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HOW TO PROPEL DOMESTIC TOURISM ACTIVITY IN AN INDUSTRIAL CITY THROUGH WINE TOURISM: A PROJECT BASED IN THE STATE OF AGUASCALIENTES, MEXICO.

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To my beloved parents.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing this dissertation has been more than a project to me. It signifies the closure of two confronting years and the possibility to overcome obstacles that, at some point, I thought I wouldn't be able to. It also allowed me to challenge myself even when I did not want to and helped me to know myself better. It also gave me the chance to develop a project that mattered to me, and that may help my community in the long run, which is really important to me. Thus, the first person I want to thank is myself for having the courage not to give up even when my physical and psychological health weren't at its best.

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RESUMO

É amplamente reconhecido que as caves de vinho estão entre os destinos mais atraentes para os turistas, principalmente quando se visita um país europeu. No entanto, a visita de vinhedos não é uma atividade de turismo popular quando nos referimos a países do Novo Mundo. Embora algumas investigações desenvolvidas na Austrália e na Argentina tenham demonstrado um incremento na procura do enoturismo, este tipo de turismo ainda é uma atividade económica pouco investigada no México. Assim, este projeto visa investigar se o enoturismo poderia ser um atrativo viável para impulsionar a atividade turística de uma cidade industrial no México, utilizando o seu potencial para dinamizar este mercado em expansão. Para analisar esta questão relativamente ao estado de Aguascalientes, México, decidimos elaborar este projecto para estudar a atividade turística na região, e aliá-la à sua longa tradição vitivinícola e à sua rota do vinho em desenvolvimento. Utilizámos dados secundários através da revisão da literatura existente e dados primários que recolhemos através de um focus group para desenvolver este projecto e sustentar a nossa proposta. A informação qualitativa e quantitativa obtida revelou que o enoturismo é suficientemente apelativo para o turista visitar um destino industrial quando existam condições adequadas. Além disso, foi possível desenvolver recomendações específicas para gestores e marketers envolvidos na dinamização do setor do enoturismo em Aguascalientes, com o objectivo de o tornar um destino de enoturismo competitivo no país, apresentando-o como um destino introdutório ao enoturismo para novos enoturistas.

Palavras-chave: Enoturismo, Turismo de Bebidas, Turismo Gastronómico, Alimentação e Vinhos, Gestão de Destinos, Rota do Vinho, Motivações do Enoturismo.

Códigos de classificação JEL: L83, Q01, Z32

ABSTRACT

It is widely known that wine cellars are among the most appealing destinations for tourists, especially when visiting a European country. However, vineyard visitation is not an isolated popular tourism activity when it comes to New World countries. Although some research developed in Australia and Argentina have demonstrated an increment in wine tourism demand, this type of tourism is still an under-investigated economic activity in Mexico. Thus, this project aims to investigate if wine tourism could be a viable attraction to propel tourism activity in an industrial city, its potential as a booming market in the country, and its possible enhancements. To analyse this premise, the state of Aguascalientes, Mexico, was taken as the case study destination due to its scarcity of tourism activity, its long-standing wine-producing tradition, and its developing wine route. Secondary data from the literature review and primary data gathered from a focus group were analysed to prove this theory. The qualitative and quantitative information obtained revealed that wine tourism is appealing enough for tourists to visit an industrial destination under the proper conditions. Furthermore, it was possible to develop specific managerial and marketing recommendations for the wine tourism sector in Aguascalientes to make it a competitive wine tourism destination in the country, presenting it as an introductory wine tourism destination for wine-novice tourists.

Keywords: Wine Tourism, Beverage Tourism, Gastronomic Tourism, Food and Wine, Destination Management, Wine Route, Wine Tourism Motivations.

JEL Classification Codes: L83, Q01, Z32

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Even though Mexico is considered one of the top ten most touristic places globally, with some of the most appealing destinations for travellers (Firas, 2021), it also owns places far away from being considered touristic. Such is the case of Aguascalientes, Mexico.

Aguascalientes is one of the 32 federal entities of the Mexican Republic, located at the very centre of the country. Its economic foundations are based on the industrial sector, among which the automotive, robotics, and agro-industrial are the most important. Up to date, Aguascalientes counts with 19 techno-industrial parks, and according to Doing Business (2016), it ranks first as the best state to make businesses and the 16th for opening new industries in Mexico (Gobierno de Mexico, 2016). Thanks to this, business and convention tourism are some of the primary sources of tourism in the state. Besides these, Aguascalientes holds the biggest festival in the country, the San Marcos Festival, which attracts around 8 million visitors and leaves an economic spill of almost 500 thousand USD per year (Rodriguez, 2019), making festival tourism the main source of tourism in the state. However, these types of tourism are not enough for Aguascalientes to have a regular tourism activity, making the tourism industry challenging to develop in the region.

Most hotels are located near the industrial areas and some others at the north and downtown of the city, where most of the urban life is. A few tourist attractions are related to cultural and religious tourism within this area, such as 16 museums, 12 theatres, one cathedral, and four other main churches. Close to the city, visitors can also find three "pueblos magicos" (magic towns) and four ecotourism places (Sistema de Información Cultural, 2020). Notwithstanding, Aguascalientes is not famous for its culture or outstanding landscapes, except for the San Marcos National Festival and the José Guadalupe Posada Museum, making the state mainly attractive for tourists during the festival season (April-May). Compared to the lowest touristic season (January), it can be observed that April is the month with the highest tourism activity, with 67% more arrivals (Gobierno de México, 2019b), which keep the tourism industry afloat.

Thanks to the local government's effort, tourism activity had increased in the last decade from 506,569 tourists in 2011 to 845,961 in 2019. However, despite this increment, Aguascalientes still has one of the lowest tourism rates in the country, ranking 31st out of the 32 Mexican entities, meaning that only 6 out of a thousand national tourists visit Aguascalientes (Datatur cited by

Entorno Turístico, 2016; LJA, 2018). Furthermore, Aguascalientes is also ranked as the 28th state with the fewest tourism services (tour guides, accommodation, restaurants). Hence, there is an imperative need to generate new activities to propel tourism in the state and services to support them.

Thus, this dissertation aims to find a way to increase the tourism offer and activity in Aguascalientes. After analysing the state's current situation and considering that its main economic activity is industrial, it was considered essential to develop a tourism product that the state was knowledgeable about and already had the infrastructure for implementing it. Therefore, the wine industry, which has been part of Aguascalientes' culture for decades, was considered the most suitable for the project.

The project proposes to use the local wine tourism industry through Aguascalientes' wine route to propel national tourism in the state as a way to increase the demand for general tourism services (hotel, restaurant and transport occupation) and parallel tourism activities (cultural, ecotourism, leisure), as well as the generation of employment in both the urban and rural areas. To achieve this, a set of activities, customer service and marketing strategies are suggested to enhance the current wine trail's offer and increase its competitive advantages against the renowned wine regions.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Tourism and Classifications

Tourism as a social and economic activity was first conceived in Western Europe during the 17th century (Walton, 2009). Up to date, it is considered the act of travelling to and staying in places outside the person's usual environment for no longer than a year, seeking enjoyment and relaxation ((UNWTO, n.d.; Jafari, 1995; Tribe, 1997 all cited by Tribe, 2009). For many years, several authors excluded any job-related or remunerated activities from the tourism product, but it is clear that today, most people who travel for work (known as business tourists) frequently include leisure activities in their schedule. These after-work tourism activities gave rise to Copper's (1993 cited by Tribe, 2009) definition, which mentions tourism as 'a multidimensional and multifaceted activity that includes individuals, businesses, organisations, and places' of different economic sectors working together to deliver a travel experience. The aforementioned has led to the creation and refinement of different types of tourism, such as cultural, adventure, medical, business, and rural tourism (Tribe, 2009). This classification is based on tourists' motivations to visit a destination. That being said, tourists are also classified depending on the type of tourism they perform. However, it should be noted that one type of tourism does not exclude another. For example, a visitor can do both cultural and business tourism during the same trip, or practice subdivisions of a specific type of tourism (or niche tourism) (Walton 2009).

Among the different tourism categories, the world's prime exponent is cultural tourism, which allows visitors to experience other societies' lifestyles, as the physical environment, the philosophical and spiritual ideas, and the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of a place. All of this enables visitors to learn, understand, and discover a culture from different perspectives, which has been the primary motivation since the Hellenic period (before it became an economic activity in the 17th century).

According to Kajzar (2014, p. 903), cultural tourism can be divided into the following categories:

- Heritage tourism (natural and cultural heritage, connected to nature base or ecotourism)
- Cultural, thematic routes (gastronomic, spiritual, industrial)
- Cultural city tourism (cultural tours)

- Traditions or ethnic tourism
- Event and festival tourism
- Religious tourism and pilgrimage routes
- Creative tourism (cinema, press, multimedia)

Notwithstanding, only the cultural-thematic routes, specifically beverage trails, would be addressed in the aims of this dissertation project.

2.1.1 Gastronomy Tourism

Due to the relative novelty of culinary tourism (also known as food/ gastronomic tourism) as a travel and economic activity, numerous authors have aimed to define food tourism in the last decades. However, the term has still not been solidly defined. Notwithstanding, different approaches to explain gastronomic tourism were gathered in order to describe it (definitions used: Lucy Long, 2004; Wolfe, 2006; Culinary Tourism in Ontario, 2005-2015 all cited by Murray, 2008):

"Gastronomic tourism is a type of tourism driven by the tourists' motivation to learn about and participate in a culture (own or else's) through the appreciation, consumption, and preparation of local food and beverages, products, and ingredients; as well as experiencing and acknowledging the eating styles and tools. Therefore, having a unique experience by trying new flavours as well as living the culture, history and traditions of a particular place, region, or country."

This type of tourism can be carried out by going to local restaurants or street food places, production places (such as vineyards, dairy producers, farms), markets, food and beverage trails, cooking lessons, food-related festivals, among others (Murray, 2008).

Just as myself, several authors that have attempted to define food tourism see beverages as an intrinsic part of it. Nevertheless, there is still an ongoing discussion about the importance of drinks in gastronomy and if beverage tourism should be separated from culinary tourism or not, therefore establishing a proper definition for the latter. However, it is possible to approach beverage tourism on its own and as a niche of gastronomic tourism. The specification of this approach will help us understand the importance of this type of tourism, mainly addressed through wine tourism, which is the most famous among tourists.

2.1.2 Beverage Tourism

Beverage tourism is usually understood as that in which local drinks (mainly alcoholic and with a denomination of origin) are the main attraction of a destination; and which tourists' main motivation is to taste the drink at the place where it is manufactured, as well as to learn about the production process, and possibly meet the producer (FOODANDROAD, n.d. a). What makes this type of tourism unique (as food tourism) is that it creates the possibility for visitors to engage with the local community and culture by learning the making process directly from people involved in it, which increases the added value of the product by creating an emotional connection with the country of origin of the drink and with the brand (FOODANDROAD, n.d. a). The most famous drinks drawing tourist to travel across the world are principally wine (mainly Europe), whisky (Scotland), beer (firstly Germany), sake (Japan), and tequila (Mexico) (Gallagher, 2020).

2.1.2.1 Wine Tourism

Despite the different definitions and approaches for this type of tourism, it seems that the most accepted one is that of Hall et al. (2000 cited by Carlsen, 2007; Bruwer and Rueger-Muck, 2018; Woldarsky & Geny-Denis, 2019), which states that 'wine tourism is the visitation to vineyards, wineries, wine festivals and wine shows for which grape tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of a grape region are the prime motivating factors for visitors.' As this definition, other authors agree that vineyards, wine-tasting and wine-production are the core motivators for tourists to visit a wine-producing region (Carlsen, 2004; Charter & Ali-Knight, 2001). However, the ongoing research regarding this relatively new tourism niche has broadened the previous definition, adding concepts such as the cellar facilities, both the physical and the emotional experience, rural and nature tourism, and the imagery as a central factor that triggers tourists to pursue wine tourism (Carlsen, 2004; Charter & Ali-Knight, 2001; Bruwer & Rueger-Muck, 2018; Carlsen, 2007; Getz & Brown, 2006). According to the previous authors, wine tourism is an extension of the tourism activity in which several unique and diverse experiences take place and where various factors are involved (wine tasting and making, the environment, the region and its culture, festivals, and food) under three different viewpoints: the tourist perspective, the tourist operators' perspective, and the wine producers' perspective.

2.1.2.2 Wine tourists: Who Are They And What Motivates Them?

People who visit wineries or participate in wine-related activities as part of their tourism schedule are denominated as wine tourists. As the name states, they are predominantly attracted to wine and the environment that surrounds it, which involves the act of drinking and tasting different wines, learning how it is produced and where, the brand's story, and the link it has with the history and culture of the region. However, this tourism activity is not exclusive of a knowledge-based experience but also of hedonic and leisure nature, making it a holistic activity for any tourist (Bruwer and Rueger-Muck, 2018), providing them with numerous motivators to pursue wine tourism (Charters & Ali-Knight, 2001).

As stated by different authors (Bruwer and Rueger-Muck, 2018), the main motivators of wine tourists are to taste and drink wine. However, there is more to it than just travelling locally or internationally for the purpose of trying different types of wines, such as the usually pleasant climate associated with grape-growing regions, the aesthetical appeal of vineyards and the landscape surrounding them, the opportunity to be in contact with nature and to connect with the origins of where the product was made; all of which can be related to learning, relaxation and leisure motivators. Furthermore, it is essential to highlight that not everybody who practices wine tourism is a wine drinker. Thus, it may not be driven by the primary motivator, which is to drink wine, but moved by secondary motives such as socialising, spending time with friends and relatives, living a different experience or trying something new, practising rural tourism, or simply because visiting a vineyard is a "must-see" attraction of a specific destination (Charters & Ali-Knight, 2001; Bruwer and Rueger-Muck, 2018).

These motivators can be measured according to different socio-psychological, functional, demographic, or hedonic approaches. According to the above, Bruwer and Rueger-Muck (2018) defined three dimensions that a cellar door can use to categorise and identify the visitor's intentions to visit their facilities, that are: 'the visitors' profile (gender, age, generation, income), the wine imaginary and the visit dynamic (first-time or repeated visitor)'. To this, it can be added a fourth dimension, the hedonic experience, constituted by the melt of the push and the pull factors. The push information is formed by the social and psychological needs of the person (goals, motives, drivers, wishes) and pull factors by the settings surrounding the product or service that the tourist is interested in (the fame of a place, worth of mouth, the marketing stimuli, destination characteristics

and uniqueness, services and complementary products and/or activities). Altogether, they develop an emotional incentive in the tourist, which in the end is what drives it to plan and execute a trip (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982 cited by Bruwer and Rueger-Muck, 2018).

As aforementioned, an intrinsic part of wine tourism is the visitation of wine cellars and vineyards, that by virtue of their nature, are located within rural regions, usually far away from the noise and the urban activity of the city, and surrounded by landscapes which are, usually, physically and emotionally pleasant (Quintal et al., 2015 cited by Bruwer and Rueger-Muck, 2018). Such is the importance of the natural settings enclosing a wine region (due to the gratification they provide to visitors and the added value they give to the wine tourism experience) that they were further researched and named as winescapes (Thomas et al. 2010; Getz and Brown, 2006; Sottini et al., 2019).

According to Johnson and Bruwer (2007), winescape comprises the countryside surroundings as the natural landscape, the different agricultural activities (among which viticulture stands out), the terroir that distinguishes the region from other vine-growing ones, the tourism facilities and services, as well as the activities that complement the regional wine tourism (Bruwer and Rueger-Muck, 2018; Sottini et al., 2019). To this combination of natural and physical characteristics, Hall and Mitchell (2002) added cultural features such as the heritage towns, the local people, and the culture of the place, which they denominated as "touristic terroir" (cited by Getz and Brown, 2006). This more aesthetic-based conceptualisation of the winemaking process shifted during the 1990s (William, 2001). Wine tourism turned from an industrial visitation whose only purpose was to drink quality wine and meet the production process into a more experiential and leisure activity, in which tourists seek not only the knowledge but also the beauty and uniqueness of both the region visited and the product consumed (Bruwer, 2003; Hall & Mitchel, 2002 cited by Getz and Brown, 2006).

2.1.2.3 Wine Tourists Classification

There have been various attempts to classify wine tourists according to different patterns, such as drinking habits, motivations and interests, attitudes, wine-knowledge, involvement with the product, etcetera (Maddern & Golledge, 1996, William & Young, 1999; Rosenberg, 1979; Belk, 1988; all cited by Charters & Ali-Knight, 2001). However, the first efforts to categorise wine tourists was carried out by several European Researchers (Charters & Ali-Knight, 2001), who divided them into

three categories: the formal wine tourists, which is a tourist with regular wine drinking habits and that tends to book wine tours; the acknowledge tourist, who is interested in wine; and the general tourists, who visit wineries for different reasons, such as curiosity, novelty, or adventure. However, this type of approach is flawed, mainly because it can have several variations from country to country. For instance, as stated by Charters & Ali-Knight in 2001, the formal tourist in the Oceanic continent (compared with the previous European definition) 'is highly-educated and is much less likely to book a tour than the other groups'. The concept of cultural variation is particularly relevant when comparing the Old World (Europe) vs the New World (any other wine-country outside Europe), as the drinking habits, wine perception (social and symbolic) and level of production, as they are significantly different in several dimensions, as the social, cultural, historical, and economic (Charters & Ali-Knight, 2001). For example, while the average yearly wine consumption per capita in Europe is 24 litres, other countries such as Australia do not drink even a third of it (6 litres per capita), or Mexico, that barely reaches a litre per person (Conway, 2020; Marian, 2014; Ministry of Foreign Affairs EU, 2016).

Furthermore, wine production in Europe is more decentralised, with more small-scale wine producers, allowing less concentration of capital. In contrast, New World countries like Mexico have more mass-wine producers and fewer family or farm-based wineries. Another factor that considerably affects wine tourism activity is the demographic factor, as the Old World is one of the continents with the most significant portion of the elderly population globally vs countries of the New World with younger populations (CNN, 2018). This could be perceived either as a positive or negative trait. On the one hand, the European population has a long wine-drinking tradition, practised by old and young people. However, it seems there is not enough range to expand their market to new targets except for the international tourists. On the other hand, the lack of wine history consumption in the New World countries provides them with the opportunity to outgrow their current market and to reach new ones, especially those generations which have not been in contact with the product or are new to wine drinking (Magda Antonioli et al. 1996 cited by Charters & Ali-Knight, 2001).

Nevertheless, whatever the cultural and social circumstances of the wine countries, the following wine tourists classification by Charters & Ali-Knight, 2001; Hall & Macionis, 1998; and Magda Antonioli et al. 1996 (cited by Charters & Ali-knight, 2001) showed to be the most complete above the others:

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Type of wine tourist	Characteristics
Wine lovers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Highly interested in wine - Eager to learn about wine differences, the wine-making process, pairing, etc. - Have a comprehensive base or previous wine education - Likely to attend or have attended wine tastings, festivals, or watched a tv show related to food and wine. - Consider themselves to have more wine knowledge than other groups. - Their primary motivations are buying and tasting wine at the winery, learning about the wine process and wine-ageing, and the links between wine and food. - Less motivated to do complementary activities at the cellar or vineyard. - They are usually graduated or postgraduate.
The connoisseur	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A Subtype of wine-lovers. - Highly informed and interested in wine. - Eager to obtain important information regarding wine production, grape types, and grape growing. - Typically more men than women and usually graduated. - They are slightly keener to learn than wine lovers.
Wine interested	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consider themselves as "interested" in wine. - Prone to have attended a wine tasting before and have very little wine knowledge. - Keen to learn wine skills: tasting, storing, and maturing wine. - Enjoy the process of wine tourism; however, they are less likely to care about wine pairing (links between wine and food) than the previous groups. - Higher level of education.

<p>Curious tourists/ Wine novice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wine curious but with limited interest. - They are less likely to have attended a wine tasting before visiting a winery and have no wine knowledge. - Their main motivation to assist a winery is to think it is relevant (culturally or socially) or because their friends or relatives wanted to go or want to have a new experience. - They are more excited by vineyard tours than any other activity. - They prefer to drink and eat than learning the wine process. - Considered a transitional group: they either become wine interested or more or desist from wine activities. - They enjoy the process of wine tourism even if they do not have specific motivators.
<p>The Hanger-on</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No interest in wine - Usually visits a winery because it is a renowned attraction because it is on the way, or because he/she is a part of a group that had decided to visit a winery.
<p>The Drinker</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tourist between their 50s and 60s who visit wineries as a part of a group, usually during the weekends. - Their main motivation is to drink wine, treating the winery as a bar. - Usually, they ask for more drinks and to buy in bulk.

Although they may exist more factors that can be included in this classification, such as generation, age, culture, and income, this categorisation covers a wine tourist's main concepts and motivations. Moreover, it is essential to highlight that all the previous groups have some common factors, such as appreciating the winescape and the winery's facilities, acknowledging and gratitude towards qualified and competent winery staff.

2.1.2.4 Wine Tourism Under a Business Perspective

To discuss wine as a tourism product, its importance as an economic activity, and what marketing and managerial strategies can propel this type of tourism in a region, it is important to recapitulate

the most relevant information regarding what makes a tourism wine destination attractive to tourists. Additionally, it is also relevant to discuss what triggers the product's demand and the most important characteristics that a winery or wine trail (route comprised by various wineries) has to have to be successful or, at least, competitive.

As argued in the previous chapters, four main factors could determine the failure or success of a wine tourism product: the quality and variety of the wines offered, the quality of the winery's facilities, the preparation of the staff, and the uniqueness and aesthetics of the winescape. Nevertheless, there are numerous characteristics (besides wine) within these factors that are the foremost opportunity a winery has to brand and position its touristic product according to several authors (Bruwer, 2003; Getz & Brown, 2006; Hall & Mitchell, 2002; Bruwer and Rueger-Muck, 2018). These features should be based on differentiation (of place, terroir, activities, among others) in order to provide a tangible and emotional added value to the products and services being provided. The features are:

- The variety of leisure, relaxation, and cultural activities;
- The offer of outdoor activities, such as nature, adventure, and exploration activities;
- Creating an environment that fosters socialisation (spending time with friends and family, meet new people);
- Host a restaurant within the facilities or offer unique gastronomy (authors cuisine, local cuisine) that can be paired with the wines;
- Attractive Scenery,
- A Touristic terroir that differentiates it from other wine regions,
- Special wine-related activities (wine festivals, trails, cooking classes, food pairing, grape harvest festivals, tours, among others);
- Moderately priced accommodation,
- Easy to obtain information,
- Well-signposted wine trails (brochures, webpages, touristic kiosks),
- And a variety of things to see and do.

Once the physical characteristics have been discussed, it is also imperative to discuss the product's intangible aspects, such as the service. Following research carried out in different countries, the most relevant trait for wine tourists is the quality of the service that wineries provide. According to statistics obtained by the researchers' surveys, the knowledge and professional attitude

of the staff, friendliness, and courtesy, were considered the most enjoyable and what makes the most of the visitors' experience. Within it, service organisation and provision was also some of the most valued qualities. Additionally, tourists highlighted the importance of the wine atmosphere, which involves the learning experience and whatever feature the tourists can find unique within their visit, and that may convey emotions such as excitement, novelty, or even nostalgia. All of the above makes it more feasible for a visitor to consume a winery's product in mainly three forms: buying wine directly from the cellar, revisiting the place or recommending it, or continue to buy the product from a retail store back home (O'Neill and Charters, 2000; Hashimoto & Telfer, 2003; Hall & Mitchell, 2002; Getz, 2000, all cited by Getz & Brown, 2006; Bruwer and Rueger-Muck, 2018; Santos et al., 2020).

Following the purpose of this project, it is essential to talk about what goes beyond a winery itself: the wine routes. Wine regions are generally comprised of clusters (contractual groups of grape growers and winemakers within a region), and these clusters, along with the government and/or other private initiatives, tend to develop wine routes to favour wineries and adjoining businesses in the region (Mueller & Sumner, 2006; Getz & Brown, 2006). Wine trails are usually mapped to ease the journey for tourists, as well as to make them aware of the offer, which besides the cellars and vineyards, typically comprise dairy and agricultural producers, farmers, cultural activities (handcrafts, art, historical places), as well as ecotourism activities, such as horse or bicycle trails, water activities (when possible), camping, hiking, etcetera. These routes are also complemented with tourism facilities such as hospitality services and restaurants. This combination of activities creates an exceptional atmosphere different from regular tourism due to its cultural, gastronomic and rural character, in which tourists can achieve memorable experiences (Getz, 2000 cited by Getz & Brown, 2006; Getz & Brown, 2006; Santos et al., 2020; Bruwer & Rueger-Muck, 2018).

Wine tourism demand depends on the offer available and the consumer's involvement with the product like any other product. It is already clear the purpose of wine tourists to consume wine tourism; however, it is necessary to understand how to measure their level of commitment. According to Santos et al. (2020), the wine tourism experience can be graded on a scale from low to high involvement based on the consumption of experience and the product (wine). The lowest level consists of those whose visitation did not surpass the wine tasting stage, meaning there was no emotional involvement with the process or the product. The highest level talks about an amalgamation between physical and emotional factors, in which the visitor is not just superficially

interested in the product and the production process, but also enjoys participating in it, buying the product, and feeling important for being able to meet the staff who produces the wine. Thus, creating an emotional bond with the brand, also known as loyalty. Sometimes this bond can go beyond being committed to a brand into investing in the industry (Charters & Ali-Knight, 2001).

The wine tourism demand is driven mainly by the desire to taste, learn and buy wine from different regions or countries. Notwithstanding, the emotional factor may be just as decisive as those above. Opportunities such as travelling to new places, living exotic and out-of-the-routine experiences, interacting with people with common interests, and acquiring new knowledge and abilities are reasons that involve and represent the hedonic, cultural, social and self-development desires that wine tourist tends to have (Pikkemaat et al. cited by Santos et al., 2020; Santos et al., 2020; Charters & Ali-Knight, 2001). However, how strong or how many of these motivators will trigger the demand for wine tourism depend on several factors, such as tourists' prior travel experiences, the generation they were born in, the visit dynamic (who are they travelling with and why?, age, and period and cohort effect (war, social forces, unique historical circumstances)' (Bruwer and Rueger-Muck, 2018).

2.1.2.4.1 Tourism Economic Importance

Up to date, the tourism industry is one of the most important engines of the global economy, considered to be one of the top 10 most important industries of the world (IBIS world, 2021), leaving an average of 3.2% of the global GDP through direct tourism activity and 10.4% via indirect means (Statistica, 2021; Staiton, 2020).

Tourism is known for being one of the best allies for those economies in need of a new source of income (and those who want to keep growing economically) due to its vast potential to generate relatively fast revenue, especially for developing countries. Tourism is one of the sectors that is constantly being developed and improved by local governments. It provides three foremost factors for a country's economic growth: foreign exchange (through currency, import, exports, and taxation), generation of employment, and the activation of different economic activities. Thanks to this, the tourism and travel sector has exponentially grown in the last decades (Staiton, 2020).

The tourism income comes from different contributions, direct, indirect or induced, contributing to the host country's economic development. The first contributions are generated

through the tourists' income directly used in tourism services (visas, hotels, transportation) and travel and accommodation taxes. Indirect contributions are those that visitors spend at technically unrelated tourism businesses, such as supermarkets and local stores, among others. Lastly, induced contributions are generated by the tourism industry employees, like the rent they pay, the food they buy, the services they use, etcetera (Staiton, 2020).

One of the primary impacts of tourism in a local economy is the significant generation of new jobs for professional and non-professionals, such as housekeepers, stewards, receptionists, hotel and restaurant staff, and tour operators. This can reduce the unemployment and poverty rate and the possibility of gradually professionalising people who did not have the opportunity to study, thus improving locals' quality of life. These jobs support around 7% of the world's direct and indirect employees (Staiton, 2020).

Moreover, tourism has the possibility to impact more than its sector through an economic phenomenon known as the multiplier effect, which is the redistribution of money in which some sector's income is invested elsewhere. This way, governments may reinvest tourism revenue in struggling areas of their local economy, such as education, health care, transportation system, or infrastructure; all of which would contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of the country or region (Staiton, 2020; Querini, 2003).

The development of the tourism industry also comes, of course, with the price of globalisation, such as foreign investments and the allocation of multinational companies in the private sector, which usually are more affluent than the local companies (small and medium businesses) and that leads to economic leak (when the money goes to other country's revenue). However, this negative factor propels the local community to improve their businesses to compete with international enterprises, pushing them to learn new technologies, innovate, and generate new services and products (Staiton, 2020).

While the pandemic of COVID-19 will not be addressed in this dissertation, it is relevant to stand it out to emphasise the importance of tourism in the world's economy through the provision of the large-scale impact of coronavirus in the tourism sector and the global economic losses. A priori this health situation, the tourism industry generated 10.6% of the jobs worldwide, which added up to 334 million employees. With the ongoing pandemic, 62 million people lost their jobs, the visitors' expenditure had the worst decrease in history by 69.4%, and the global travel and tourism

GDP dropped 49.1% against 2019. All these losses account for approximately 4.5 trillion USD in just one year (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2021).

The above can provide a broad perspective of the economic significance of the tourism industry in the global economy, which proves its importance for developing rural areas and regions in need of new sources of income.

2.1.2.4.2 Wine Tourism Economic Importance

Nowadays, the more demanding tourists are on a quest for new and improved travel experiences, away from the regular types of tourism such as beach, urban, or amusement parks, into more cultural based experiences like rural, religious, and food and wine tourism. Thanks to this, there is an increasing need to create innovative ways to entertain travellers, especially as the travelling trends are going to weekend escapes or shorter trips rather than long-term vacations (Meraz y Maldonado, 2016).

Industrial tourism is one of the industries that have taken the most advantage out of this, which is the visitation of tourists to an industrial business with the purpose of meeting the manufacturing process. This tourism became famous after Jack Daniel's American whiskey company opened its doors to the public in 1866 (Chikurova, 2019). Around the same period, wineries in France, Germany, and Italy started attracting tourists to their facilities. However, wine tourism of the mid-19th century, in contrast with other beverage and industrial tourism of the period, was exclusive of aristocrats and nobility (Velissariou et al., 2009; Meraz & Maldonado, 2016). Despite that today, wine tourism is offered to anyone interested in it and has the legal age to drink, there is still a belief that wine is for people of the upper class, especially in third-world countries of the New World.

Tourism activity adds much value to wineries. On the one hand, there are internal gains, such as the extra income from the tourists' entrance fee to visit the wineries' facilities, which "pays" for the direct marketing of the cellars' wines, as tourists are meeting the process and buying the product directly from the producers. Hence, saving transportation, commercialisation, and marketing costs for the cellars. Moreover, it enhances the corporate climate through incentives such as staff's certifications.

Furthermore, it forces companies to be in continuous development and innovation, as they have to be as transparent and as flawless as possible with the process as the clientele is directly

involved and producers cannot hide anything from them, which generally improves the place's cleanliness and the modernisation of equipment and production processes to be competitive. This competition also helps motivate the staff to show their abilities, knowledge, professionalism, and customer service. On the other hand, all of the above contribute to the external advantages that wine tourism has on wineries, such as earning the customers' loyalty and thus, future and continuous sales outside the cellar and worth of mouth marketing, which is an 'effective support for the brand' regionally, nationally or even internationally. Thanks to this, well-made industrial tours increase both the products sales and the profits. The revenue generated by the wineries and the regions (through taxes, road fees, etcetera) contributes to enhancing living standards for the people working in the industry and indirectly generating a profit from this activity. Additionally, this can also fund new infrastructure or enhance the existing one, create new jobs and services, and maybe contribute to the attraction of new investors (Chikurova, 2019).

That is why, at present times, wine tourism is considered 'as one of the most significant forms of tourism, and entire regions and countries of the New World feature it as their basic means of promoting the tourism industry...such as Chile, South Africa, New Zealand, and Australia' (Veselá & Malacka, 2015). Notwithstanding, all these positive impacts can be assured when wine tourism and the industries around it are well organised, meaning both private and public (governmental) organisations and enterprises. The previously mentioned leads to the importance of the formation of wine routes, which would allow not only the growth of wineries' as individual companies but also of the wine industry as a whole, along with the sectors that comprise the attractions around wine tourism, developing the regional industry and the rural area (Chikurova, 2019).

2.1.2.4.3 Wine Routes

According to Getz (2000), Hashimoto & Telfer (2003 cited by Correia & Brito, 2016), wine trails are the bond that holds together wine, tourism and local traditions. They are generally comprised of numerous organisations of different sectors such as the tourism industry (tour operators and hospitality services), wine industry (grape growers and wine producers), farmers within the denominated area, and of course, the local government. Their primary purpose is to divulge and promote regional tourism, focusing on wine culture, allowing the visitors to engage with the destination's cultural heritage and natural attractions (Correia & Brito, 2016).

Wine trails are located within a circumscribed territory, easily identified by signposted roads, kiosks, and tourist marketing such as brochures, billboards, and online marketing of wineries, wine events and festivals. The territory is generally designated where most of the vineyards and winemakers are located. In most Old World countries, wine trails are well-known for having a geographical indication, Denomination of Origin (D.O.) or any other guarantee of origin, such as the cases of Bordeaux, Porto, and Tuscany (Correia & Brito, 2016). Up to date, some regions of the New world do count with D.O.'s, such as Luján de Cuyo in Argentina, which was the first of Latin America, or Brazil (Bodegas Bianchi, 2020; Brazilian Farmers, 2018). However, not all wine countries count with such denominations. Nonetheless, wine quality and wineries' facilities are the most critical criteria to admit potential members in the routes (Correia & Brito, 2016).

Wine routes are one of the touristic assets with the most potential to enhance the imagery of a destination, creating added value for the region through its wines, the touristic terroir, and the place's culture. Along with the above, they can provide particularly unique experiences, as they usually symbolise the unification of the industry with the rural culture and the tourism experience, which changes the usual dynamic for the travellers (Brunori & Rosi, 2000 cited by Correia & Brito, 2016).

As several wineries constitute wine routes, their reputation and trademark value depend on the collective work of all those comprising it. Thence, even when it is evident that participants will contribute to the network unequally (because some may be larger than others), their participation needs to be guaranteed as they still contribute to the same system, and they all share the same interests. Therefore, sharing the responsibility to promote wine trail's services and products, maintain and enhance the overall facilities and infrastructure, and contribute to the route's marketing, safety, and other needs (Argin et al., 2002 cited by Correia & Brito, 2016; Correia & Brito, 2016).

Sharing duties with various private companies and governmental organisations may seem like a negative factor, as coordination among all parties may become difficult. However, creating a wine route is the best way to achieve success at a less high price. Furthermore, this association will allow the generation of more jobs than cellars can create independently and enable locals to feel identified with the project and eager to contribute (Correia & Brito, 2016). Additionally, the increase in the offer will also raise the demand for the product, as tourists have several options to visit, which are more appealing than travelling for isolated choices. In the end, the collective work and knowledge,

as well as shared values 'can gradually lead to progressive interconnections between social actors, inanimate elements and regional symbols' (Brunori and Rosi, 2000, p. 421, cited by Correia & Brito, 2016), which will contribute to increasing the tourism experience satisfaction. Ultimately, visitors tend to see wine routes as a single product and not the wineries within it as individual actors, expecting the same quality from all participants within the route.

Henceforth, it is essential to create legislations that establish minimum standards related to wine quality, infrastructure, and customer service; as well as obligations to contribute to the route, such as landscape and tradition preservation (and divulgation of the latter), the maintenance and enhancement of the roads and general infrastructure, and the collaboration between participants (Brunori & Rosi, 2000; Arfini et al., 2002 all cited by Correia & Brito, 2016). The previous collaboration between wine route's participants 'may be the decisive factor in differentiating the route from others...creating a sustainable value for itself' (Hall & Mitchell, 2000 quoted by Peris-Ortiz et al. 2016 & Correia & Brito, 2016). According to Brunori & Rosi (2000 cited by Correia & Brito, 2016), once a wine trail is efficaciously settled, it can open the doors for wine and other local businesses to new markets and create new products and trends according to consumers demand.

Lastly, it is necessary to talk about the impacts of wine routes in rural development, which focus not only on selling more wine but also to contribute to the rural environment they are located in and the people inhabiting it. From here, it is relevant to state that wine routes must be based on local products and people. The latter will disseminate the history, culture and nature of the place better than anyone, as they are in greater exposure to the traditions and the natural landscapes of the region, and that will give the route an unequalled personality (Arfini et al. 2002, cited by Correia & Brito, 2016).

The conjoint work of all actors involved in the wine routes, which are not merely wine-focused, allow tourism organisations to target current and potential tourists, as the variety of offers can draw more visitors than only those interested in wine. This diversification can increase the wine and the general regional product sales, the tourism services consumption, and the possibility to trigger new types of tourism for different markets (such as adventure or ecotourism). Hence, generating new jobs and possible business ventures (Correia & Brito, 2016; Peris-Ortiz et al., 2016); which show the substantial potential routes have to develop regional tourism, primarily rural, as they display a homogenous image of a destination by embracing all the elements of their territory and how they can be offered to tourists (Correia & Brito, 2016). Notwithstanding, it cannot be left

aside that wine tourism has a rural and natural dimension, in which sustainability must have a leading role, especially after all the ecological issues that have been rapidly increasing in the last century.

2.1.1.5 Sustainability in Wine Tourism

Sustainability within the tourism industry is a concept that is still being researched and developed and has not a clear definition or usage for this context. According to the formal definition created in 2005 by the United Nations World Tourism Organization, sustainable tourism is the guidelines and management practices that apply to any tourism and/or destination, including ecological, socio-cultural, and economic impacts of tourism development. Sustainable tourism principles were established to guarantee the long-term sustainability of tourism in a region and lessening as many negative impacts as possible by preserving the ecological processes, biological resources, and respect for local communities' lives (Montella, 2017).

Tourism activity has become a vital resource of relaxation and leisure in most people's lives, which, as stated above, can have many positive impacts. Nonetheless, the excess of this activity also produces negative factors that are very hard to control and tackle, such as mass tourism and the destruction of landscapes and infrastructure (Malacka, 2015). In order to avoid these effects as much as possible, tourism should follow these guidelines according to the UNWTO (2005):

1. Optimising the use of environmental resources that are a vital component of tourism's development, maintaining the fundamental ecological processes, and preserving and supporting natural heritage and biodiversity.
2. Respecting the culture's authenticity and the local values of the place contributing to the dissemination, understanding, and respect of their traditions.
3. Assure a long-lasting and feasible functioning of tourism in the region as an economic activity, job stability, and growth opportunities, providing fair economic benefits to local people and stakeholders.

To achieve this, it is necessary that all the tourism industry participants, governments, and legislative organisations are well-informed and continuously updated regarding new technologies, impacts, policies, etcetera. In this way, it can be assured the constant supervision of tourism activity,

and the application of all preventive measurements or corrective actions when needed, without neglecting the tourism experience and satisfaction (UNWTO, 2005).

As previously mentioned, wine tourists tend to have a particular interest in natural landscapes and the rural culture, and according to Montella (2017), they are also prone to be interested in ecological issues. These specific traits of wine tourists make them especially suitable for sustainable tourism, which as aforementioned, is concerned with ethical and efficient preservation of local needs, values, and natural and cultural resources (Lane, 1994 cited by Montella, 2017). Furthermore, wine tourism itself is one of the tourism with the greatest need to be sustainable, mainly because its primary product (wine) entirely depends on natural resources, such as the quality of the soil and fertility, water availability, and weather conditions. Secondly, its touristic appeal relies on the beauty and conservation of the landscapes, the local surroundings, and culture (Montella, 2017).

Despite this, due to the popularisation of wine, many wineries shifted from a quality-based production to a quantity-based one, reaching their maximum production capacity to diminish their production costs under more significant revenues. This, of course, means overexploitation of the land, which threatens the environment, destroying both the production area, the local ecosystem, and the touristic attractiveness.

However, thanks to the constant awareness campaigns related to environmental issues (global warming, climate change, endangered species), the production trends in numerous industries are starting to change, and the wine sector is no exception. Nowadays, numerous wineries are trying to optimise and improve the overall quality of their grapevine's production (by taking care of their lands) for flavour and conservation purposes instead of focusing on mass production.

Regarding this topic, it is essential to understand that producing quality wine and maintaining a good business performance is not in necessary conflict with sustainability. Both can be achieved when stakeholders are open to finding a balance between processes and the carrying capacity of the cultivation area. This balance can be accomplished by acquiring new technologies in winemaking equipment, energy sources, water recycling process, field rotation, bioclimatic constructions, and resource monitoring through satellites and other technologies. These new technologies could give the product a competitive advantage through differentiation, marketing benefits, reputation, innovation, and eco-friendliness. The usage of these technologies can also translate inefficient resource management (water, energy, supply chain), preventing soil degradation and deterioration of the landscapes, and cost reduction (Montella, 2017; Karagiannis & Metaxas, 2020). Additionally

to these internal factors, they are external motivations such as the adaptation to the current times and problems, and the pressure of social groups and organisations such as wine consumers, investors, retailers, environmental groups, and governments, which are paying particular attention to sustainability, and in the end are the ones who shape the product's demand (Malacka, 2015; Karagiannis & Metaxas, 2020).

In spite that sustainability's perception may vary from country to country, environmental attributes and a positive image are always important for wine consumers. If applied, it can reaffirm the customers' loyalty and attract new customers who are more prone to be ethically responsible. Furthermore, this will call the attention of those markets interested in green trends and socially responsible companies (Karagiannis & Metaxas, 2020)

However, developing a sustainable tourism collective plan is necessary, creating a network between the stakeholders and the local people to create a bond based on ethics, values, and local traditions. This link will emphasise the connection between the products and the place's culture, the uniqueness of the territory and the inhabitants will to protect their natural resources. The collaborative networks are strictly necessary for wine routes, as sustainability will depend on all partners involved (Williams & Dossa, 2003; Getz & Jamal, 1994, cited by Montella, 2017). Within a wine trail, sustainability will involve both the wineries' individuals issues (as the human resources, water, capital, and land) and the routes needs, such as the infrastructure and quality of the roads, the landscape, the visitors' facilities and tourist-related services, and the rural area within the wine route. This can positively affect resource efficiency, knowledge and technology sharing, and best manufacturing practices. Additionally, wineries will be able to share their marketing strategies as a "green wine trail" and the benefits that come with it, such as more sales, tourists, and new investors (Karagiannis & Metaxas, 2020; Portrais & Getz, 2006 cited by Montella, 2017; Montella, 2017).

CHAPTER 3. MARKET ANALYSIS

3.1 Internal Analysis

3.1.1 Wine Industry in Aguascalientes

Aguascalientes is a Valley formed by two mountain chains born from the neighbouring state of Zacatecas that cross the territory from east to west. It is situated on the west side of the country in

the Bajío region, and it is considered the geographical centre of Mexico. It has a warm weather under altitudes of 2000 metres and semi-cold beyond that altitude. It has light soil with low-content organic matter and high-content salts, which make it suitable for viticulture. However, its late and scarce rains make the harvest hard to predict (Heraldo SLP, 2015; Sánchez, 2017).

Notwithstanding, since its foundation in 1575, it was already considered the second biggest vine producer of the country after Parras, Coahuila, holding 90 vineyards that produced 100 thousand vines for winemaking and brandy. This industry was implemented in the state thanks to the Spaniards' arrival (around 1570) to produce communion wine (Topete de Valle, 1973 quoted by Sánchez, 2017). Since then, they started to produce wine on 50 hectares, increasing to 250 hectares by 1884. According to Topete del Valle (1973 quoted by Sánchez, 2017), the government incentivised business people to cultivate grapevines for a conditional ten-year tax exemption as long as they planted within the first two years 1500 vines by 1.5 hectares, or produced 30 barrels of wines per year. By the end of the '70s, 13 thousand hectares of vineyards already existed, and 90% of them were destined to produce Brandy.

At one point, grapevine production was so crucial in the state that when it became independent from Zacatecas (1835), it captured a vine in its emblem, which symbolised the importance of the industry in the territory. Nonetheless, most of the vine production was destined to the elaboration of Brady, Uvate (a type of grape juice), and a famous moonshine called “Chinguirito”, more than for table wines (Sánchez, 2017; Gobierno del Estado de Aguascalientes, 2019; De Jesús y Thomé, 2019).

This production was stable until 1946, which along with the support of the Ministry of Agriculture, the cultivation of grapevines, its transportation and production for winemaking was propelled (Palacios, 2011 quoted by De Jesús & Thomé, 2019). The wine industry finally had its peak in the state during the '60s and '70s, with the construction of the Plutarco Elías Calles water dam and the watering system 001, which eased the growing of the vines, as the activity was constantly affected due to droughts in the area (Secretaría de Desarrollo Rural y Agropecuario, 2014 quoted by Sánchez, 2017). Because of this, several cellars established in the area, the Association of Winemakers of Aguascalientes was constituted, and the first Grapevine Festival was organised. Another influential factor of this boom was the creation of the first winemaking and brandy industry in 1949, at the same time that the Aguascalientes' Wine Company and the "Pabellón" Cellar were

born (the first one producing the "Alamo" wines, and the "San Marcos" wines) (Palacios, 2009 quoted by Sánchez, 2017).

However, just as Querétaro, the region faced a tremendous economic crisis during the '80s, that together with the decrease in Brandy's consumption, resulted in a significant downturn for the industry, forcing many cellars to close and substitute the vine for more profitable products, such as peaches, guavas, or olives (Ramírez, 2016 quoted by De Jesús & Thomé, 2019).

According to the Ministry of Agriculture (SAGARPA), in 2014, there only existed five wine-producing companies besides Valle Redondo, which is the most extensive wine and grape-concentrate producer of the state, owning 80% of the total territory intended for this activity. Notwithstanding, up to date, there exist approximately 200 vine-growers distributed in 980 hectares, out of which 120 hectares are used for wine production, positioning the state as the fourth producer of Mexican wines with 9,868 tons of vines annually. Unlike Baja California and Querétaro, Aguascalientes only produces wine for national consumption. However, in the last years, it has been trying to incursion in the international market through its participation in contests around the world, aiming to export its wines to countries such as Japan, France, the USA, Canada or Spain (El Heraldo SLP, 2015; Sánchez, 2017).

Currently, the leading wine regions of Aguascalientes are Calvillo, Paredón, and Los Romo. However, this activity is practised in the 11 municipalities of the state. Its main varieties are Chardonnay, Muscat Blanc, French Colombard, Ruby Cabernet, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, the last two being the most famous. (El Heraldo SLP, 2015; Sánchez, 2017).

3.1.2 Wine Tourism in Aguascalientes

The first plans for the current wine trail were proposed in 2013 by the National Council of Viticulture, conjointly with the five cellars that existed to implement wine tourism in the state. The project considered vineyard and cellar tours, wine tastings, the construction of a hotel within the vineyards, and residential areas with vineyards in different parts of the region. All of it to boost tourism in the state. However, it was not developed until last year, when the Ministry of Tourism (SECTUR) and the local government inaugurated the wine route to promote the identity of local wines through tourism (De Jesús & Thomé, 2019). It is important to note that the current route is

not precisely elaborated under the original plan, as there are no hotels or residential areas within it, at least not in the nearest future.

Moreover, the route does not work all year round as the ones in other states. It was opened just for the inauguration, receiving 17,184 guests and leaving an economic spill of 839,779 USD. Up to date, the wine route is only open for special events; however, wineries are opened independently (SECTUR, 2020).

Ten wineries and five cultural attractions comprise the Route. The oldest of these vineyards dates from 1854, while the youngest from 2012. As a common factor, all the wineries offer a guided tour around the vineyards, cellar and other facilities, as well as wine tasting. Notwithstanding, most of them offer only two wines per taste. According to the information of the Route's official webpage, only four out of the ten wineries have the option of a pairing along with the wine tasting, and only one (Viña las Cruces) offers extra activities such as bike or horse ride tours, yoga, or a vineyard picnic. Furthermore, only two out of the ten wineries (Hacienda de Letras & Viña de las Cruces) have a restaurant within their facilities (Gobierno del Estado de Aguascalientes, 2020). The majority of the tours last approximately 40 minutes, and all of them require prior reservation. Even when not all the wineries require a minimal number of people, most of them require at least six people and a maximum of twelve to offer their services. The general schedule is from Thursday to Sunday, from 11 hrs. to 16 hrs. (Gobierno del Estado de Aguascalientes, 2020).

In addition to the wineries, the Route indicates five nearby places that could be interesting for the visitors, such as two dairy-producer haciendas (one of cow and one of goat milk), two tauromachy haciendas, and an equestrian centre. They all offer a guided tour and a store where visitors can purchase their products (Gobierno del Estado de Aguascalientes, 2020).

Interestingly, according to Asertumx (2021), seven new cellars are going to join the Wine Route by the end of 2021: El Secreto (located in Cosío); Fragüe, Chacón and Santa Julia (located in Rincón de Romos); Tierra Tinta and Casa Quesada (located in Aguascalientes); and Renacimiento (located in Asientos). Also, Asertumx said that other wine producers already expressed their desire to be part of the Trail. If this is true, together with the previous wineries and attractions, the Route would have 23 visiting points, which increase its appeal for both local and national visitors. Furthermore, according to a conversation held with Alejandro Quiroz from the Ministry of Economy (2021), who is in charge of the Wine Route's project, it is within the government's plan to keep the Wine Route a fixed attraction (all year round).

As it can be seen, even when the majority of the wine production in the state is classified as mass production, there are a lot of small cellars (boutique) still emerging, which turns Aguascalientes into the wine region with the most significant potential for growth in the country (Uncork Mexico, 2020).

As for the wine tourist persona of the region, according to a research study carried out by María de Los Ángeles Sánchez (2017), the average wine tourist in Aguascalientes drinks wine occasionally (53%), 37% drinks wine 1 to 2 times per week, and 10% only once per month; usually when they are in family or social gatherings or business meals. Those who enjoy wine commonly select what to drink based on the flavour, aroma, colour, price and brand; and as wine tourists, they usually look for good customer service, knowledge or winemaking and traditions, and socialising. Most of them range between 34 to 41 years old and have a monthly income between 700 and 1000 USD.

Unfortunately, besides this information, it was impossible to gather any other information regarding how many tourists visit the different wineries in Aguascalientes per year or where they came from, as none of the wineries has a formal record book their visitors. Hence, the state's Tourism Ministry has no statistics related to this information either, at least for the moment.

3.1.2.1 Main Problems For Developing Wine Tourism In Aguascalientes

The main problem is that tourism is practically inexistent in the state besides the one driven by the San Marcos Festival, narrowing the tourism influx between mid-April to mid-May. To solve this, the government has tried to promote different kinds of tourism in Aguascalientes, beginning with the Wine Route's opening in September 2020 (despite the coronavirus pandemic). Its main aim is to stimulate the consumption of local wine and wine tourism in the area. Nonetheless, it should be noted that this Route is short on inventiveness to attract both foreign and local tourists to the vineyards. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic increases the difficulties to activate this type of tourism at the moment (at least to non-locals and large-scaled) (Gobierno del Estado de Aguascalientes, 2020).

The second problem of the Route is accessibility, as there was no available information of whether there is public transport available to take the visitors from the city to the Route. Even when the distance between vineyards is relatively short (10-30 minutes tops), the distance between the Route and the city is approximately 30 minutes, making it difficult for visitors to move around

without a car. Furthermore, the state does not currently have guided tours nor special transportation services for tourists. Thus, private transportation is the only way to get to any of the wineries, such as the visitor's car, a rental car, or a driver service such as Uber.

The third problem is related to accommodation. It is essential to highlight that most people visiting the state tend to stay in the city's capital and not in the surrounding municipalities. The largest concentration of hotels (also of higher quality) is located in the city's northern region, followed by the downtown and the southern areas. It is also important to mention that only one of the ten vineyards has accommodation and camping available for visitors, which means that they would have to go back and forth a couple of times if the tourists want to visit all the wineries.

Additionally, there is a lack of information, especially at the Wine Route's official web page, displaying all the wineries and attractions information, such as schedules, web pages, phone numbers, and emails. However, not all wineries link to their social media or online platforms, which is unforgivable given the technological era in which we live. Additionally, it was interesting to find that tourists cannot book a trip through the Wine Route's webpage. Instead, they have to email or call each of the wineries to make a reservation. Also, none of the wineries specifies the price for any of their activities and services.

Lastly is the lack of touristic attractions within Aguascalientes Wine Route, especially when comparing it to Baja California's Route (Mexico's leading wine-producing state with 90% of its wine production). Baja California's Wine Route hosts over 64 wineries, which offer guided tours and tastings of more than two wines and pairings with complex meals; beautiful and unique accommodations and restaurants inside the wineries' facilities; exceptional landscapes, cultural attractions, and other activities. Therefore, leaving Aguascalientes' Wine Route with much to desire (Fideicomiso Público para la Promoción Turística del Estado de Baja California, 2020).

3.2 External Analysis

3.2.1 The Wine Market in Mexico

When people think about wines from the American continent, they usually think of the most representative wine countries such as the United States, Argentina or Chile, even Brazil or Uruguay, but they never think of Mexico; which is curious because Mexico is the country of birth of viticulture

in North America. However, oddly enough, it is also the latest New World country to incursion in the production of wine on a commercial level (Paulina, 2018; Uncork México, n.d.).

Another of the contradictions of the Mexican territory related to wine production is that Mexico is located below the 30th parallel, which indicates that it is beneath the "suitable land for wine production". Notwithstanding, thanks to the mountainous regions, which soils are fertile and abundant in gravel, sand, and red clay; along with the warm days and fresh nights, where the summers are dry and the winters humid; the country has the perfect terroirs for grapevine cultivation and the production of high-quality wines. Geographically, the wine regions in the country are located in the north and centre of the territory, with deep-rooted viticulture traditions, which origins take place in the colonial era when the wine was elaborated for religious purposes (Corona, 2004 quoted by De Jesús & Thomé, 2019).

Nowadays, Mexico has an approximate surface area of 6,745 hectares of vineyards destined to wine production, growing more than 40 varieties of white and red grapes, such as Sauvignon Blanc, Chenin Blanc, Riesling, Gewurztraminer, Merlot, Nebbiolo, Cabernet Franc, Grenache, Aglianico, Misión, Verdejo, and Cabernet Sauvignon, all of which are well-known internationally. However, as Mexico is a New World country, it can afford to experiment with different vines (such as hybrid and American varieties), winemaking methods, and technologies to produce its wines, unlike the Old World countries (Uncork México, n.d.; De la Torre, 2019).

These almost seven thousand hectares are divided in 24 wine-producing regions, owned by 14 states out of the 32 of the Mexican Republic, which are: Baja California, Coahuila, Chihuahua, Sonora, Querétaro, Aguascalientes, Zacatecas, Guanajuato, Nuevo León, Puebla, San Luis Potosí, Hidalgo, Michoacán y Jalisco. Jointly, they produce more than 30 million wine bottles per year, belonging to more than 230 cellars (Uncork México, n.d.; Culinaria Mexicana, 2019; Soto, 2020). According to the Mexican Viticulture Council (ICEX, 2020), in 2017, Baja California produced 75% of Mexico's total wine production. However, today, thanks to the developing competition of the other wine regions, it only produces 57% of the national wine, followed by Coahuila, Querétaro, Aguascalientes, Sonora, and Chihuahua. However, the above does not mean that Baja California has diminished its production, but the other regions have increased theirs. Hence, resulting in the growth of the wine market in Mexico (Culinaria Mexicana, 2019; El Financiero, 2018).

Currently, the annual wine consumption per capita in Mexico is one litre, which may seem too little compared with the 7.5 litres consumed by a person in the USA yearly, the 53 litres of France,

or the 60 litres per capita in Portugal (Soto, 2020; Uncork México n.d.). Nonetheless, this annual consumption per person is translated into 122 million litres of wine consumed in Mexico just in 2018, which in regards to previous years, represents a yearly increase of 8% that has remained since 2015. According to the OIV, this continuous growth positions Mexico as the second country with the highest growth index globally (ICEX, 2020). Nonetheless, Mexico imports most of the wine it consumes (82 million litres/ 300 wine labels) because the country's actual wine production is insufficient to cover the national demand, which has forced the country to increment its imports by 88% in the last decade, mainly from markets such as Spain, France, Chile, Italia, Argentina, and the United States (ICEX, 2020). At first sight, this could be seen as a negative factor for the Mexican market, especially if we compared to 2015 when 30% of the consumed wine was national (vs the 22% of today). However, the consumption of the national wine has not lessened; instead, the wine demand has increased, generating an opportunity for growth for the Mexican wine market (Uncork México, 2020).

Throughout the last two decades, the Mexican wine scene has stepped from being practically inexistent to obtaining the boom it deserves, winning several awards and acknowledgements in the most famous international contests (Forbes, 2019). Thanks to the acceptance and the market openness (both nationally and internationally), today Mexico owns approximately 400 wine labels, many of which have been internationally awarded, such as The Best Cabernet of the World 2020 for Bodegas Don León (by Concours International des Cabernets 2020), as well as multiple recognitions from Challenge du Vin and Bacchus Awards 2020 for Monte Xanic, Casa Madero and Tres Raíces cellars; making a total of 1,500 medals won by Mexican wines (Consejo Mexicano Vitivinícola quoted by De la Torre, 2019; Silva, 2015; Conmexviuyv, 2020). This acceptance is translated to the consumption of Mexican wine and the recognition of the wine industry as an essential economic activity for the country, producing more than a half-million jobs (Conmexviuyv, 2020).

Despite the significant development that the country's wine industry has had, it should be noted that unlike other Mexican beverages like Tequila, Mezcal or Sotol, Mexican wines do not count with a Denomination of Origin. This is because the industry is still in the process of defining the added value and personality of its wines against other countries, their terroirs and winemaking methods (De la Torre, 2021).

Speaking of the main challenges of this industry is found by first the scarcity of funds for the cultivation of vines in the country, that even when Mexico tends to seed 70 hectares of grapevines each year, it is also true that each vine costs five thousand dollars, and takes five years to produce good wine; which represents difficulty and a high risk particularly for small producers (Toledano, 2015). Other obstacles are the labels and the corks used for the wine bottles, as most of them are imported, which hinders the logistics and increases the production costs. Moreover, many cellars lack storage space for raw material and bottles, lack transportation or weather inconsistencies (such as droughts or excessive rain). This last is why some of the wine regions have opted for irrigation systems, such as Aguascalientes (Uncork Mexico, n.d.), which leads to another issue: sustainability.

3.2.1.1 The Wine Consumer Persona in Mexico

The Mexican consumers' overall wine preference tends to be towards fruity wines, followed by dry wines, semi-dry wines, and sweet or dessert wines (Piña et al., n.d.) Nonetheless, up to date, the best-seller wines in the market are sparkling wines, which consumption increased by 20% with regards to 2019. After this, the second most sold wines in 2020 were the light wines, mainly red, which increased by 10% from the previous year (ICEX, 2020).

3.2.2 Wine Tourism in Mexico

The Mexican wine regions were not positioned on the map as wine tourism destinations in the world (not even in the country) until 15 years ago. Even when there existed initiatives from individual cellars to attract tourists to their facilities, it did not exist an integrative project among wine producers, tour operators, and the state governments, as the wine routes today. However, the federal government propelled food tourism in the country after Mexican gastronomy was named Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2010. Thanks to this, the federal entities started to develop food tourism products and services, in which they highlighted, among other things, autochthonous drinks of the regions and the incorporation of the wine culture to the Mexican cuisine.

As part of this initiative, the federal government created two trails where the Mexican wines were highlighted: the Fogones entre vías y aromas del mar trail (Fires between rails and see aromas Trail), which extends from North Baja California to South Baja California, and the Cortes y Viñedos

trail (Meat and vineyards trail) that crosses the states of Nuevo León, Durango, Coahuila and Sonora, at the northeast of the country (De Jesús & Thomé, 2019).

Some wine regions in the country are newer than others. Nonetheless, all of them try to offer the best product and services quality, such as the vineyards and cellar tours, the wine tastings and wine pairing, as well as storytelling; trying to leave a stamp of its own that will distinguish them from the rest of the country's winemakers (Soto, 2020; Conmexviuyv, 2020).

3.2.2.1 The Wine Tourist Persona in Mexico

Based on the statistical data obtained from various research studies carried out by different Mexican Universities and the Tourism Ministry of the wine regions to analyse, a general Mexican wine tourist persona was created (wine tourist profile) Mexican (Casas, U. et al. 2015; Piña et al., n.d.; SECTUR, 2018).

This wine tourist is often from a medium-high to a high socio-economic stratum, with an average income between 750-1,500 USD (\$15,000-30,000 Mexican pesos), with at least a Bachelor's Degree and works as a company's employee. It usually travels with family, friends, or couple; and tends to stay in hotels, followed by a friend or relative's house (Piña et al., n.d.; Sánchez, 2017; Casas et al., 2015).

According to a study carried out at the Guadalupe Valley (Piña et al., n.d.), the primary purpose of the tourist visit to a wine cellar is because it was recommended by friends and relatives, followed by the experience/ jumping off the routine, the brand and the awards of the cellar, the wine tasting, and price. The factors involved in the decision-making regarding the destination are mainly the landscapes and the diversity of the tourist offer and activities (such as festivals, cultural activities, different types of tourism, and gastronomic offers).

3.2.3 Direct Competition of Aguascalientes' Wine Trails

The direct competitors for wine tourism in Aguascalientes state are the other 13 wine-producing states of the Mexican Republic. From the total, the most important ones regarding infrastructure and production along with Aguascalientes are Baja California, Coahuila, Querétaro, Zacatecas and San Luis Potosí. However, for this study, two states were selected according to their competitive

relevance, reputation, and tourism activity. Following those above, the most relevant competitors are Baja California and Querétaro, with the most touristic trails in the country. The first one was selected because it is the most important wine state in the country, and the second one due to the closeness to Aguascalientes (as both belong to the Bajío region).

3.2.3.1 Baja California

It is located at the northwest boundary line of the country. It is the foremost wine producer of Mexico, with almost 60% of the total wine production. Its vineyards extend along the Franja del Vino (Wine Strip), a temperate-zone that goes from Mexicali to Ensenada (Torres, 2017; El Heraldo SLP, 2015; Gobierno de México, 2015). Thanks to its perpendicular location to the Pacific Ocean, it has a climate condition known as the Mediterranean weather, which makes it highly competitive against those wines from the European Mediterranean, not only for the weather similarities but also because the particular terroir in the state makes it excellent for the production of high-end wines (Torres, 2017).

This Wine Strip is divided in seven wine regions: Valle de Guadalupe, Valle de Calafia, Santo Tomás, San Vicente, San Antonio de Minas, Ojos Negros, and Tecate; being the first three the most important ones. Notwithstanding, the most renowned region is the Guadalupe Valley (Valle de Guadalupe) (Torres, 2017; El Heraldo, SLP, 2015; De Jesús & Thomé, 2019), who will be considered as the main competitor of the Aguascalientes' Wine Trail.

The Guadalupe Valley is situated to the north of the Baja Californian peninsula, just two hours away from San Diego, California, making it an ideal destination for the neighbouring country (USA). It offers delightful weather and incomparable landscapes between mountains and beaches (Paulina, 2018). This Valley is not only "the most important wine region of Mexico, but it is also considered one of the main wine tourism destinations of the world" (Uncork Mexico, n.d.) and one of the most promising. Furthermore, it is considered the heart of the Mexican vineyards (Paulina, 2018).

Its first wine cellar, Santo Tomás, was established in the Valley at the end of the XIX century, thanks to the Spanish missionaries (Paulina, 2018). Years later, the isolated and small wine industry was enriched with the arrival of the Russian Revolution refugees, who brought new varietals to the Valley. Nonetheless, it was until the 80's that the Guadalupe Valley started to flourish as oenologists

that studied in European wine countries came back to apply their knowledge and the new technologies in grape-growing and the winemaking of the country, such are the cases of Hans Backhoff (Monte Xanic) and Hugo D'Acosta (Santo Tomás) (Paulina, 2018).

Despite the significant development that the industry of the region had had, it was until 2005 that the government of the state, along with the Ministry of Ranching, Agriculture, Fishing, and Food (SAGARPA), the Ministry of Tourism (SECTUR), and the Ministry of Economy (SEDEC), joint forces with the winemakers' cooperative to create a wine cluster that preceded the wine route. They also had help from different state universities such as the Autonomous University of Baja California and the Centre of Scientific Investigation (among others) to recollect statistic data to define the tourist profile of the wine trail, the market analysis, as well as the possible improvements for the Trail (Meraz, 2014 quoted for De Jesús & Thomé, 2019). This route was not only a new and more dynamic trading and marketing channel, but it also propelled the creation of regulatory organizations and promoters of the wine industry of the state and its tourism activity, as 'Provino, Sistema de Producto Vid, and the Asociación de Vitivinicultores y Amigos del Valle' (Quiñonez et al. 2012 citado por De Jesús & Thomé, 2019).

The Baja Californian wine trail extends along 10 thousand hectares that are house to more than 150 cellars that comprise industrial wine producers, premium boutique wine cellars, and small artisan and family winemakers (De Jesús & Thomé, 2019; Uncork México, n.d.). Out of the whole Route, 70% of the wine production is concentrated in the Guadalupe Valley (Paulina, 2018), producing different varietals and blends. However, its most famous wine is produced with Nebbiolo grape thanks to the Valley's terroir, resulting in a rounded, full-bodied and very dark wine, with very different characteristics from the Italian Barolos y Barbarescos (Uncork México, n.d.).

This Trail produces an average of two million boxes of wine bottles per year, with a yearly increase ranging from 10 to 12%. 70% of this production is destined for national consumption, while the 30% remaining is for locals (Jiménez, 2019).

The Baja California Wine Route most representative cellars are: Viñedos Santo Tomás, Casa Pedro Domecq, L.A. Cetto, Barón Balché (these first being the ones that produce the most wine in the region), Monte Xanic, Cavas Valmar, Viña Liceaga, Adobe Guadalupe, Bodegas San Antonio, Casa Bibayoff, Casa de Piedra, Bodegas Valle de Guadalupe, La Lomita y Chateau Camou, along with a great variety of small producers of artisan and author's wine (Torres, 2017; El Heraldo SLP, 2015; Jiménez, 2019).

Currently, the Route offers food and wine tours in the main cellars, vineyards, and restaurants, where the landscape and the wine become of paramount importance as the region's main attractions. Besides the activities offered by the cellars, such as the wine tastings, wine pairings, and tours, the Trail also offers a wide variety of extra agricultural, gastronomic, cultural and adventure activities. There also hold diverse thematic events and festivals, as the "Paella contest, the Wine Harvest Festival (Fiesta de la Vendimia), the Guateque, the Blossom vineyards festival (Festival Viñedos en Flor), or the International Contest of Ensenada Tierra Vino" (Meraz, 2014 quoted by De Jesús & Thomé, 2019).

There are different accommodations within the Trail's hospitality offer (some inside the cellars' facilities), from 1 to 5-star hotels, boutique hotels, glamping, rustic cabins, B&B, and camping. Furthermore, it offers both countryside and gourmet restaurants to enjoy traditional local food, spas and vinotherapy, handcrafts and local products stores, etcetera (De Jesús & Thomé, 2019).

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This Trail is the preferred tourist destination for both Mexican and foreigners (mainly North Americans). According to the Ministry of Tourism (Jimenez, 2019), on average, 850 thousand tourists visit the Baja California Wine Trail each year, and more than 5% of that visits go to the Fiestas de la Vendimia (Wine Harvest Festival) (González, 2018 quoted by De Jesús & Thomé, 2019). The visitors' profile that assists this festival has medium-high to high income, ranging between 18 and 25 for nationals and from 26 to 43 for international visitors. On average, tourist stays four nights with an estimated expenditure of a 100 USD per person, leaving a profit of 33,530 USD just during the Fiestas de la Vendimia (Jimenez, 2019; De Jesús & Thomé, 2019). Unlike the festival visitors, the regular wine tourists range between 26 and 60 years old, the predominant group being between 34 and 41. They are mainly women (but not by much), mostly graduated from college or with a postgraduate degree. As the general wine tourist persona, they are primarily employees, followed by entrepreneurs, homemakers, students, and retirees; and most of them took from 3 to 6 days to plan their trip (Casas et al. 2015; Piña et al. N.d; SECTUR, 2018.).

3.2.3.2 *Querétaro*

It is located in the Valley with the most south vines, at the centre of Mexico, in Bajío. Its weather conditions and soil properties are ideal for the cultivation of grapevines of unequalled flavour. It is considered the second most important wine region after Baja California due to its wine production and the number of cellars (Uncork Mexico, n.d.; Torres, 2017). The territory is divided into five wine regions: San Juan del Río, Pedro Escobedo, Calón, Tequisquiapan, y Ezequiel Montes. However, the last two regions are considered the most important due to the temperate weather, sunny summers and abundant rains. Furthermore, it has very fertile and deep sandy-clay soil (De Jesús & Thomé, 2019; El Heraldo SLP, 2015).

From 1970 to 1990, Querétaro dedicated its vine harvests to producing table wine (but in small amounts and terrible quality), brandy, moonshines, and other distilled drinks made from grapes. After the crisis of the '80s, the region was able to recover thanks to the investment of international companies, who started the wine industry in the state (AVQ, 2017 quoted by De Jesús y Thomé, 2019).

Nowadays, the vineyard area covers more than 500 hectares, divided among 27 winemakers, which produce over 100 labels of wine. Even if the state produces all kinds of wines (red, white, rosé, and sparkling), it is most famous for its cava-type sparkling wines, with an annual production of three million bottles, and it is known as the "Mexican bubble" in the wine world (Almanza, 2017; De Jesús & Thomé, 2019; Torres, 2017). According to Culinaria Mexicana (2019), Querétaro produces more than 4% of the total wine production in Mexico.

The first version of the actual wine route was created in 2007, thanks to the initiative of winemakers, cheesemakers, and tour operators who wanted to propel their productions and tourism in the state. Notwithstanding, over the years and with the help of the local government (who invested public funds in marketing and infrastructure for the wine industry), as well as the incorporation of more wine producers, cheesemakers and artists, the actual Trail was developed under the name of "Ruta del Queso, Arte y Vino" (Cheese, Art, and Wine Trail). This Route comprises 26 vineyards, 11 cheese factories, a wine-themed park, and several plastic artists and artisans (Almanza, 2017). In addition, it offers tours to both the vineyards and the cellars, wine tastings, and wine pairings with local cheeses and regional food. At present times, this Trail is considered to be the second most

crucial attraction of the state by the Ministry of Tourism, receiving over 700 thousand tourists yearly, out of which 70 thousand go to the Wine and Cheese Festival and 50 thousand to the Wine Harvest Festival from July to September. As a result of these numbers, Queretaro has consolidated as a wine tourism destination in the country, and it expects to achieve a million tourists by 2022 (De Jesús & Thomé, 2019; El Heraldo SLP, 2015; López, 2018).

Part of the touristic appeal of the Art, Cheese and Wine trail is the five Pueblos Mágicos (Magical Towns) that surround the city of Querétaro. Two of them are part of this route: Tequisquiapan and San Sebastián Bernal. Besides the vast history and the incomparable rural beauty, these towns offer various activities, such as natural springs, spas, balloon rides, caves, and archaeological sites. Furthermore, Querétaro has four UNESCO namings, two tangible (the historical centre and the Misiones de la Sierra Gorda) and two untangible (the traditions of the otomí and chichimeca culture) (Uncork México, n.d.; El Heraldo SLP, 2015).

Today, the state's most important cellars are Freixenet, La Redonda, Viñas del Marqués, San Juanito, Vinos Azteca, Puerta de Lobo, Cava 57, among others (TipAdvisor, 2021; La Ruta del Queso, Arte y Vino, 2021), and its main grapes are St. Emilion, Chenin Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Gris y Macabeu, Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir, Gamay y Malbec (Toledano, 2015; El Heraldo SLP, 2015).

3.3 Aguascalientes' Wine Route SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- Location: located in the exact geographical centre of Mexico, it is close to the most significant cities (Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Monterrey) as well as other states (Queretaro, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Zacatecas, Michoacán) that would facilitate both weekend and long-stay tourists, and day trippers.
- Safety: Aguascalientes is known as one of the safest states of the Mexican Republic.
- Different kinds of tourism offer, mainly business tourism and ecotourism/adventure tourism, followed by cultural, religious, and festival tourism.
- Natural Thermal waters, temazcal saunas, and spas.

- Great offer of terrestrial routes (by bus), from all around the country.
- The street management/ design of the city is effortless to follow, resulting very convenient for the tourists as it is hard to get lost or drive in the city.
- Medium price (lower than most of the other cities in the country).
- It has 3 of the 132 magical towns of Mexico.

Weaknesses

- Lack of touristic information
- Lack of tourism services (guided tours, kiosks, and maps)
- Lack of touristic marketing (local and national), not only in social media but also physical (brochures, billboards, etc.).
- Lack of direct flights to the city (There only exist direct flights from Puebla, Mexico City, Cancún, Toluca, Monterrey, Puerto Vallarta, and Texas), making flights scarce and more expensive.
- Scarcity of 5-star hotels. The majority are 4-3 star hotels.
- The wine route was inaugurated a year ago, in the middle of a global crisis due to COVID-19 pandemic, and it lacks organization, tourist attractions, and marketing diffusion.
- Wine Route is only open for especial events.
- No accommodation within the cellars' facilities or nearby.
- There is no public transportation available to do the wine route.
- Wineries work as individuals and not as a wine route team.

Opportunities

- Aguascalientes was one of the first states that started to produce wine in Mexico. Thus, the government can use its history to promote the state as a wine-producing and cultural touristic place (storytelling).
- Promote the three Pueblos Mágicos as part of the wine route, as they are adjacent to it.
- As many wineries are relatively young, they are not only offering new world wines (as all the country), but they are offering new technology and new viewpoints of younger generations.

- As the 2nd market with the most grow-potential, so the government can give incentives (for ex. low-interest-rate loans, discounts in equipment, or facility for importing needed materials (lessen tax rates) to new entrepreneurs.
- Opportunity to develop outstanding and unique experiences and accommodations within the wineries' facilities (compare those of other states and develop concepts that tourist would not be able to find anywhere else).
- Develop a private transportation system between the wineries for the visitors (ex. round trip for the tourists from their hotel to at least three wineries and back).
- As more wineries from different parts of the state are joining the trail, more attractions can be added to the project such as ecotourism sites (Sierra Fria cabins, camping, cycling, and hiking activities; Cerro del Muerto hikings; cycling trails; Boca de Tunel adventure park) and leisure (Spas, Temazcal saunas, etc.).
- Create tour packages that involve different kinds of tourism for visitors (ex. visit the wine route + climbing in the Sierra Fria + visit three museums).
- Develop agreements/ Create packages with B&B's where they can book accommodations and wine route tours for lower prices (when booked together).
- Focus on target markets that other wine markets are not interested in, for example, those without wine knowledge and medium income, but with the curiosity to learn; young people (18-25), among others.
- Break the country's taboos/ stereotypes about wine (beverage for wealthy, educated people, for important occasions, difficult to understand or drink). Give another marketing perspective to wine (use Aguascalientes as a foundation state to introduce people to wine tourism).

Threats

- The attractions publicized in the wine route are not eco-friendly or animal friendly. They are tauromachy haciendas or dairy-producing haciendas, which is terrible if our visitors are vegan, or under a cruelty-free trend.
- The continuous development of older and more consolidated touristic and wine states with more or better attractions to offer to the visitors and/or better marketing to draw tourists to the area, especially neighbouring cities.

- Water scarcity in the state.
- Aguascalientes is surrounded by cities that are catalogued as dangerous due to drug dealing and cartels (such as Zacatecas, Guanajuato, San Luis Potosí, Jalisco).
- Aguascalientes is generally an unknown state for tourism.
- Aguascalientes wines are rarely known.

CHAPTER 4. METHODOLOGY

In order to obtain enough and valuable information for the elaboration of this project, primary and secondary data were used. The first was obtained from a focus group session, while the secondary data was gathered from various academic papers based on research about the wine tourism market. The information gathered from secondary sources was discussed in the market analysis to understand the current situation of the tourism and the wine tourism market in Mexico, narrowing it to Aguascalientes and its main competitors.

The main focus of this research was to comprehend the Mexican wine tourists' motivations, needs and expectations (particularly for millennials) and to find out if a wine route was attractive enough to drive them to visit an industrial city. However, after realising that the data collected from the secondary sources was not enough to explain the wine tourism market in Mexico, it was imperative to collect primary data to understand the market better.

The focus group was selected as the primary data collection method to find information that was not obtained through secondary sources to corroborate if the global theories related to wine tourism were adaptable to the Mexican wine tourism market. Furthermore, primary data was helpful to have an in-depth understanding of the current and emerging wine tourism market needs. The utilisation of both methods was beneficial to develop a proposal that could improve the competitiveness and attractiveness of Aguascalientes' wine route for national tourists by implementing marketing and managerial strategies.

4.1 Focus Group

As previously mentioned, the research method carried out for obtaining the qualitative data was a focus group. A focus group consists of a small group of people, generally from 6 to 10, in which a mediator asks open questions about a specific topic in order to foster a debate among participants. This qualitative method was considered the best option for this project as it is a tool that facilitates the discussion between the selected respondents, which provide much more detailed information that is less likely to be obtained in a regular survey. Moreover, the debate between the parts may evoke further views and uncover data that was not previously considered, enriching the research.

Additionally, focus groups are more personal and allow the mediator to observe attitudes towards the questions and responses, rather than obtaining plain answers that could limit the information to preestablished thoughts (De Franco, n.d.; Flynn, et al., 2018; Malhotra, 2017). The purpose of using this type of research method was to find valuable and unknown information about national young-adults tourists' motivations to practice wine tourism, what their expectations were about these experiences, what they like about the current wine tourism market, and what would they improve. Additionally, it was essential to determine if this type of tourism offer was enough to entice the participants to visit an industrial city such as Aguascalientes and how long would they stay.

4.1.1 Focus Group Methodology

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to have participants from different states, the focus group was conducted via an online meeting through the Zoom platform. It took place on June 1st 2021, at 19:00 hours and was headquartered in Aguascalientes, Mexico. It lasted an hour and 21 minutes and consisted of 12 open questions carefully formulated to facilitate a constructive debate around the topic. In order to have a precise record of everything discussed in the study, the focus group was voice recorded and then translated (as the original focus group was in Spanish) and transcribed. Participants were selected according to their age (minimum 20 and maximum 40 years old) and generation cohort (preferably within millennials), income (between 500 and 1000USD monthly), level of interest and knowledge in wine and wine tourism (preferably novices), and if they had had a previous wine tourism experience.

The millennial generation cohort was selected since it is the second biggest wine tourism group in the country and with the most growth potential, according to Morgan, Cuamea and Minaverry (2016). The research examined at the market analysis shows that the social classes that predominate among Mexican wine tourists are the medium-high and high-social classes (Sánchez, 2017). Thus, the interest in expanding the income rate, including a medium-class group that could be potentially targeted but have fewer possibilities of attending an expensive destination such as the Baja California wine route. Lastly, the knowledge factor was chosen after analysing the opportunity of targeting consumers that the rest of the routes are not: the wine curious or novices.

The study comprised seven people (four men and three women) between 26 and 36 years old, from different cities (mainly within the Bajío region), and which monthly income fits the established

standards. All participants have had at least one previous wine tourism experience and share a high interest in wine and wine tourism but little knowledge. Thus, they were catalogued as wine curious or novices. Only one out of the seven participants was considered a hanger-on wine tourist with a high probability of becoming a wine novice. Interestingly, even if it was not a requirement to have previously visited Aguascalientes, all members except one had been to the state at least once.

Questions were formulated as general as possible (within our goals) to obtain as much insight and feedback from the respondents, avoiding any possibility of a biased answer. Additionally, all questions tried to target how each participant feels related to the country's overall wine and wine tourism culture and their previous experiences, which could provide additional information about the wine market and how Aguascalientes' competitors perform from the customers' point of view. Moreover, they also appeal to the emotional context of wine and wine tourism in society and their lives, giving us a better comprehension of their decision-making process (ex. if they are society-driven or self-motivated) and what they expect or desire.

To better analyse the responses obtained, they will be itemised by question. However, none of the participants will be named to maintain anonymity.

4.1.2 Focus Group Questionnaire

Q1. What are your general thoughts about wine and wine tourism in Mexico?

Q2. As a Mexican, do you have any stereotypes regarding wine and/or wine tourism?

Q3. How familiar are you with wine tourism? Have you had or have not had a wine tourism experience before, meaning going to a vineyard, winery, or wine festival? If not, why?

Q4. If you have had a previous experience, what were the motivators that drove you to visit a wine region? If not, what are the motivations you have to visit a wine region in the future?

Q5. Now, I would like you to share what expectations did you have when visiting a wine region; and for those who have not visited one, what would they be?

Q6. When visiting a wine region, would you go just to wine-related activities, or would you like to have different activities within your visit? Which ones?

Q7. Do you consider it important to have available accommodation within the wine route?

Q8. What factors would determine the amount of money you are willing to spend on a wine tourism destination?

Q9. If it was your first time visiting a wine region in Mexico, would you prefer to visit a nearby region or a famous one?

Q10. When practising wine tourism, would you prefer a short-term vacation or a long term one, and why?

Q11. Do you consider sustainable tourism relevant when choosing a travelling destination? Why?

Q12. Do you think having a wine route would be enticing enough for you to travel to a non-touristic state such as Aguascalientes?

4.1.3 Focus Group Analysis

As shown in the questionnaire, the first two questions intend to understand the cultural and personal perception of the participants towards wine and wine tourism. All participants were familiar with some Mexican wines but accepted that they tend to drink more international wines for three main reasons: the price point, the quality of the product, and the unfamiliarity with most national labels.

To explain this further, respondents agreed that they believe Mexican wines are more expensive than most international wines, such as the Spanish, Chilean or Argentinian wines, and that the quality they offer is not worth the price. Furthermore, they also admit that there is limited marketing related to national wines, and thus, they do not know the available offer. Related to the second question, all participants agreed on seven very pronounced stereotypes that the Mexican society has regarding wine and wine tourism and why their consumption in Mexico is not very prominent:

1. It is for rich people
2. It is for knowledgeable people (people who know how to drink and pair wine)
3. It is expensive
4. It is for older people (+40)
5. It is for unique/ formal events and not for partying
6. It makes them tired
7. Hang-overs are worst with wine compared to other spirits

Interestingly, there were two relevant opinions related to these questions. First, one of the participants emphasised that some Mexican wines are more expensive because they have smaller productions than those international, which increases production costs. Moreover, a participant

highlighted that some countries have commercial trades with Mexico, which exempt them from certain taxes that the local wines have to pay, making them more expensive. Additionally, the participant compared some local wines that can compete with international wines, emphasising good quality Mexican wines at a reasonable price. However, he also agreed that many wineries sell poor-quality wines at high prices because there is no wine culture in the country. Secondly, another participant assured that wine is overrated in the country, saying that wineries have marketed their products as a commodity for people of a higher class and higher purchasing power, raising the price of both the wines and mainly the wine tourism products, limiting their market to a small percentage of the Mexican population when the wine is a product for everybody.

Questions three and four are related to participants' previous wine tourism experiences and their motivations to practice this type of tourism. Three out of the seven participants had had both national and international experiences, which they used to compare the wineries dynamic between tours, providing meaningful insight. The main issue the participants had with their previous experiences was the duration of the tourism service. On average, all of their wine tours lasted an hour and a half, to which all agreed it was not enough to have a satisfying experience. Even when they assured that they had a lovely time at the wineries, they argued that 90 minutes were not enough to fully enjoy the tour and learn something meaningful from the process explanation and tasting. Participants commented that they felt rushed through the process and that the explanation was quite simple.

Additionally, they felt that some wineries have so many people visiting them that they already do the tours in an "automatised" way. Furthermore, those with international experiences (held in Chile, Portugal, Argentina, among other countries) complemented the debate by stating that the wineries in those countries with more wine tradition enriched their explanation with the history of the place. As an example, one of the participants shared his experience at Santiago de Chile, in which the winery explained how wine producers contributed to the rebellion movement during the dictatorship period and other historical data relevant to the country's history, which enhanced the tourism experience taking it beyond a wine tour. Also, another participant who had an experience in Porto stated that the winery mixed people from different countries in groups while they learned about wine, making the experience even more international and appealing for travellers.

Regarding the motivators, everybody except one agreed that their primary motivation was to learn more about the wine tasting and process, followed by spending time with friends and family, relaxing, travel, and enjoying the landscapes and beautiful sceneries. On the other hand, the

participant who shared a different opinion stated that his main motivator was having fun with his friends and had some drinks, which was considered a hanger-on tourist following the wine tourists classification in the literature review section.

The following four questions (5 to 8) intended to determine participants' expectations regarding their future wine tourism experiences. This time, the hanger-on tourist commented that he wants to have a learning experience the next time, mainly because he wants to differentiate wines and stop asking for sweet wine. The rest of the group admitted that they expected a more thorough tour and explanation, hoping to learn more about the wine process and taste wine. Participants emphasised that they want an experience that teaches them how to taste all wines and not just the wineries' wines, pronouncing that they can then compare wines and decide which one they like best in the future. They also acknowledged that introducing wineries' storytelling and linking it to the region's history would be a great plus. In addition, they talked about having activities in which they could get involved, such as cooking classes or the grape harvest, as well as ending the experience with a nice meal in a restaurant within the vineyard or close to it, where they could enjoy local food with local wines.

Appealingly, two participants shared the idea of creating different tour plans in which visitors could decide which type of experience they would like to have, for example, a technical tour in which they could have an in-depth explanation of wine processes and tasting; or a leisure tour, in which they could have a quick tour and more tasting and food to relax with friends. Another participant brought up the fact that in the country, the wineries often serve the "average" wines and not their best-quality wines, arguing that their best wines are for international contests and exports. However, everyone agreed they would expect to have the best wines, and they made an analogy saying that when someone visits their house, they serve the best they have. Last but not least, they expected the customer service and the professionalisation of the staff to be better, arguing that the wineries' staff are not prepared enough and that they lack friendliness and knowledge.

Talking about additional activities within the route, respondents shared that whenever they travel, they tend to fit as much as possible in their travel schedule and that wine tourism was not the exception. All participants agreed that they would like to do two or more wineries, do rural tourism and enjoy as many attractions as possible, maybe visiting nearby towns or the city centre.

Accommodation-wise, participants concurred that it is vital for them to have a hotel within the route or nearby. However, the idea of having a hotel within the vineyard was not very popular, as

they stated it would be more expensive and probably would limit them to visit only that winery or have to move from that hotel to another depending on what they want to do or how many wineries they want to visit. However, they thought that a hotel, cottages, hostels, or B&B within the route would be ideal. The main reason was to avoid driving after drinking as well as the possibility to enjoy a rural setting with a nice view of the vineyards and far away from the urban life.

The attractions available, the accommodations and restaurants offer, and how vast the touristic information is, are what all agreed it would determine how much they are willing to spend on a destination, stating that it is more about what they can do and not where. Also, they highlighted other travel decisions such as transportation (if they have to travel by plane or car) and how far the destination is from their place of residence.

The following two questions are related to the length of their stay and the destination decision-making. The intention of question nine was to find out if they were more moved towards destination popularity when practising wine tourism for the first time. However, they all agreed that if it were their first time, or one of the first times practising wine tourism, they would instead go to close by and less expensive regions than the popular ones such as Baja California. Even though they all accepted that Baja California's Wine Route is on their bucket list, they would do it once they feel knowledgeable enough about wine. Question 10 was made to find out how long would participants stay at a destination and what would they prefer (if a long or short-term vacation). They all agreed they would like to mix both long and short-term vacations and had no particular preference. However, they stated that the closer the destination, the less they would stay. Respondents said that if the destination were from 3 to 5 hours away, they would probably stay for a weekend unless there were more than two wineries that they would like to visit. On the contrary, if it was farther and they would have to travel by plane, they would prefer to stay for a whole week.

To question eleven, participants responded that sustainability was not relevant to them when choosing a destination; nonetheless, they would find a sustainable vineyard more appealing than those that are not.

The last question was formulated to find out if wine tourism would be enticing enough to drive them to visit an industrial city, to which they responded with an affirmative answer. They concur that they would try to do something else, but that if the wine route is well developed, it would be enough for them to visit Aguascalientes. In addition to these comments, six out of the seven participants (who had already visited Aguascalientes) stated that even if the city is beautiful and

safe, it lacks tourism attractiveness and activity and that the wine trail would be a great asset to increase the touristic value of the state aside from the San Marcos Festival. Participants also commented that the quality of the roads and well-signposted routes were a must for practicing this type of tourism.

After analysing the participants' responses, it can be concluded that wine tourism in an industrial city is appealing enough even for the younger generations than the usually targeted in Mexican wine tourism. However, it is imperative to have affordable prices, enhance the quality of the service, and invest in the staff's preparation, remembering that customer service was the best-qualified asset of wineries by tourists according to several authors (O'Neill and Charters, 2000; Hashimoto & Telfer, 2003; Hall & Mitchell, 2002; Getz, 2000, all cited by Getz & Brown, 2006; Bruwer and Rueger-Muck, 2018; Santos et al., 2020). Additionally, it can be inferred that the Aguascalientes Wine Route can have more weekend tourists from the main cities in the country (as is in the centre of the country), and some long-term ones (mainly from the south, in which viticulture is not practised), which on the bright side, could bring more tourist during the year and increase the influx of the tourism sector. However, having sufficient attractions within the wine route can potentially increase their stay and generate more tourist attractions within the area and the state, propelling, in the long run, sustainable and consistent tourism activity in Aguascalientes.

CHAPTER 5. STRATEGIC PLAN

After analysing both primary and secondary data, it was possible to develop an issue-based strategic plan in which specific recommendations are made for the wine tourism sector of Aguascalientes and its future development. The aim of this strategic plan is not only to improve the current wine route offer and management but also to position it as a competitive wine tourism destination nationally. To achieve these goals, the plan is divided into three main areas: wine route's management, wine-tourism management, and marketing of the wine route. Nonetheless, it is necessary to remember that for now, the wine route is open only for special events. However, the government has planned to open it permanently. Therefore, the following recommendations are made under the supposition that the route will be operating all year round.

5.1 Management of the wine route

5.1.1 Wine route and wineries' management

From the internal market analysis, it can be perceived that several issues at the wine trail need to be addressed—the primary ones are staff professionalisation and the lack of organisation within wineries.

As observed in the literature review, previous research has detected that one of the assets that wine tourists value the most is the friendliness and preparation of the staff. Moreover, these aspects were also highly valued by the focus group respondents. However, it was found out at the focus group session that the preparation of the staff is a neglected aspect in Mexican wineries. This problem was particularly emphasised by three of the participants when referring to Aguascalientes' wineries. Thus, the first strategy proposed is the proper professionalisation of the staff through certifications on different fields, more specifically, in the history of Aguascalientes as a wine region; the grape growth, harvest, and wine production; wine storage and ageing; wine tasting and its organoleptic characteristics; and wine and food pairing.

A second strategy as part of the staff's preparation is educating them in customer service as well as etiquette and protocol. These two subjects will ensure a good relationship with the clientele and the correct use of body language, proper behaviour and attitudes within a wine service environment,

and the correct usage of the table service within wine tastings and pairings. The above will enhance the customers' perspective towards the wineries' expertise, value, formality and professionalism.

Although uniforms can seem old-fashioned, they give a sense of belonging, formality, and professionalism to the staff, especially in a tourism sector where a quality and high-end product as wine is involved. Hence, the third strategy is directly related to the dress code of the wine route. Even though it is not strictly necessary to be formal, it is encouraged to wear a formal shirt or polo t-shirt as a uniform for the wineries comprising the route, providing a sense of formality and unification. Each winery would have a different shirt colour and their logo imprinted along with the wine route logo. However, it is also encouraged to use the formal shirt with standard jeans to give the staff a hint of youth and inclusiveness to all generational cohorts.

Another improvement point is the standardisation of the visitors' records. As previously mentioned, Aguascalientes' wineries do not have a visitors' book to record the number of customers per day, nor their sex, age, provenance, and the plan booked. Therefore, the following recommendation is to set up a digital record book to organise and store all the relevant information related to their customers. The collection of this information will help establish which type of wine tourists are wineries targeting, if they are their desired market, and their future target market. Furthermore, record books could help the local government to generate statistics related to wine tourism in the state, which could help both the state and the route to develop future marketing and administrative plans to increase this type of tourism, its economic spill, and the creation of new attraction based on customers' needs.

5.1.2 Website and social media

Concerning the webpage of the wine route, the data from all the wineries should be homogenised. As reviewed in the market analysis, not all the wineries displayed at the Wine Route's site had the same information, which is perceived as informal and unequal. Thence, all the wineries' profiles must count with the address of the cellar, work schedule, contact information (phone number, email, and social media), as well as their official webpage. Moreover, it is also essential to display the different packages offered, prices, and requirements (such as the minimum people required, knowledge level, etcetera).

Another issue was the lack of practicality to book a trip to the wineries, as visitors have to email or call each winery to reserve a place. Thus, the recommendation is to set within the website a platform in which the tourists can book their visit to one or more wineries and the additional route's attractions' (if needed). Additionally, adding a recommendation section (with a map) of accommodations, restaurants, convenience stores and health services near the route is also suggested.

Moreover, it is crucial to add a review section to rate the wineries, giving room for improvement. Lastly, it is also encouraged to enhance the webpage with a more colourful yet elegant design to attract younger audiences, to give the impression of a well-designed and innovative project.

5.2 Tourism management

5.2.1 Tourism services

Regarding tourism services within the existent wine route in Aguascalientes, various improvement opportunities have been detected, such as accommodation agreements and new hospitality services, tour operators' services, transportation, and tourism offer extension. According to the state's initial plan in 2013, a hotel within the wine route area was proposed; nonetheless, this never happened.

According to the literature review, tourists prefer to stay near the wineries as alcohol is involved in wine tourism, which was confirmed in the focus group session. Furthermore, according to the primary data gathered through this method, it was also found that Mexican wine tourists prefer the idea of a hotel within the route vs the concept of wineries' private hotels, as is the case of the Baja California wine route. The main reasons for this are the high prices of wineries' accommodations and the limitations of staying just in one vineyard. Due to the above, two concepts are suggested: reconsidering a hotel for the wine route and creating agreements between the route and the existing accommodation services.

5.2.1.1 Wine Route's Hotel

The proposal is creating a sustainable hotel located within the wine route's area and exclusive of all wineries, which means that the tourists visiting any wine cellar belonging to the route can stay at

the hotel. Part of the recommendation is attracting an investor outside the route to avoid conflicts of interest, such as hotel chains or a local investor.

The sustainability factor for the hotel is imperative, as wine tourism is involved within a rural setting, and part of its essence and appeal are the landscapes, nature, and the local culture involved with it. Thus, it would be feasible to have a hotel that can obtain the majority of the needed resources without harming the environment as well as contributing to the local communities, such as obtaining energy and heating from solar panels, having a water recycling system to water the gardens, implementing measures for waste reduction, processing food waste for composting, and buying raw materials, supplies and souvenirs from locals as much as possible.

Additionally, it is encouraged to create a system where tourists can book their accommodation, wine tour, leisure activities, and transportation services simultaneously through the hotel or the wine route's webpage. Lastly, a restaurant where tourists can try authentic local food and wines is proposed as part of the hotel facilities and a souvenir shop with handicrafts and food products of the region.

5.2.1.2 Agreements with existent accommodation services

An alternative to the wine route's hotel for those tourists interested in staying within the urban area or who have a preference for another type of accommodation, it is suggested to sign an agreement with other hospitality services in the city, such as particular and chain hotels, B&B's, and hostels. The contract should be based on a win-win strategy, in which the tourists have a preferent rate when booking a wine tour meanwhile the accommodation services ensure year-round visitors and the possibility to offer additional services, such as transportation to the wine route, special dinners with local wines, and advertisement in the wine route's official webpage. This agreement between local businesses could increase the tourism activity in the wine route and the state, helping other types of tourism increase their revenue.

Through this strategy, it is also possible to join international platforms such as Airbnb not only for the wine tourists to look for accommodations nearby the route or in the city, but also to display the state's wine route in the "What to do in Aguascalientes" section of the website, which could potentially target not only local but also international tourists.

5.2.1.3 Tour operators and tourism information

Primary and secondary data from the analysis show no tour operators or tourism information kiosks in Aguascalientes, making it difficult for visitors to find tourist attractions and activities around the state. Notwithstanding tourism information kiosks and materials, in general, are not directly related to the wine route, it would be convenient if brochures of the wine route are located in every accommodation facility in the state, airport, bus stations, and governmental buildings. Furthermore, the placement of an information kiosk about the wine route in the most concurred places of the city is also encouraged (city centre, malls, industrial area and convention centres).

As for tour operators, it is convenient to create alliances with tour agencies to provide a tour guide service for those who want to book a guided visit to the wine route. Visiting rural areas could be challenging for a tourist, especially if the signposting is insufficient or incorrect. Hence, having the option in which tourists can book a guide that would take them from and to their accommodation, the wineries, and other attractions, as well as telling them the story of the city and facts of interest of the route they are traversing, can increase the added value of the wine route. Additionally, it is vital to create attractive tour plans of the wine route for other tourism agencies in the country to promote the visit of national visitors to the state, particularly in the neighbouring cities.

5.2.1.4 Transportation services

Unfortunately, there is no public transport or tour buses or other tourism transportation from the city to the wine route. Therefore, it is recommended to implement a transportation system exclusive for the route. This could be achieved through agreements with transportation services' companies (coach companies, Über and similar services) and tourism agencies; or through the development of a private transportation system of the wine route. The first option would need to be developed along with second partners, reducing investments in transportation equipment and personnel hiring; however, the revenues would be split between stakeholders. The second option would involve an investment in at least one transportation equipment (business class coach) plus hiring at least two qualified drivers (in the understanding that there would only be two schedules in which this transport operates). Nonetheless, profits would be exclusive for the wine route.

5.2.1.5 Wine tourism plans

According to the information obtained from the focus group, Mexican tourists have different motivators to practice wine tourism, which depends not only on their interests but also on who accompanies them. Thus, they suggested creating different wine tourism plans for the wineries to fit their needs (partying, learning, relaxation, leisure). Hence, the following wine tourism packages are suggested so the wineries can implement them within their offer:

- Introduction to wine tourism: this plan is specially designed for those tourists who have little to no wine knowledge. It aims to teach them the overall process of winemaking and tasting without being overly technical. However, this introduction should encourage them to continue practising this type of tourism and increase their wine knowledge. The approximate duration of the session (vineyard and cellar tour + introduction to wine tasting: 1 hour and 30 minutes).
- Wine experienced plan: differently from the previous one, this requires previous wine experience. Notwithstanding, it is not necessary to be an expert. This plan is for those who want to take a step further in wine tasting, learning to taste more complex wines and how to pair them with food, and the ageing process. The duration of this plan is around 2 hours (vineyard and cellar tour + thorough explanation of wine storage and ageing + wine tasting and pairing).
- Wine expert: this is the third level plan for those wine tourists interested in perfecting their wine skills. It is strictly necessary to have more than one wine experience and knowledge in wine tasting. In this plan, tourists will learn the technical vocabulary, chemical and physical reactions in the wine, in-depth organoleptic characteristics of wine such as wine defects, and the different winemaking methods (sparkling, icewine, etcetera). This activity lasts approximately 2 hours and 40 minutes, including the vineyard and facilities tours, wine tasting and pairing.
- Family plan: this plan could be adjusted at the level of expertise of the family members. However, this plan is created to provide the visitor with a learning experience and an enjoyable environment to spend quality time with their beloved ones. This plan includes a complete meal served with different house wines at the end of the vineyard and facilities'

tour and a brief explanation of the winemaking process and tasting. It has an approximate duration of 3 and a half hours. Wine recommendations are based on their taste and the food ordered.

- Friend-day plan: this package is specifically created for those who want to have leisure yet learning experience while enjoying time with friends. In comparison to the previous plans, this is a more relaxed wine tourism activity, in which the visitors will have a pleasant and relaxing guided tour through the vineyards and the cellar, a brief winemaking process explanation, and a nice meal with wines of the house and music of their like. Wine recommendations are based on their taste.

5.2.1.6 Extra activities at the wineries

As studied in the internal and external marketing analysis, wineries worldwide have various leisure activities besides the regular facilities' tours, wine tastings and pairings to keep their guests entertained. According to their possibilities and location, and following the global trends, Mexican wine regions have tried to implement extra activities as part of their wine tourism offer. However, Aguascalientes wineries' have been left behind, at least from their main competitors (Baja California and Querétaro).

Nonetheless, some of the state's wineries have tried to implement different activities such as bicycle rides; they have not made sufficient efforts to keep both the tourists and locals interested. By increasing and diversifying the tourism offer within the wineries, the tourist influx and revenue would grow. Furthermore, visitors' seasonality would not be exclusive to business and festival tourism (San Marcos Festival), as an attractive wine tourism offer can draw tourists all year round without depending on any other sectors or events. The suggested activities are:

Day activities:

- Cooking classes + pairing: this activity intends to create a higher level of involvement of the visitors with the local culture and the winery's brand. It consists of offering the customers a cooking class with a local chef in which they would learn to prepare a local recipe (either sweet or salty) and learn how to pair it with a wine of the cellar.

- Horse ride/ bicycle ride: it consists of a 30-minute ride either by bicycle or horse (for those wineries that count with horses) around the vineyard to enjoy the winescape and the sunset while enjoying a physical activity away from the urban life.
- Spa and vinotherapy: relaxation services that could be offered either at the wine route's hotel or the wineries, in which guests can get a massage or vinotherapy while enjoying the beautiful winescape views and drinking local wines and fruits.
- Fun for children: this activity was particularly thought for those wine tourists with children or making a family trip. It consists of maintaining kids entertained through storytellings, cooking lessons, bicycle rides and crafting while their parents enjoy the wine tasting or other activities.

Night activities:

- Camping: this activity is encouraged for those tourists who are passionate about nature adventures and sleepovers, who would like to try a more rustic accommodation with a beautiful view of the stars and the vineyards.
- Wine pairing + dinner under the stars: as the previous activity, this is for nocturnal tourists, who are enticed to have a nice dinner within the beautiful vineyard while enjoying the light of the stars.
- Campfire storytelling: this last night-time activity is about setting a bonfire close to the vineyards and hearing urban legends while enjoying roasted sausages and marshmallows paired with a glass of good house wine.

5.2.1.7 Tourism offer

As displayed in the internal analysis, tourists can visit very few attractions within the wine route and quite a few cultural, natural, and religious tourism attractions within the state. However, the lack of touristic information had made it challenging for tourists to find them. In this case, the main suggestion is to add the following attractions as part of the wine route (Annex 2):

- Temazcal sauna HAAB
- Temazcal sauna Aztlan
- Temazcal Sauna Jardin Ana Natalia

As well as to promote at the wine route's webpage and map, the attractions below as additional activities that wine tourists can do as part of their visit:

- Boca de Tunel ecotouristic park and cabins
- Hiking at Cerro del Muerto
- Pueblos Magicos (Calvillo, Real de Asientos, San José de Gracia)
- Hiking, camping and/or staying at a cabin at Sierra Fria

5.3 Marketing of the wine route

5.3.1 Blue ocean marketing strategy

The value proposition of this strategic plan is based on the marketing strategy created by Kim Chain and Renée Mauborgne, the blue ocean strategy, which consists of penetrating a non-explored or unknown market space, either through a new service or product or a different value proposition from the existing ones. In contrast, the red oceans are those markets that are already saturated with the same offer and which already have set competitive rules and prices (Chain & Mauborgne, 2015).

As seen above, the red ocean within wine tourism in Mexico targets mid-generation millennials and generation X consumers; with medium-high to high purchasing power, high interest in wine, which primary purpose is learning, and mainly accompanied by family members. However, Aguascalientes does not have enough attractions or wineries to compete at the same quality level as the already established markets, such as Querétaro and Baja California. Trying to venture within the same market would be an anticipated suicide. Therefore, the suggestion focuses on a market not yet addressed by the competition, such as medium-income people with no wine knowledge or previous experiences but a high interest in wine.

After analysing the prejudices and feelings from the focus group respondents, it was realised that the current wine market is excluding those people who do not have the money to travel to expensive destinations such as Baja California, where not only the accommodations are expensive but also the transportation to the destination, and the wineries' services. Furthermore, they target long-stay vacationers (4 days or more) rather than weekend travellers as it is a far-away destination for most tourists. Moreover, it was also found that tourists who want to introduce themselves to the wine world feel afraid of not having enough knowledge or paying too much without knowing if they will enjoy the experience.

Given the above, the opportunity to develop a wine tourism service for people who are new to the wine world arose. Aguascalientes may still be a young destination to compete with the most famous wine destinations in the country but is good enough to create a market of its own. Thus, the idea is to market Aguascalientes as an introductory wine destination for those tourists interested in becoming wine tourists, with no experience needed, and without the need to spend much money. Additionally, the plans created for the wine route could encourage different types of tourists to navigate this type of tourism, either for curiosity, adventure, interest in learning, relaxation, leisure time with family and friends, and partying. Lastly, as the state has a privileged location, it is encouraged to target weekend travellers, addressing the country's main cities, such as Guadalajara, León, Mexico City, Monterrey, and Queretaro.

5.3.2 Positioning Aguascalientes as a wine tourism destination

Once the target market has been established, it can proceed to the marketing strategy to position the state as a wine tourism destination. This project aims to position the state as a launchpad for those people starting in the wine world before becoming formal wine tourists. Thus, the promotion of the destination would encourage people (mainly young adults) to visit Aguascalientes to taste wine while having a good time at a reasonable price, no matter if they are beginners or not and what their motivations are. Aguascalientes have a plan for everybody, from knowledge-thirsty to party-lovers, family trippers, or nature lovers.

Aguascalientes may not be a wine tourism monster yet, but once it is positioned as a wine tourism destination for those who have no possibilities of reaching renowned destinations, it can create premium services for its market and new ones. Through this, the state's wine route can gain knowledge, experience, and fame.

The suggested marketing means are social media, mainly LinkedIn (as business tourism is the leading tourism in the state), Instagram (for young adults), and Facebook (for more family-based tourists). Additionally, it is also suggested to use e-tourism platforms such as Airbnb, expedia.com, booking.com, TripAdvisor, and the Ministry of Tourism website.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS

After developing this project, it can be concluded that wine tourism is a growing global trend, especially in the New World countries, and that can expand its market to younger generations through the wine culture dissemination and the innovation of the archaic wine tourism experiences. The first can be accomplished through the constant professionalisation of the staff, and the adequate transmission of knowledge, avoiding the generation of stereotypes and trying to tackle existing prejudices. Innovation within wine tourism can be achieved by developing plans for specific needs and niche markets, creating allegedly engaging activities to complement the aforementioned tourism, and implementing sustainable and eco-friendly practices and facilities. The above, accompanied by a proper marketing strategy, can transform the wine industry into a sufficiently attractive asset to propel tourism in an industrial region and evoke high satisfaction and motivation levels in tourists.

6.1 General Contributions

This project has contributed to the extant literature in various ways; first, by developing a more holistic and exhaustive definition of gastronomy and beverage tourism and assembling the necessary information to give a more precise classification of the types of wine tourists and their motivations. Secondly, it provided further information about the limited data available concerning wine tourism practices in Mexico, specifically in Aguascalientes. Moreover, it also provided the generation of a tourism persona for the Mexican wine market, identifying its needs, the possible strategies to expand the wine tourism market in the country, and how to tackle the existing barriers in younger generations. Furthermore, the recommendations made in this project may contribute to the development, management, and marketing of late wine routes and destinations that have no wine tourism experience or deep-rooted wine traditions.

6.2 Guideline Contributions

The issue-based strategic plan created for this project may contribute to the advancement of Mexico's and other New World countries' wine tourism know-how in a theoretical and operational

approach through the establishment of the wine tourists' precise needs and guidelines that wineries need to follow to professionalise their staff, such as the subjects (grape growing and harvesting, wine-making and ageing, and history of the destination), and the skills needed to be competitive, as customer service and etiquette and protocol.

Additionally, the parameters established for the unification of the operation and image of the wine route can help other trails correct their mistakes, prevent them and prepare future projects.

Furthermore, the guidelines established in this project allow wineries to promote a service based on the prioritisation of the customer needs and desires, which could assure their success and decrease as much as possible the tourists' negative experiences and failure probabilities. Finally, the suggestions based on the importance of a well-signposted destination, with accurate and updated information at the website and physical spots (tourism offices, kiosks), are also imperative for developing and improving wine tourism destinations. The classification of wine tourists, motivations, needs, and expectations, and the managerial and marketing strategies could be implemented for any wine developing destination or those who want to renew its *modus operandi*.

6.3 Limitations

The main limitations for the development of this project were the COVID-19 pandemic and the lack of information available for Aguascalientes' state and the general wine tourism in Mexico. The first limitation made it impossible to carry an in-person investigation and observation of the wineries' performance to obtain more accurate and relevant information regarding their customer service and offer as they were closed at the investigation time. Additionally, the scarcity of information and statistics concerning wine tourism in the state made it even more challenging to develop this project. Notwithstanding, thanks to the information available from other Mexican destinations and other New World more evolved wine regions, it was possible to create a sound-enough strategic plan that could be feasibly implemented in the state. Another limitation was the difficulty of organising the time and date for the focus group, as the selected sample had different working schedules and resided in different cities in the country, which decreased the sample size from twelve to seven people.

6.4 Future Research

Future quantitative and qualitative research is needed to develop wine tourism further in Mexico. There is still considerable unknown information regarding tourists' motivation among the different generational cohorts and social status. Furthermore, in-person observation of the wineries' tourism operation is required to generate a more thorough strategic plan to meet the cellars' and the clients' expectations. Expanding this study to a larger sample that includes international tourists could improve the managerial and marketing tactics of the wine tourism destinations, as regions could benefit from their previous experiences and knowledge and expand their scope to a global market. Furthermore, analysing both national and international markets and different cohorts could provide more consistent and reliable answers that could be translated to a solid-based business plan for any wine destination and increase the offer and competitiveness in the country. The application of the developed strategic plan along with the continuous investigation, enhancement and innovation of the ongoing practices can position Mexico (and not only Baja California) as a worldwide wine tourism destination.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX A: AGUASCALIENTES, BAJA CALIFORNIA AND QUERETARO WINE TRAILS' MAPS.

1. Aguascalientes' Wine Route's Map



2. Baja California's Wine Route's Map



3. Querétaro's Wine Route's Map



ANNEX B: MAP OF THE WINE ROUTE'S PRORPOSAL



ANNEX C: AGUASCALIENTES WINE ROUTE'S MAIN STATISTICS



AGUASCALIENTES
GOBIERNO DEL ESTADO

Contigo al 100

SECTUR
SECRETARÍA DE TURISMO

RESULTADOS PRINCIPALES RUTA DEL VINO 2020

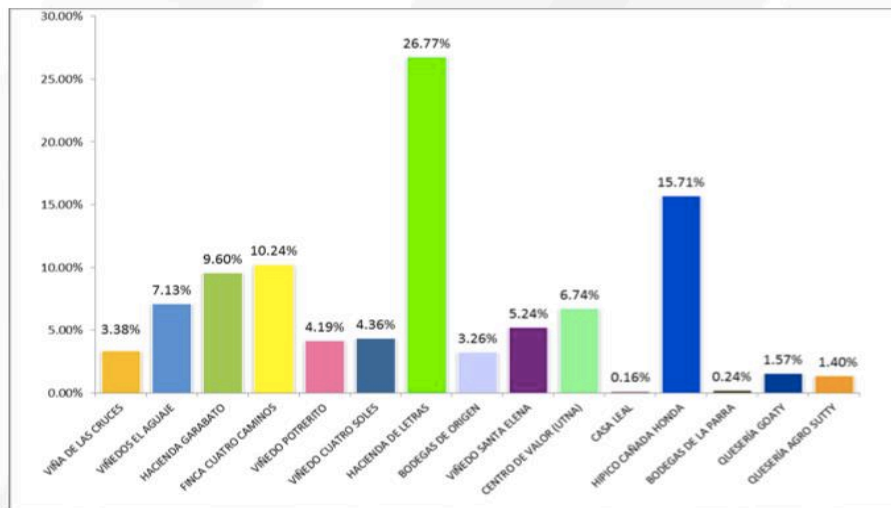
OCUPACIÓN HOTELERA

CATEGORIA	CUARTOS OCUPADOS	TURISTAS NOCHE	PORCENTAJE DE OCUPACIÓN	ESTADÍA
1 Estrella	414	588	48.59%	1.2
2 Estrellas	555	942	27.53%	2.15
3 Estrellas	1,581	2,651	37.91%	2.68
4 Estrellas	2,532	4,126	37.51%	2.41
5 Estrellas	631	845	31.85%	1.82
TOTAL CATEGORIAS	5,713	9,152	36.22%	2.23

Fuente: Datatur – SECTUR

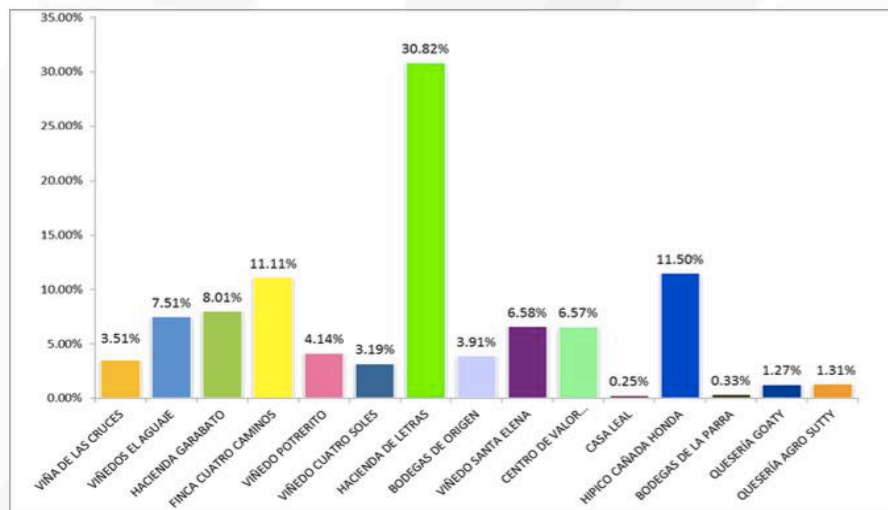
Muestra al 84.38%

SEDES MÁS VISITADAS



AFORO TOTAL 17,184

APORTACIÓN A LA DERRAMA TOTAL POR CADA SEDE



**DERRAMA TOTAL
\$16,795,582.57**