intrinsically linked to sustainability; by favoring low-impact transportation—such as rail, cycling, or walking—and extending the duration of stays, slow tourism significantly mitigates the carbon footprints typically associated with “checklist” travel models.

The idea of “slow” derives from the “Italian slow food” movement of the 1970s. Slow Food is an international movement founded by Carlo Petrini to counter fast food. It is based on the principle of good food that is sustainable for the environment and fair for producers. Slow Food invites us to slow down to rediscover local flavors and traditions that are in danger of disappearing. In fact, its main objectives are the protection of biodiversity, food education, and support for local traditions (Petrini et al., 2001).

Local organizations taught visitors how to best enjoy their products and, after creating a market for their products, they started a worldwide mail order business (Petrini et al., 2001). Since then, this new business has begun to establish itself in the food industry, as mass-produced food products are giving way to a growing preference for seasonal, local, and traditional products (Nosi & Zanni, 2004). As a result, the popularity of traditional foods linked to different cities around the world has led to the development of other organizations promoting slow tourism, such as the Slow Cities movement. The Città Slow Movement is an international network of municipalities (the “Città del Buon Vivere” or “Cities of Good Living”) founded in Italy in 1999 with the aim of promoting a philosophy of life centered on slowness, sustainability, and the enhancement of local identities (Cittaslow, 2025). The “international Cittaslow network” involves a total of 305 cities in 33 countries and territories around the world, and Italy has a widespread network with 88 certified municipalities (Cittaslow, 2025).

Therefore, over the last fifteen years, one of the tourism industry’s responses to sustainability trends has been slow tourism, which applies the “slow philosophy” of the slow food and slow city movements (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010).

Slowing down the pace of a holiday provides greater opportunities to interact and connect with local people and places on a deeper level (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010).

According to several studies, the essential elements of slow tourism include slow food, for example, local food, slow transport, for example, local buses and trains, and slow places/cities. Slow cities are smaller areas that emphasize the changing seasons, respect the health of citizens, offer authentic products and foods, have a rich heritage of fascinating craft traditions and valuable works, and are characterized by the spontaneity of religious rituals (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010; Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Smith & Costello, 2009).

These slow ideas reflect a social phenomenon caused by a modern society characterized by frenetic lifestyles and people who are often overworked, goal-oriented, and stressed (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010).

Understanding and predicting the behavior of slow tourists is important for developing appropriate marketing strategies and increasing tourism market share (Meng & Choi, 2016).

This type of slow tourism is part of the broader concept of “low-impact tourism,” a form of tourism that takes an approach to travel that aims to minimize the negative effects of tourism on the environment, culture, and society (as is the case with mass tourism, for example).

However, paradoxically, the growing demand for slow tourism is gradually attracting the attention of an increasing number of people, which may compromise certain popular tourist destinations that could become overly sought after and experience the phenomenon

of overtourism, i.e., the overcrowding of tourists (S raphin et al., 2020; Heitmann et al., 2011; Knox, 2005).

The slow philosophy provides a framework for the sustainable development of destinations (Serdane, 2020). An example of this is slow events, which add value for destination stakeholders as they support local businesses and help preserve local traditions, thus facilitating the sustainable development of destinations (Werner et al., 2021).

The pressures of the contemporary socioeconomic environment, stress, lack of time, the fast pace of modern life, and the lack of communication and real contact in human relationships are the main themes of interest of the slow movement (Moir  et al., 2017).

Slow tourism represents a paradigm shift in contemporary travel, characterized as a deliberate “counter-narrative” to mass tourism that prioritizes the quality of the experience over the quantity of destinations visited. From an economic perspective, slow tourism acts as a driver for regional diversification, channeling financial benefits directly to local artisans and small business owners rather than multinational corporations, thereby promoting resilient and equitable community development.

2.4. *Eno-Slow Tourist Conceptual Framework*

Over the years, slow tourism has remained fairly constant in terms of numbers. However, since 2020, following the COVID-19 pandemic, it has emerged as a new trend that contrasts with the previously prevailing trend of mass tourism, or fast tourism. This is in response to a new and strong need for people to get out of cities and spend their free time or holidays in a peaceful environment with good air quality and closer contact with nature. As a result, rural destinations or destinations surrounded by nature have become popular. In the spirit of this type of holiday, slow tourists visit the cultural and religious monuments of the area. In fact, some particular forms of religious tourism, such as walking tours (Bellia et al., 2021), for example, the Camino de Santiago (Spain) or the Magna Via Francigena in Sicily (Italy), are true examples of slow tourism. Pilgrimage tourism, also called “religious tourism,” has been shown to have many elements in common with gastronomic tourism, cultural tourism, and rural tourism, as pilgrims or walkers visit villages (cultural tourism), taste local delicacies (gastronomic tourism), learn about their history (cultural tourism) and production techniques, taste local wines and beverages (wine tourism), visit farms, learn about or participate in agricultural activities (agritourism), and visit local production units (industrial tourism). They also go on nature excursions (ecotourism), trekking, cycling, and rafting on the lakes and rivers (nature tourism) of the destination (Bellia et al., 2021; Moira et al., 2017).

Recently, the literature has highlighted many points of contact between wine tourists and slow tourists (Esau & Senese, 2022). In the current tourism context, wine tourism has established itself as a driver of rural regeneration, transforming wine tasting into an act of cultural and environmental discovery that perfectly matches the philosophy of slowness. This convergence has been accelerated by a growing demand for authenticity and sustainability, with modern travelers preferring personalized and “transformative” experiences, such as grape harvesting workshops, walking tours among the vineyards, and sensory workshops that require a longer stay and direct interaction with small, independent producers. This bond is based on shared core values among “eno” and “slow” tourists, such as respect for natural rhythms, appreciation of local traditions, and the pursuit of mental and physical well-being as opposed to the frenzy of mass tourism.

Some studies discuss how the enotourist demand is evolving beyond simple visits to wineries and wine territory, incorporating more profound local experiences (Hall & Prayag, 2017; Dixit, 2019; Sigala & Robinson, 2019). Contreras and Medina (2021) reflect on food and wine tourism in rural areas from an anthropological perspective, highlighting the link

with culture. [Charters and Ali-Knight \(2002\)](#) identify tourists' motivations, which are often related to learning and culture.

The slow tourist has the need to answer essential existential questions, the need to reconnect with people, family, community, and friends, the need to communicate, rediscover places, food, and drink, and, finally, the need to live a meaningful life. The slow movement has gained recognition in the context of tourism, as tourists are increasingly looking for sustainable tourism experiences. [Poitras and Donald \(2006\)](#) were among the first to conceptualize sustainable wine tourism. [Peris-Ortiz et al. \(2016\)](#) explored the strategic role of wine tourism in sustainable economic development. [Pérez-Romero et al. \(2025\)](#) analyzed how wine tourism contributes to sustainable regional development.

Therefore, it is clear that there are an increasing number of characteristics, motivations, and needs shared by tourists categorized as enotourists and so-called slow tourists.

2.5. Hypotheses and Objectives

For this study, we have formulated the following hypotheses and aims.

The hypotheses are as follows:

H1. *There are emerging segments or profiles of wine tourists with new motivations and needs.*

H2. *The traditional profiles of wine tourists remain, but with new motivations and needs.*

H3. *There are new hierarchies of motivations and needs for wine tourists where the primary interests are the same as the typical ones of slow tourists (i.e., longer stays, focus on authenticity, choice of lesser-known destinations, sustainable mobility, support for the local economy, conscious approach, focus on sustainability, etc.).*

Therefore, this study aims to find out, through a broad survey of food and wine tourists in the Wine Routes of Sicily between 2023 and 2024, the following:

1. Whether the traditional profiles of food and wine tourists have changed (after the COVID-19 pandemic);
2. Whether there are any new profiles of food and wine tourists, with specific characteristics (e.g., age, income, etc.), behaviors (interests, lifestyles, etc.), preferences (favorite activities, communication channels, etc.), and needs;
3. Whether interest in the typical characteristics of slow tourism (longer stays, focus on authenticity, choice of lesser-known destinations, sustainable mobility, support for the local economy, conscious approach, etc.) has increased among food and wine tourists or not (i.e., the hierarchy of motivations for visiting a winery along the Wine Routes may be changed).

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Study Design

For this study, a survey was conducted on tourists who visited the Sicilian Wine Routes in the three-year period 2023–2025. In this study, all 13 SWRs (taken as the statistical reference universe) were observed as the initial frame. The official list of existing SWRs was provided for the three years covered by the study by the Regional Institute of Wines and Oils of Sicily ([I.R.V.O. Istituto Regionale del Vino e dell'Olio, 2025](#)). From this initial list/set, all the wineries associated with the 13 SWRs were identified and considered as the initial data set (statistical reference population). Therefore, a census of the wineries and non-wine companies associated with the SWRs was carried out, and only the population of wineries belonging to the SWRs was identified, obtaining N = 93 associated wineries. Subsequently, the presidents (or vice presidents/directors) of the 13 SWRs were contacted

to obtain the actual number of wineries associated with the SWRs in the three-year period 2023–2025, which was found to be $N = 90$ wineries (statistical population). Therefore, due to the low number of units in the reference population, all the SWRs' wineries were contacted by telephone by a member of the research team in 2023–2024, asking the producers or marketing/communication/reception managers of the wineries whether the winery carried out wine tourism activities, even if not systematically, and their willingness to participate in the survey. The wineries that agreed to participate and carried out wine tourism activities, even if not on a continuous basis, with a constant presence of wine tourists, numbered $N = 62$. From this initial set, it was decided to extract, using a simple random sampling method, 3 wineries for each Wine Route, for a total of $n = 39$ wineries where interviews with tourists/visitors were conducted.

3.2. Tourist Sampling Design and Questionnaire

According to official sources ([Movimento del Turismo del Vino, Guida al Turismo del Vino, 2025](#); [Associazione Nazionale Città del Vino, 2025](#); [Associazione Italiana Turismo Enogastronomico, 2025](#)), the average number of wine tourists in Italy in the five-year period 2021–2025 is approximately 12 million visitors per year, similar to the three-year period 2021–2023 (the two years in which the highest number of wine tourists was observed, i.e., more than 13 million per year, are 2021, post-pandemic, and 2025, still ongoing).

Therefore, as a result of applying the statistical method for determining the sample size in case of a random sampling method, based on the sampling error, subject to the assumption of a very large population (the total number of visitors/wine tourists in Italy in the various years), as in this case, and setting the sampling error at 5%, which was considered more than satisfactory for this study, with the assumption of $p = q = 0.5$ and $\text{Prob.} = 0.954$, a sample size of $n = 400$ was calculated.

For the analysis, face-to-face interviews were conducted with tourists/visitors to the wineries. The interviews were conducted during the autumn–winter and spring–summer periods of the three-year period 2023–2025. During the periods indicated, the research team's interviewers visited the wineries under study on a few occasions prior to the scheduled visits. In the case of organized visits, the organizer or tour guide was asked to ask visitors if they would like to participate in the research. In the case of independent visits, tourists were asked at the end of their visit if they would like to participate in this study. If the answer was positive in both cases, an expert inspector from the research team explained the purpose of the survey to the participants, and if they agreed, they were asked to sign a written consent form. The interviewers then distributed a paper questionnaire, which they explained to the participants. All participants were assisted by the surveyors while completing the questionnaire. The questionnaires were completed in a designated room inside the winery or in a designated outdoor area.

A specific questionnaire with a precise "question path" was used for these interviews. The authors designed a question path to maintain the same course of discussion, based on similar previous work ([Ingrassia et al., 2018](#); [Altamore et al., 2018](#)). While completing the questionnaires, participants were not allowed to exchange opinions or suggestions. The questionnaire initially included questions aimed at gathering personal, socioeconomic, and origin information about the tourists interviewed, the type of vacation, and the sources of information about the trip, the frequency of consumption, and the level of experience in wine consumption. The questionnaire then contained 16 closed questions aimed at identifying the reasons for visiting the winery and the needs/desires that tourists wanted to satisfy during this specific vacation or visit to the winery, including with regard to sustainability. These variables (motivations/needs) were chosen by the authors based on a review of the relevant literature on the subject ([Bruwer, 2003](#); [Alant & Bruwer, 2004](#); [Getz &](#)

Brown, 2006; Karafolas, 2007; Bruwer & Alant, 2009; Bruwer et al., 2013; López-Guzmán et al., 2014; Figueroa & Rotarou, 2018; Trigo & Silva, 2022; Pahrudin et al., 2022; Tănase et al., 2022; Alebaki et al., 2022; Cunha et al., 2023), preliminary studies on territorial tourism (Back et al., 2021; Byrd et al., 2016; I.R.V.O, Regional Institute of Wine and Oil; Federation of Wine and Flavors Roads of Sicily; Associazione Nazionale Città del Vino, 2025), and studies conducted by the authors in previous years (Ingrassia et al., 2022b). Respondents were asked to give a score from 1 (min) to 10 (max) to each variable based on their personal judgment of importance (10 most important, 1 very low importance/no importance).

4. Results

The Profile of the Wine Tourist

As is well known, segmentation divides the market, or consumers/tourists in this case, into homogeneous groups (segments) based on demographic, psychographic, or behavioral data. The goal is to create distinct groups that are easier to target with marketing. After segmentation, profiling is used to gain a deeper understanding of each group, transforming raw data into a more detailed and personalized view. While segmentation groups customers based on common characteristics, profiling analyzes individual habits, interests, and behaviors to gain a thorough understanding of each group and, ultimately, each individual customer.

Both of these steps were carried out in this study. Profiling involves in-depth analysis of the identified segments to create a detailed portrait of each one. This was performed in this study. In fact, detailed data on preferences, needs, motivations, and behaviors—both purchasing and consumption, as well as interaction and socialization, including digital—were analyzed for each segment. Subsequently, detailed profiles of the wine tourists interviewed for this study were outlined or “constructed”.

Profiling has made it possible to transform the data collected into comprehensive information that allows us to understand and interpret the evolution of wine tourism in Sicily and, consequently, to create more targeted communications and offers, improving customer experience and the effectiveness of marketing campaigns.

In the segmentation of consumers, as well as tourists, particular attention has been paid to the criterion of age. In fact, generational marketing for tourism, as for food products, is based on the assumption that the “consumption” or use of a service is firmly anchored to people’s tastes, which in turn are greatly influenced by age, especially in certain cases, such as this one, where we observe the motivations or needs that drive a particular type of vacation. Obviously, biological age is not necessarily an indicator of behavior (citing Kotler and his book on marketing), so much so that it must be considered in relation to other equally important variables that, when combined, can lead to the creation of different consumer/user profiles, such as gender, income, level of education, occupation, and other cultural factors related to origin. All these variables have been considered in this study.

Therefore, our interest was to consider all these variables simultaneously, not just age. But since age appears to be fundamental to this study, we decided to analyze the results according to the “generation” to which they belong. It is well known, in fact, that today’s thirty-year-olds are not the same as those 50 years ago, nor are children or the elderly. On the other hand, consumption patterns, behaviors, habits, and even travel motivations have changed.

The positioning of a study result in relation to the variable “time” must therefore be continuously reconsidered by researchers and businesses, as this almost always corresponds to changes in people’s lifestyles, attitudes, and behaviors, which must be reflected in the search for a tourist destination and in travel motivations, as well as in the supply of tourist products and services.

And this was precisely the purpose that led to the formulation of the hypotheses of this study and its objectives: starting from a framework in which much of the literature spoke of the possibility that something was evolving in the profile of tourists in general—more in search of sustainability, serenity, and tranquility in uncrowded places in contact with nature—and finding out whether these changes had led to a collateral and consequent change in the “classic” profile of wine tourists. And if so, highlighting it.

The following scenario of segmentation emerged from the analysis of data collected from interviews with 400 tourists/visitors at the 39 wineries along Sicily’s wine routes during the autumn–winter and spring–summer periods of the three-year period 2023–2025.

Table 1 shows the segmentation characteristics of the wine tourists interviewed. The visitors interviewed were 54% men and 46% women (Table 1).

Table 1. Segmentation characteristics of wine tourists along the Sicilian wine routes from 2023 to 2025.

Variables	Categories	Frequencies
Gender	Female	46%
	Male	54%
Range of age	20–30 yrs old	20%
	31–40 yrs old	45%
	41–50 yrs old	16%
	51–60 yrs old	12%
	61–70 yrs old (and older)	7%
Origin	Italy	39%
	Europe (France, Germany, Switzerland, Netherlands, Belgium, Austria, Sweden)	36%
	USA	23%
	Other	2%
Employment	Professional/manager	11%
	Civil servant	23%
	Worker/trader/craftsman	5%
	Self-employed	21%
	Student (full-time)	13%
	Retired	8%
	Unemployed	12%
Other	7%	
Level of education	High school or lower	3%
	Some college without a degree	48%
	Bachelor’s degree	44%
	Postgraduate degree	5%
Annual family income	Less than €25,000	14%
	€25,000–€50,000	55%
	More than €50,000	31%

Most of the respondents were international tourists (61%) from Europe (36%) and USA (23%) (Table 1). Most of the tourists were aged under 40 years old (65%) and there was a high proportion of young and very young tourists—belonging to Generation Y and Generation Z—with 20% aged between 20 and 30 years old and 45% from 31 to 40 years old (Table 1).

The level of education ranges from medium to high (97%), and most respondents are civil servants (23%), more frequently Italians, and self-employed (21%), though 13% are students, 12% unemployed, 11% professionals or managers, and 8% retired (Table 1).

Overall, 86% have an income above €25,000, with 55% of the total number of respondents belonging to the income bracket between €25,000 and €50,000 (Table 1).

As regards the type of vacation, it emerged that visits are often limited to a single day (71%), while the remaining 48% of respondents arrived at the winery through an organized tour, including those arranged by tour operators (Table 2). Respondents included couples, small groups, and groups of around 10 people.

Table 2. Type of holiday, information channels, wine consumption, and type of wine consumer declared by tourists along the Sicilian wine routes from 2023 to 2025.

Variables	Categories	Percentages
Type of holiday	Wine tourism/other vacation with parents/friends, do-it-yourself via the internet	22%
	Wine tourism/other vacation with parents/friends, organized tour	48%
	Day trip	71%
Information channels	Brochures and leaflets in hotels	3%
	Tourist guides/Tour operator/Travel agencies	23%
	Tourist information points	19%
	Specialized wine magazines	8%
	Newspapers, periodicals, magazines	4%
	Billboards in airports and along roads/highways	-
	Websites/social networks of wine routes/wineries	19%
	Websites/social networks and online platforms	21%
Wine consumption	Other	3%
	Frequent	35%
	Regular	35%
Type of consumer considered to be	Occasional	30%
	“Wine experts”	37%
	Average consumer	28%
	Newcomer	35%

Regarding the source of information from which consumers learned about the winery and the wine route, 23% of respondents said they learned about it through tourist guides or tour operators (Table 2), 19% said they obtained the information from tourist information points and websites or social networks of wineries, and 21% learned about the winery through physical or digital word of mouth (DWOM) via social networks and online platforms (such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and travel blogs) that travelers use to research, plan, and share their vacations. These tools offer inspiration through visual content, reviews from other users, and recommendations for activities and itineraries, and allow travelers to share their experiences in real time and after their trip (Table 2). Tourists scroll through photos and videos and read reviews on travel sites and blogs to find out about flights, accommodation, and activities and seek recommendations for activities, restaurants, and local attractions.

In terms of consumption type, Table 2 shows that 35% are frequent or regular consumers and 30% are occasional consumers.

If we compare this result with the characteristic that differentiates consumer types based on their level of wine knowledge, it emerges that most respondents define themselves

as “Wine experts” (37%) (Table 2), although the respondents are distributed fairly evenly among the three types, with 35% being “Newcomers” and 28% defining themselves as “Average consumers” (Table 2).

Lastly, the previous results were enriched by those relating to the reasons for travel and the needs that the tourists interviewed would have liked to satisfy with this type of experience. Table 3 shows the hierarchy of motivations and needs that emerged from the scores given by tourists to the motivations/needs (variables) observed.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and hierarchy of motivations and needs that emerged from the scores given by tourists to the motivations/needs (variables) observed.

Order of Presentation of Variables to Respondents	Motivations/Needs	Mean of Scores Given to the Variables	Standard Deviation
4	To enjoy the experience of a winery visit	9.60	1.362
7	To experience local food and wine	9.52	2.785
14	To have a relaxing day (or weekend) out	9.21	2.254
12	To visit cultural attractions and rural settings of the territory	8.93	2.896
5	Because I knew a specific Sicilian wine brand and I want to experience the winery personally	8.69	2.214
1	Tasting and buying food and wine	8.35	2.023
10	Socializing with other wine lovers	7.88	2.362
11	Socializing with partner, friends, family, and/or local inhabitants	7.66	2.148
6	Winery tour	7.35	2.654
2	To visit the winery and learn about the winemaking	7.29	2.745
3	To enjoy new/special wines	7.06	2.614
8	To learn about wines and wine production (focus on sustainability) from the winemaker	6.94	2.789
9	To have information about wine prices and how to buy wines	6.84	2.895
13	Recreation/Leisure (walks, picnics, lunches in the vineyard, sensory trails, wine painting, educational farms, trekking, mountain bike, cooking classes, yoga, horse trekking, etc.)	6.63	3.648
15	Other complementary activities (hobbies, congresses, events, celebrations, work conventions, etc.)	3.63	3.349
16	Because the winery is associated with a Wine Route	3.27	2.316

The analysis of the results revealed two main groups of motivations and needs. The first group, after the first motivation “*To enjoy the experience of a winery visit*,” followed by “*Because I knew a specific Sicilian wine brand and I want to experience the winery personally*”, is more focused on the main motivations of a slow traveler, which are stress reduction, the search for authentic and meaningful experiences, connection with nature and local culture, and the adoption of a more sustainable and environmentally friendly style of travel. A slow traveler wants to slow down the frenetic pace of everyday life to fully enjoy every moment and place, promoting mental and physical well-being and creating deeper memories. This group is characterized by the following variables: “*To experience local food and wine*”, “*To have a relaxing day (or weekend) out*”, “*To visit cultural attractions and rural settings of the territory*”, and “*Tasting and buying food and wine*”.

In the second group, social and experiential aspects are linked to curiosity about the winery, the wines, and the wine producer. It can be observed that tourists want to

learn/discover new things, enjoy new experiences in a pleasant setting, and socialize with other people. The variables are “Socializing with other wine lovers” “Socializing with partner, friends, family, and/or local inhabitants”, “Winery tour”, “To visit the winery and learn about the winemaking”, “To enjoy new/special wines”, “To learn about wines and wine production (focus on sustainability) from the winemaker”, “To have information about wine prices and how to buy wines”, and “Recreation/Leisure (walks, picnics, lunches in the vineyard, sensory trails, wine painting, educational farms, trekking, mountain bike, cooking classes, yoga, horse trekking, etc.)”. This group emphasizes the dimension of socialized experience, both with the participants in the visit who are physically present and with the producer; more specifically, wine tourists are interested in learning about the distinctive characteristics of a particular wine or region, or sustainable production methods such as organic wine production (with interest in sustainability practices). In addition, tourists socialized with other people using social networks, such as Instagram, for example, thanks to which the sharing of a beautiful moment or a positive experience takes place in real time. This result also appears to be of interest to wine producers and wine marketing studies, as it reveals and confirms the importance of the wine experience and its territory in influencing wine purchasing behavior (Bellia et al., 2022) and the importance of sharing (Alebaki & Iakovidou, 2010; Alebaki & Iakovidou, 2011; Ali et al., 2016; Bruwer & Rueger-Muck, 2019; Ingrassia et al., 2022b) and of communicating the learning experience with other people (Alonso & Liu, 2011; Bonarou et al., 2019; Ingrassia et al., 2020; Bellia et al., 2022).

The third group of motivations/needs of little importance and significance includes the following variables (needs): “Other complementary activities” (hobbies, congresses, events, celebrations, work conventions, etc.) and “Because the winery is associated with a Wine Route.” This result highlights respondents’ lack of interest in other reasons for visiting and their lack of knowledge or indifference to the fact that the winery was located along a Sicilian wine route.

The analysis of discovered segments allowed us to draw up the new profile(s) of wine tourists in Sicily which can be observed to outline similarities or differences with previous research in Italy or in other countries (Ingrassia et al., 2022c, 2023). Based on the results obtained, described, and commented on above, a new tourist profiling was developed, shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Classification of the main profiles of wine consumers discovered among the tourists interviewed.

Variables	Main Profiles of Wine Consumers		
	Wine Experts	Beginners	Young Wine Tourists
Age	Senior	Intergenerational	Youngsters
Main benefit sought	High quality and prestigious research	Progressive learning	Immediate and emotional sharing
Behavior	Habitual, immersive, and contemplative behavior	Curious and exploratory behavior	Social, digital, and sharing behavior, connection between tradition and innovation
Information sources	Specialized and authoritative sources	Accessible and practical sources	Fast, interactive digital sources
Product knowledge	Expert knowledge	Basic knowledge	Superficial knowledge and curious attitude
Frequency of travel	Regular	Accidental and occasional	Regular, occasional, and accidental

Table 4 describes a classification of the main profiles of wine consumers discovered among those interviewed. These are divided into three main tourist profiles.

The first profile of Table 4 are wine tourists defined as “Wine experts.” This profile of tourists are regular wine tourists who often choose this type of holiday to visit wineries and spend days or weekends in the countryside, enjoying agricultural landscapes, local cuisine, and typical wines, living in a relaxed context, but above all looking for convivial atmospheres. Wine experts, which include regular wine consumers and connoisseurs, visit wineries to purchase quality, authentic, and prestigious wines; they are characterized by professionalism, competence, and trust.

Often, a visit to a winery is a first experience, motivated by a desire to explore and learn more about the world of wine, or because they have chosen to visit rural areas for another type of vacation, such as agritourism, cycling tourism, nature tourism, cultural tourism, etc. This segment has been defined as “Beginners” because they are mostly new to wine, love to learn and buy wine during winery visits, and are motivated by curiosity to experience wine tourism. They are characterized by enthusiasm and desire to discover. Both types of wine tourists enjoy interacting with producers and asking questions about the wines they taste. At the end of the visit, they usually purchase the wine or ask for information on where to buy it once they return home, either online (e-commerce) or through direct contact. This aspect therefore requires companies to equip themselves with the offering of winery visits and tastings of their wines and to set up their sales outlets with an increasing focus on high quality standards.

A new element that completes the new segmentation of wine tourists is the presence, which is also quite significant, of a new segment of very young tourists, for whom social networks are a very important means of communication used to share experiences and opinions (Bruwer & Rueger-Muck, 2019; Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Ingrassia et al., 2022b, 2022c). This new group of wine tourists belonging to Generation Y and Generation Z differs from the other two segments in terms of level of knowledge of wines, with superficial knowledge but a curious attitude, and, above all, in terms of their motivations and methods of visiting the territory and the needs they want to satisfy through the wine tourism experience. This segment of young food and wine tourists, spanning two generations, is characterized by the daily and constant use of social media to share and recount their everyday experiences. Through their digital interaction, they learn about and share wine tourism experiences, thus contributing to the promotion of wine destinations and highlighting the fundamental role that digital word of mouth plays in communication for wine companies. Their characteristic is the connection between tradition and innovation. This finding is very important because it confirms a change in the communication behavior of wine enthusiasts and tourists in general, namely the desire and need to immediately communicate an emotion or experience when traveling or discovering something new (a place, food, wine, etc.).

Finally, it is possible to note that this new profile of wine tourists can be alternatively regular, occasional, and accidental. According to the literature, differences in attitudes, lifestyles, and demographics, and differences based on people’s attitudes affect motivations (Bekar & Benzergil, 2025). These studies and another by Alebaki and Iakovidou are in line with our results showing that occasional wine tourists are young people with a high level of education and a medium-high income (Alebaki & Iakovidou, 2010; Tănase et al., 2022).

It is noteworthy that wine tourism is increasingly taking the form of experiential, relational, sensory, and sustainable tourism, with a focus on environmental issues and the quality of the offering.

Figure 1, designed by the authors, aims to highlight the connection between wine tourism and slow tourism.

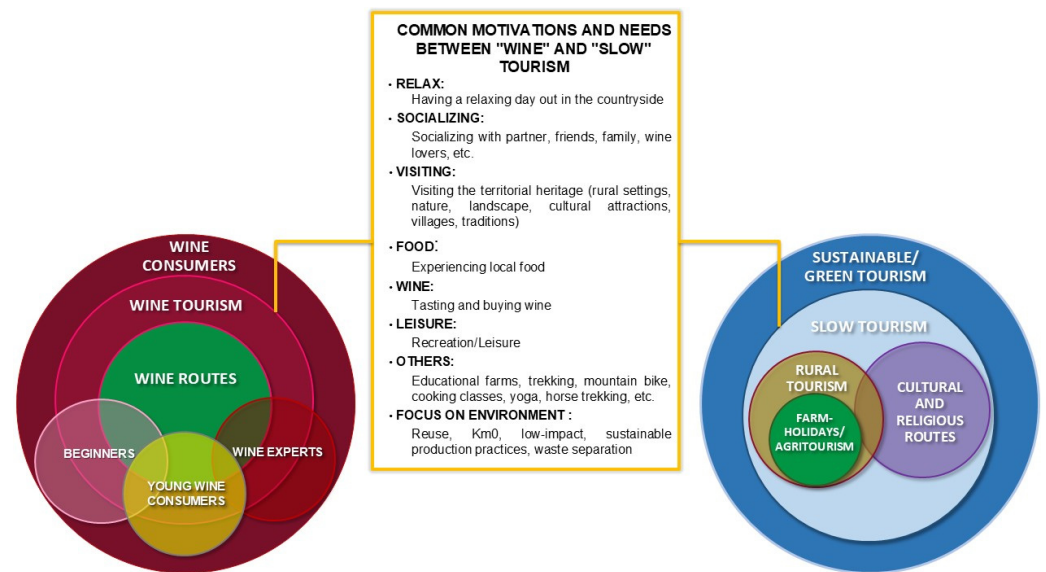


Figure 1. Authors' elaboration of visual representation of links between Wine tourism and Slow tourism and of common motivations and needs.

The red circle represents the totality of wine consumers. Wine routes are a specialized tourist offering in the field of wine tourism (like wine tourism itineraries that include visits to wineries and tastings). In the field of wine tourism, traditional wine tourist profiles were identified (Figure 1), such as *Beginners*, i.e., tourists or consumers who are new to wine and are attracted more by the overall experience (e.g., landscape, conviviality, discovery of a territory) than by the oenological and sensory characteristics of the wine; *Wine experts*, experienced wine consumers, including “connoisseurs,” motivated by a deep interest in the world of wine in general, are often referred to as “wine lovers.” They are characterized by their desire to learn about the characteristics of wine, production techniques, and quality, and to participate in wine-related events (e.g., fairs, organized evenings, promotional events, and cultural events), but also to learn about the territories where wine is produced, their history, culture, and gastronomic traditions; finally, there are the *Young Wine Consumers*, consisting of young people belonging to the two most recent generations (i.e., Generation Z and Generation Y or Millennials), the emerging group positioned between the two previous ones because it includes both wine experts and beginners. However, this segment exhibits specific characteristics such as young age, curiosity, sociability and digital sharing of experiences, desire for discovery, interest in protecting the planet and environmental sustainability, adoption of circular economy behaviors and strong social commitment, use of slow means of transport or even walking in order to enjoy the landscape along the way, even together with other people, and stopping/practicing sports in the open air or in contact with animals.

The blue circle on the right represents another form of tourism that has become very popular recently, namely *Sustainable/Green Tourism*. As already mentioned, this type of tourism is based on the social responsibility of tourists and entrepreneurs in the sector toward environmental sustainability and circularity. So-called Slow Tourism can be defined as a subset of Green Tourism because it is the opposite of mass tourism, i.e., a form of tourism characterized by a demand for experiences linked to knowledge and staying in rural, uncrowded areas, and the use of slow means of transport. It is a form of tourism distinguished by contact with nature and authentic, real sensory experiences.

This subset consists of rural tourism (which includes activities in rural areas such as guided tours, discovering local traditions, and direct contact with nature), farm holidays/Agritourism (a specific form of rural tourism focused on farm life, agricultural

activities, and food and wine), and finally “Cultural and Religious Trails”, which are experiential itineraries and trails with a strong emotional involvement, combining faith and culture, traditions, food and wine, and contact with nature. These two important forms of tourism, wine tourism and green tourism, have common underlying motivations and needs, as can be seen in Figure 1.

A new element that emerged from this study is that some of the motivations and needs expressed by the tourists interviewed were common to those typical of slow tourism. These common motivations are listed in the box and defined as common motivations and needs. These motivations and needs do not appear to be incidental but, on the contrary, decisive because they enrich the new wine tourism experience in Sicily and outline the current demand for slow tourism by tourists and by the new profile of wine tourists, consisting not only of young tourists. These motivations, or needs, are as follows: “Relax” (having a relaxing day out in the countryside), “Socializing” (socializing with partner, friends, family, wine lovers, local inhabitants, etc.), “Visiting” the territorial heritage (visiting rural settings, discovering nature, landscape, experience cultural attractions, villages, traditions, etc.), “Food” (experiencing local food, learn about local foods and cuisine, taste traditional foods and recipes in typical restaurants in the areas visited, etc.), “Wine” (tasting and buying local wines), “Leisure” (walks, picnics, lunches in the vineyard, sensory trails, wine painting, etc.), “Others” (educational farms, trekking, mountain bike, cooking classes, yoga, horse trekking, etc.), “Focus on Environment” (reuse, Km0, low impact, sustainable production practices, waste separation, etc.). These activities describe the different facets and motivations of today’s food and wine tourism (or wine tourism and rural tourism) in Sicily. In other words, they demonstrate a growing interest in forms of travel that combine the sensory pleasure of food and wine with prolonged cultural and natural immersion in the territory. Specifically, they indicate a trend towards a “search for authenticity,” as travelers seek genuine experiences in direct contact with local producers and traditions; “experientiality,” as it is no longer enough just to “visit” or “taste,” but to actively “experience” the area through practical activities such as cooking classes, trekking, yoga, educational grape harvesting, etc.; “sustainability and well-being,” with a focus on relaxation, outdoor life, and conscious consumption of local products; “socialization,” because the activities are often designed to be shared with others (family, friends, partners), encouraging the creation of bonds; and finally, “tourist loyalty” in the area, as the range of complementary activities aims to create a lasting bond between the visitor and the destination, whether it is a winery or the entire area. In summary, these common motivations and needs demonstrate the evolution of the concept of wine tourism from an “immersive and multisensory experience” in wine and its territory to a “holistic immersive experience” in a rural area, typical of slow tourism.

5. Discussion

Wine tourism continues to be an increasingly popular form of off-season tourism (García-Rodea et al., 2022), and the results of this study confirm this trend and provide a comprehensive overview of the current food and wine tourism landscape in Sicily.

In recent years, the profile of wine tourists has undergone a significant transformation, evolving from visitors primarily interested in wine products to “slow” travelers interested in an immersive, multifaceted experience deeply connected to the territory.

The literature on slow tourism (Kostilnikova et al., 2022) highlights how socio-cultural and post-pandemic changes have led to a growing appreciation of slowness, authenticity, and sustainability, elements that are now fully recognizable in wine tourism as well.

This study has revealed a new segmentation of consumers and a new profile(s) of wine tourists in Sicily. In this context, the wine component—while maintaining a central

role as the initial driver of the visit—has a relatively lower weight than in the past: it is no longer the sole motivation for the trip or the fundamental motivational factor for the visit (Ingrassia et al., 2022b), but is integrated into a broader and more diversified set of activities and experiential values.

Several studies (Getz & Brown, 2006; Carvalho et al., 2021) highlight how food and wine tourists are no longer “mono-” or “oligo-motivational”, but rather oriented towards combining tasting, discovery of the rural landscape, outdoor activities, contact with the local community, and the search for inner and physical well-being.

This study empirically observed this phenomenon, demonstrating that this change exists at least in the context of Sicilian wine routes, and accurately outlining the characteristics of tourist segments and the new profiles that have emerged.

The results of this study have allowed us to identify not only the main segments of wine tourists in Sicily, but also a new profile of wine tourists, defined as “Young Wine Tourists”. This new profile of wine tourists is no longer interested only in wine, but also in a broader type of vacation, namely an experiential vacation typical of the so-called green-sustainable tourism and “slow tourism” (Cucculelli & Goffi, 2016; Montella, 2017; Bellia et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the results are further in line with Dias et al. (2023), according to whom middle-aged consumers have higher levels of education and income, show a better knowledge of wines, and have a greater interest in consumption and learning about production characteristics, as well as a higher propensity to purchase wine from the wineries they visit.

However, an additional and entirely new element that completes the new segmentation of wine tourists is the rather significant presence of very young consumers/tourists, for whom digital and social networks are a very important means of communication used to share experiences and opinions (Bruwer & Rueger-Muck, 2019; Chen et al., 2025; Ingrassia et al., 2022b). For example, the study by Du and Morrish (2025) analyzes that wine consumption by young Chinese consumers is determined by a complex set of factors; a combination of cultural, social, and economic factors, including the influence of digital media and social networks (Ingrassia et al., 2022b). Relational contexts, such as professional events, family gatherings, and romantic occasions, play a significant role in defining such behaviors. The inclusion of wine in Western gastronomic practices and the influence of social media further stimulate this trend, with influencers and public figures having a significant impact on purchasing choices (Ingrassia et al., 2020). This element is very important because it confirms a change in the communication behavior of wine lovers and tourists in general, namely the desire and need to immediately communicate an emotion or experience as part of a journey or discovery of something new (a territory, a food, a wine, etc.). There has been a change in the sharing habits of young wine lovers, which is also important for wine producers, who can take advantage of “digital word of mouth” and reviews from their customers/consumers through the use of social networks (Ali et al., 2016; Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Bonarou et al., 2019; Ingrassia et al., 2020, 2022a, 2022c).

In fact (Figure 1), many tourists say they are interested in environmental issues and the environmental sustainability of wineries and wines. These tourists are also interested in responsible consumption and the application of circularity and reuse practices.

The study also revealed the main motivations that drive this new profile of wine tourists to travel the Wine Routes in Sicily, whose priorities in this study are slightly different from those of tourists in the pre-pandemic era (Alant & Bruwer, 2004; Alebaki & Iakovidou, 2010; Alebaki & Iakovidou, 2011; Alebaki et al., 2022). The main motivations, apart from the primary motivation, which remains, and is, “*To enjoy the experience of a winery*

visit”—and this was to be expected, if not taken for granted, given that the interviews were conducted at a winery after the tour and tasting (if the interviews had been conducted with pilgrims or religious tourists on an ancient pilgrimage route during the pilgrimage, the most common reason would clearly have been to experience the pilgrimage)—were those not purely related to wine but those that in the past had been defined as “the complementary motivations to those related to wine”, i.e., “*To have a relaxing day (or weekend) out*”, “*To visit cultural attractions and rural settings in the area*”, and “*Tasting and buying food and wine*”.

Today’s wine tourist in Sicily is a visitor attracted not only by wine but also by a “green” style of vacation, i.e., slow tourism focused on environmental sustainability, social responsibility, and circular behavior. These tourists travel in search of direct outdoor experiences and want to combine wine tasting with visits to other attractions in the area. For example, they like to eat in the winery and buy the wine they have tasted at the end of the visit. The importance of the surrounding environment is in line with the findings of the study by [Bruwer and Rueger-Muck \(2019\)](#), which shows that the atmosphere and surroundings of the winery are extremely important in attracting tourists to visit.

In addition, these tourists are also interested in the activities of wine producers and their commitment to climate change and environmental protection. Tourists seek out places where they can learn about and taste wines, interact with producers, and share moments of discovery and learning with others. The emotional bond between wine tourists, regions, and producers is established not only through wine as the main product, but also through the set of hedonic attributes that make up the trip or vacation, which include tangible and intangible components that together determine the holistic slow experience ([Dias et al., 2023](#)).

The study highlighted the importance of providing additional and complementary services to guests, such as those provided by agritourism establishments ([Ingrassia et al., 2023](#)), as the customer experience is crucial to strengthening tourists’ motivation to spend time in the winery and, hopefully, to stay in the area for several days or return, in addition to the classic effect of purchasing wine. These concepts are also confirmed by other studies that highlight the strong connection between the search for sustainability, rural tourism, and wine tourism ([Ingrassia et al., 2022c](#)). The results showed that the wineries observed have good hospitality facilities and a sufficiently varied range of additional services in addition to wine tasting/visits at the winery connected to wine.

However, the Sicilian WR infrastructure in the observed area still represents an obstacle to the development of tourism. Our study revealed that the wine route system in Sicily also has numerous critical issues, as highlighted in previous studies ([Ingrassia et al., 2022c](#)), which shows that tourists have little knowledge of the existence of wine routes in Sicily and their location due to many issues linked to organizational and communication deficits, which fully hinder the promotion of the offer. In particular, tourists traveling independently declared it was difficult to reach the winery due to the lack of facilities and infrastructure for tourist transport, such as roads, highways, railways, buses, trains, etc., as well as poor internet coverage in suburban and inland areas, unlike in other more developed areas of Italy such as Tuscany, Veneto, or other countries like Napa Valley or other territories abroad. Some interesting studies on regions such as Napa ([Hira & Swartz, 2014](#)) demonstrated that path dependency and distance to markets are poor explanations for the relative success of wine regions. We believe that although terroir, or natural comparative advantage, is supported by some evidence, the social capital and entrepreneurship underlying technological leadership are fundamental to the competitive advantage.

It would be interesting to disseminate these results in the region to help policy makers and businesses operating in the rural and slow tourism sector and wine-producing

businesses to formulate strategies to enhance their offerings in response to the needs of this new tourist profile identified in this study, in order to fully satisfy this new demand through better personalization and more focused differentiation of the services that can be offered to these tourists. It has emerged that these tourists—although they visited these places with the primary interest of visiting a winery, walking along an ancient path through the inland areas of the region, visiting a village, visiting a town with particular landscape or cultural characteristics (architectural, artistic, etc.), visiting certified quality food trails, seeking relaxation in the open air, following the routes of certified quality food products, or relaxation in the open air away from the city—all have common motivations and needs in terms of the experiences and activities they wish to enjoy, which must be satisfied by the accommodation and tourism businesses in the area, working in close collaboration and synergy.

In fact, the tourist that emerged in this study is a tourist who “seeks out the territory” in all its facets and wants to experience it through various types of experiences. Therefore, these results are very important for the territory covered by the study, as they can contribute to defining integrated territorial enhancement strategies for the revitalization of inland rural areas through this form of “Eno-Slow” tourism and all other forms of tourism which may be related to it (e.g., green tourism, agritourism, sustainable tourism, cultural tourism, naturalistic tourism, religious tourism, etc.).

This study has the limitation of considering only one wine-producing area, which, although highly significant in terms of tourist appeal, is still only one area. In fact, the study focuses on Sicily, which limits the generalizability of the results of other areas, even though this specific area is particularly relevant for tourist appeal, not only wine tourism. Clearly, there are many wine regions around the world, characterized by profound environmental, cultural, and agricultural differences. Therefore, it would be interesting to replicate the study in other contexts to confirm or refute the results obtained. The methodology for sampling wineries and tourists is sufficiently robust to allow for the generalizability of the method and therefore the replicability of the study in the future. In fact, response biases were overcome by the random sampling method and the large sample size. However, the respondents are tourists who chose to go to Sicily, and, clearly, they do not represent all potential wine tourists around the world. The study should certainly be replicated in other wine-producing regions with food and wine tourism, to understand if results are confirmed or other information may be acquired regarding the motivations and needs of today’s wine tourists. Moreover, it would also be interesting to replicate this study in other wine-producing areas with strong slow tourist appeal to verify the existence of this new profile of wine tourists and their needs and motivations, which are no longer solely focused on wine as the central element, but also on other attractions typical of slow tourism.

6. Conclusions

Slow tourism is a rapidly growing sector and a real opportunity for the economic and social development of many rural areas worldwide. Wine regions that are still disadvantaged in terms of infrastructure, or those in developing countries, can benefit greatly from the expansion of this closely related form of tourism and from the positive experience of other rural areas with similar characteristics. However, true transformation requires a transition to truly sustainable agriculture and rural tourism. Wine tourism should contribute to the sustainability of the destination, as visitors demand that wineries demonstrate good environmental practices, identifiable through certification labels and the adoption of socially responsible attitudes (Vecchio et al., 2024). This requires effective public policies capable of financing investments in renewable energy, landscape protection, biodiversity, and land conservation.

Findings suggest that Wine tourism is evolving to Slow tourism, because it is often based on the same principles of traveling calmly, immersing oneself in the local culture, and rhythms for a more authentic experience. Both value the discovery of the territory, culture, traditions, and interaction with communities, without the rush of mass tourism. Wine tourism was an experience primarily focused on wine (which includes tastings and visits to wineries and vineyards), however today it is also increasingly about immersing oneself in the culture, traditions, and landscapes of the wine-producing regions, especially in areas such as Sicily, where there is a great variety of landscapes, territorial conformations, history, art, and culture.

The novelty of this study is that Wine tourism in Sicily aligns perfectly with the principles of Slow tourism because its essence lies in the gradual and in-depth discovery of a region through its wine, food, and stories. In fact, it is precisely along the Sicilian Wine Routes that a new and specific profile of wine tourists has been highlighted for the first time, with motivations and needs connected precisely to this overlap of tourist offerings that Sicily can offer (Cucculelli & Goffi, 2016; Montella, 2017; Pahrudin et al., 2022).

These results allow us to draw up a profile of wine tourists who, compared to the pre-COVID-19 pandemic years, want to satisfy a psycho-emotional need with this type of vacation through wine-producing regions, with motivations that are new compared to the traditional ones of wine tourism, including the social, physical, and digital sharing of these experiences and emotions. For these tourists, their interest in wine is combined and fully integrated with their interest in the nature, culture, and gastronomy of the area they are visiting and rediscovering the history and origin of wines in the landscapes of the territories they slowly travel through, as an authentic expression of a territory and its history.

This interesting result confirms the importance of rural areas strengthening the link between wineries and other elements of quality tourist interest, which together constitute the entire tangible and intangible heritage of a territory.

In order to revitalize wine-producing areas and enable them to contribute effectively to the socioeconomic development of rural areas, it is essential to adopt integrated strategies that combine sustainable viticulture, wine production, and rural tourism, promoting innovation and value creation through cooperation between local actors. This approach aims to offer high-quality services and enhance the identity of the area. The success of promotional strategies depends on close collaboration between entrepreneurs, stakeholders, and local administrations, with a view to sharing a project for the enhancement of rural areas through food and wine and vice versa.

At the local level, this change favors the deseasonalization of tourism and the enhancement of rural areas and small villages, often excluded from mass tourism circuits. Interest in sustainable experiences and contact with nature stimulates the local economy, supporting producers, artisans, family-run accommodations, and minor cultural activities. It also encourages the protection of the agricultural landscape, as environmental quality becomes a value perceived and demanded by visitors.

This “slow” approach also encourages greater awareness of identity on the part of local communities, who rediscover wine and agri-food traditions as a powerful tool for storytelling and social cohesion.

On a global level, the new wine tourism fits perfectly into the international trends of sustainable and responsible tourism, strengthening the image of Italy (and wine-producing regions in general) as a model of balance between culture, nature, and quality of life. This positioning attracts a more cultured and attentive audience, capable of appreciating not only the product, but also the cultural and environmental context that generates it.

Furthermore, the promotion of wine as a symbol of identity and not just as a consumer product encourages intercultural dialog and the dissemination of good practices related to ecological transition and respect for traditions.

To conclude, it is possible to note that this new profile of wine tourist represents a strategic opportunity to build more balanced, sustainable, and culturally aware models of territorial development. It is a transformation that combines economic, ethical, and environmental dimensions, generating widespread benefits both locally and internationally.

These results can guide the definition of more effective strategies for the growth of rural, slow, and sustainable tourism and the economic strengthening of the inland areas of regions where local communities are struggling to remain.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

WRs	Wine Routes
SWRs	Sicilian Wine Routes

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