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MASTER THESIS

ANALYSIS AND PROPOSALS TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF THE TOURISM OFFER IN PRIORAT ENOTURISME

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ABSTRACT

The following Master Thesis presents an analysis of the current situation of the quality of the tourism offer in Priorat Enoturisme. The objective of this analysis is to identify the characteristics of the tourism offer in the companies of the association and present some proposals of improvement.

Priorat is a region very well-known internationally for its high-quality wines and this fact implies that tourists who decide to visit this destination motivated by the wine are also expecting a high-quality tourism experience. The quality of the wines and the quality of the tourism experience are two concepts directly related in wine destinations.

Priorat Enoturisme is an association that combine 51 companies, all of them are located in Priorat and they belong to 7 different economic activities: accommodations, restaurants, wineries, oil mills, travel agencies, wine shops and transport. Although this diversity makes more complicated to create common standards of quality, there are some initiatives that Priorat Enoturisme can carry out to improve the tourism offer of its companies. Communication, reservations, personnel and physical space are the four categories in which the results are exposed in this project. This allows to have a better understanding of the real situation of the tourism offer of the companies in Priorat Enoturisme.

Key words: Priorat Enoturisme, Quality tourism offer, Company, Association, Wine destination, Wine Tourism, Communication, Reservations, Personnel, Physical space.

List of abbreviations:

DOQ: Qualified Denomination of Origin

DO: Denomination of Origin

DOP: Protected Denomination of Origin

IDESCAT: Statistics Institute of Catalonia

1. INTRODUCTION

This Master Thesis is been developed during the months of February and June 2021 for Priorat Enoturisme, an association located in the region of Priorat, Spain. The main objective of the present project is to analyze the quality of the tourism offer in the companies that are part of the association and create some proposals of improvement.

The Priorat is a region located in the province of Tarragona, in the south of Catalonia. It is surrounded by mountains, Montsant mountains in the north and the Mola de Colldejou, Llavería and Santa Marina mountains in the south. Due to this rough orography, the vine cultivation is difficult and, as a consequence, the yields are low and the properties small (Prat Forga & Cànoves Valiente, 2014). The region has an extension of 498,6 km² which is divided into 23 municipalities and it has a total population of 9.133 people (<https://www.idescat.cat/>).

Priorat Enoturisme is a private association formed by different companies located in the region that belong to the tourism sector, even so, in some cases, tourism is not their main activity. There are 7 different categories of companies: accommodations, restaurants, wineries, oil mills, travel agencies, wine shops and a taxi. These sectors represent all the economic activities that a visitor needs to have a full tourism experience. This fact makes that a tourist can do everything he or she wants to do in the region consuming only in companies that are part of Priorat Enoturisme.

In this study it is analyzed the current state of the quality of the tourism offer in the different companies of Priorat Enoturisme from the visitors' viewpoint, with the aim of proposing some strategies of improvement. This analysis is divided into four different categories: communication, reservations, personnel and physical space. To get the results of the analysis in a fair way, it was necessary to make some differences depending on the economic sector: accommodation, restaurant, winery, oil mill and travel agency and taxi (the wine shops have not participated in this study).

1.1 PRIORAT ENOTURISME

Priorat Enoturisme is a private association located in the Priorat region, in the province of Tarragona, Spain. The association was created in 2013 and, in the present, it is formed by 51 companies divided into 7 different categories: 21 wineries, 11 restaurants, 16 accommodations, 4 oil mills, 3 travel agencies, 2 wine shops and 1 taxi. The sum of all these companies is more than 51, this is because there are some companies that belong

to more than one category; it is the case, for instance, of Clos Figueras, that belongs to 4 categories, it is a winery with an oil mill, a restaurant and an accommodation. All these companies represent the 33% of the tourism sector in Priorat.

Nowadays the president of the association is Roger Felip and there are 12 more people that are part of the management board (minimum one person per economic sector).

The association was created with the aim to boost the wine tourism in the region by creating synergies between them and making up a network to become a lobby. They created this network by making packs with some of the associated companies and they also make recommendations to the visitors to consume and visit other members of the association.

What makes Priorat Enoturisme unique is its people, its diversity of services and products and its respect for the environment. They bet for a sustainable tourism that respect the local community and the land (landscape, local products...) and try to enhance the economy of the region. Priorat is a region that has 2 Denominations of Origin for the wine (Priorat DOQ and Montsant DO) and one Denomination of Origin for the olive oil (Suirana DOP). This is part of the diversity of the region and, in Priorat Enoturisme, this big heterogeneity is well represented.

The association is also a tool to promote the different companies through social media channels and through the web site. In the present, there is an outsource company that is in charge of all the online promotional tasks for the association. This company is called PCatS Comunicació and it is specialized on wine and wine tourism. They manage the web page and the social media profiles (Instagram, Facebook and Twitter) of Priorat Enoturisme.

The members of the association use to say a very representative sentence for Priorat Enoturisme: unity is strength.

1.2 DUTIES AND ACTIVITIES DURING THE INTERNSHIP

During my internship I have done several tasks but, mainly, I have participated in the elaboration of a quality certification manual for the members of Priorat Enoturisme. From the beginning of my internship, I have been working with Vinka Woldarsky, who is currently PhD Candidate in Sustainable Tourism at the URV and who has finished the International Master on Wine Tourism Innovation (WINTOUR) in 2018.

To carry out this manual, firstly, we needed to identify the current tourism offer of the different members of the association. The best way to analyze this is to visit each company as a “mystery shopper” but, unfortunately, it was not possible due to the Covid-19 restrictions; many companies were not doing tourism, they were closed because the mobility between *comarcas* (Catalan’s counties) was forbidden. Then, we scheduled the visits and we started the analysis part. We could not visit all the companies but it was enough to have an overview of the situation, we could identify the main points that these companies can improve.

During our visits we had several conversations with the owners and the wine tourism responsible of the different companies and we realized that there is a lack of cooperation between the members of the association and this was being detrimental for the proper functioning of the association. This lack of cooperation was motivated partially because many companies do not feel themselves identified with the brand of Priorat Enoturisme, they are disconnected from the association. Other reason is because many companies prefer to collaborate with companies located nearby or in the same municipality rather than recommending to their visitors some companies from farther places in the region.

Due to these problems of cooperation between the members, Vinka and I were asked to carry out a parallel project in which we analyzed the current situation of the brand, taking advantage of the visits we have been doing.

For the development of these two projects, we did several visits to many members of the association and we also created an online survey for the companies to answer. There was a different survey depending on the type of company (accommodation, restaurant, winery, oil mill, travel agency, wine shop or taxi) and their objective was that companies could make a self-evaluation. There were questions about the communication, the booking system, the personnel, Covid-19 measures, requirements from the association and about Priorat Enoturisme brand.

With all the information we could gather from the visits, from a research of the web pages and social media profiles of all members and the surveys, we could elaborate a report about Priorat Enoturisme brand and the manual for the quality certification. With the first document (brand study) they want to use it to reconsider the brand strategies for the future and to try to motivate the companies to collaborate more and participate more actively in the association. The second document is more complex, they want to use it for three different applications:

1. Grade the quality of the tourism experience that companies offer,
2. Analyze new companies that want to join the association and decide if they have enough quality to enter
3. Access to the WebApp*.

*They are working in the creation of a WebApp together with the Eurecat (technological Center of Catalonia) in a project called *PECT TurisTIC en familia* (Territorial Specialization and Competitiveness Project) to boost the family tourism in the region.

As part of the internship, I also worked in the organization and development of 3 days of workshops for the members of Priorat Enoturisme. During those days Vinka and I formed the companies about the good practices to offer a good quality service to the tourists. We divided those sessions depending on the category; the first day was dedicated to restaurants, the second day to wineries and oil mills and the third one was for accommodations. As there are only 3 travel agencies, 2 wine shops and 1 taxi company, we decided not to make a specific session for each one, these 6 companies could join us any of those three days.

1.3 BASE FOR THE MASTER THESIS PROPOSAL

Priorat has been a wine producer region since the XII Century, when the Carthusian monks arrived to the region and established in what is nowadays the *Cartoixa de Escaladei*. When the phylloxera arrived to the French vineyards in the second half of XIX Century, Priorat started to live an economic growth, increasing also the population in the region (Margalef & Tasia, 1985). This prosperity ended with the arrival of the phylloxera plague to Priorat, it devastated all of the region's vineyard. This big crisis lasted for almost the whole XX Century and it caused a reduction of three quarters of the population (Margalef & Tasia, 1985).

In the 90's, the region experienced a big economic growth thank you to 4 people from outside the region who arrived to Priorat and joined forces to conduct their entrepreneurial project, the creation of wines aimed at well-informed segments of the market that were willing to pay high prices in exchange for a unique product (Fernández Aldecua, Vaillant , Lafuente, & Moreno Gómez, 2017). They exported Priorat wines to many countries and this fact made the name of Priorat very internationally known for its wines.

Nowadays, the region of Priorat includes two different Wine Denominations of Origin: Priorat DOQ and Montsant DO. Priorat DO was created in 1954 and, in the year 2000, it became a DOQ, this means that it upgraded to Qualified Denomination of Origin due to the high-quality of its wines (<https://www.dogpriorat.org/>). There are only two wine regions in Spain with this high qualification: Rioja and Priorat. Montsant DO was created much later, in 2001, to give recognition to the wines from the rest of the region that did not belong to Priorat DOQ. As it shows the map (figure 1), Priorat DOQ is located in the middle of the region whereas Montsant DO corresponds to the surroundings.

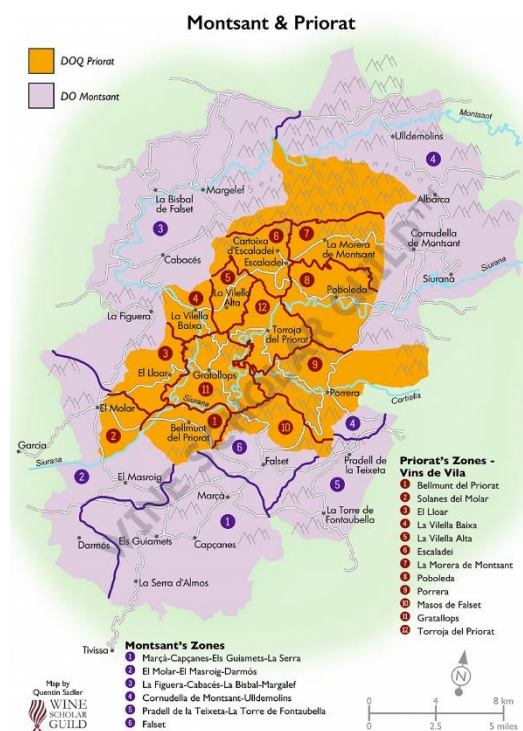


Figure 1. Map of Priorat and its two different Denominations of Origin. Source: <https://www.winescholarguild.org/resources/wine-maps/spanish-wine-maps/priorat-montsant-wine-map>

Priorat DOQ is characterized by its *licorella* soils (Catalan word to say slate), this is the main characteristic that makes Priorat wines different from Montsant ones. Slate soils have very low yield, less than 1kg per plant (<https://www.dogpriorat.org/>), and this difficulty that the plants have to grow is what gives the typicity and singularity to Priorat wines (Nadal & Sánchez-Ortiz, 2011). This inside part of the region is also characterized by the singular landscape, vineyards planted in slopes making, in some cases, the viticulture very difficult (especially in the old vines planted without terraces).

Montsant DO has a bigger soil diversity, it has limestone, granite and also some slate (Nadal & Sánchez-Ortiz, 2011) and the yield is higher than in Priorat DOQ. The landscape is also more divers, it has mountain ranges as Monstsant and Llaberia, but the vineyards are mainly planted in flatter land.

Even though Priorat is mainly famous for its wines, it has many other attractions that, in many cases, surprise tourists who visit the region for the first time. A very important strength is the landscape, plenty of vineyards planted in slopes, olive fields and the characteristic mountains of Montsant Natural Park. Local people are conscious of the high value that the landscape in Priorat has and they created in 2007 an association called PRIORITAT. This association works for the protection of the landscape and, currently, there is a project with the objective of getting the recognition by the UNESCO as “cultural landscape”, which reflects the interaction between humans and nature throughout the history (<https://prioritat.org/>). It is possible that this candidature has more options to become a protected landscape by the UNESCO than other Spanish regions (e.g., Rioja or Ribera Sacra) because Priorat has added the value of agricultural landscape in the Mediterranean mountains (Martínez Arnáiz, Baraja Rodríguez, & Molinero Hernando, 2019). According to Martínez Arnáiz et al. (2019), the fact of having added this element of agricultural landscape has the intention to give the candidature more arguments and strength to be chosen in a difficult and restrictive moment to be recognized as World Heritage of vineyard landscape (subcategory of cultural landscape).

As it was mention before, the Priorat region is internationally known for its high-quality wines; that is why the people who decide to visit the region and enjoy the wine tourism in this destination are expecting, at least, the same level of quality in the tourism experience as in the wines. The perceived image pre-trip of the visitors is a high-quality experience and this makes more difficult to satisfy customers due to these high expectations. According to Ye, Wu and Zheng (2019), expectation is an antecedent to tourism satisfaction and can directly/indirectly affect tourism satisfaction. Authors like Castillo and Jimber del Río (2019) affirm that the measure of the quality of tourism products or services from customer's viewpoints is very important for tourism place management. These authors also say that the tourism management boards have to know if satisfaction levels decrease and if so, they should identify what causes this drop and which are the consequences.

On the other hand, Priorat Enoturisme is an association formed by different tourism companies and all of them are under a common brand which is Priorat Enoturisme. This means that all the individual companies and the common brand are always related, it exists a bidirectional relationship between them (García, Gómez, & Molina, 2013), in other words, everything that companies do affect to Priorat Enoturisme brand and all that the association does also affect every individual company.

2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

For the development of this Master Thesis, they have been needed several research methods to get to know the current situation of the quality of the tourism offer in the different companies of Priorat Enoturisme. In this study they have been analyzed 24 companies.

Although this research is part of a bigger project developed for Priorat Enoturisme to create the quality certification manual (the project I have worked in during my internship), for this Master Thesis they have been selected some specific points related with the quality of the tourism offer.

The methodology to carry out this study is divided into three main parts:

- Online communication research: in this part they were analyzed the web pages of all the companies that take part on this study and the online reviews that they receive in platforms like TripAdvisor or Google Reviews.

In the web pages they have been examined points like the contact details they have, the information about the tourism products they offer, the different options they have to book the experience, how visually attractive the website is or how easy to navigate is.

In the online reviews platforms what has been evaluated is if they answer to the reviews (positive or negative), how often they do it and what they write in those answers.

The aim of this research on the web pages and the online reviews is to have an overview of how the companies of Priorat Enoturisme do the online communication.

- Visits to the different establishments: this part of the research consisted of visiting physically the places where the companies are located, it helps to have a better understanding of the situation and characteristics of each company. In those visits they were analyzed aspects like the arrival, the parking, the accessibility or how prepared is the place to receive visitors. In these visits it was also possible to have informal interviews with the owners or the wine tourism responsables in which they could explain how their tourism offer is, what kind of clients they usually have or which opinion they have about Priorat Enoturisme.
- Self-evaluation survey: it was created an online survey in which the companies had to answer some questions regarding their tourism offer. They were created different surveys for the different economic categories: accommodations, restaurants, wineries, oil mills, travel agencies, wine shops and taxi. This division

was made because there were some questions that were specific for each sector and it did not make much sense that other companies had to answer them.

All surveys (regardless of the category to which they belong) were formed by 6 different sections: communication, reservations, Priorat Enoturisme requirements, personnel, Covid-19 measures and Priorat Enotursime brand. For the elaboration of this Master Thesis, it has been made a selection of some questions of these surveys to be able to focus the results in what is more useful for the present project. The selected questions from these surveys belong to the following sections: communication, reservations and personnel.

The surveys contain three different types of questions: multiple choice (single-answer and multiple-answer), matrix questions and open questions. This variety facilitates to get the maximum information from every question allowing the person who is answering to express him/herself in the best way.

During the process of getting all the information needed to make a complete and impartial analysis they were found some contradictions between what companies answered on the survey and what they said or it was seen during the visits or in their web pages. This is why, while transcribing the results, it was needed to analyze each individual case in every question, to be able to get the most objective information.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 RESULTS

This chapter shows the results of the analysis done of companies that are part of Priorat Enoturisme. It is a summary of the most important aspects that define a high-quality tourism offer in a wine destination like Priorat.

This study is based on 24 companies: 3 travel agencies, 7 accommodations, 11 wineries, 3 oil mills, 4 restaurants and 1 taxi. The sum of all these numbers is 29, but they represent 24 companies in total; this is because there are companies that belong to more than one category. One example is Mas Trucafort, this company is a restaurant that has a few rooms to host visitors.

These companies are: Travel Priorat, El Brogit, Siurana Tours, Mas Figueres, Baronía, Mas Trucafort, Clos Figueras, Cal Salut, Mas del Salin, Mas Ardèvol, Priorat B&D Lab, Sangenís i Vaqué, Vinícola del Priorat, Celler Devinssi, Perinet, Clos Pachem, Cellers de Scala Dei, Celler Dosterras, Celler Masroig, Conrería d'Scala Dei, Priordei, El Cairat, Quinoa and Taxi Ferran.

Even though during the internship a bigger number of companies were visited (27 in total) and also more enterprises answered the self-evaluation survey (37), it has been decided to focus this study on the companies that have participated in both analysis: the visits and the self-evaluation survey.

The results of the present study are divided into 4 different sections: communication, reservations, personnel and physical space.

3.1.1 COMMUNICATION

a. Online communication

This section starts with a basic aspect that every company should accomplish nowadays: the web page. Almost every company has a web page, there is only one that does not have it (a restaurant). This is only a fact about if they have or do not have a web page, it does not mean that the web page is well maintained, visually attractive or it has all the information needed. Some of these aspects will be developed below.

The second aspect analyzed is the languages in which the web pages are available. All the web pages of the companies analyzed are in Catalan and Spanish but 22% do not have the information on their site in English, 6 out of 23

companies. Other languages found on the sites were: French (2 companies), Russian, German and Chinese (one company each language).

It was also analyzed the contact details on the web page, which kind of contact information can potential visitors get. All the companies with web page have a phone number available, 91% have the email address, 85% have the physical address* and only 61% have the opening times.

*The percentage of companies that have the physical address on their web pages was calculated on a total of 19 enterprises because the travel agencies and the taxi do not have a physical establishment.

The next point is about the information that can be found on their web pages about the tourism product they offer. This part is based on 15 companies: travel agencies, wineries and oil mills; the rest of companies (accommodations, restaurants and the taxi) were not considered for this question because their product does not include any activity. The results (see Figure 2) show that 80% of the companies have information about the type of activities they offer and the prices they cost. 73% of them specify what is included in the price of those experiences. Less than 70% indicate the language in which the visits and the activities are available and a 53% inform about the maximum number of people that can participate in an activity, if it is a private visit or with other unknown people.

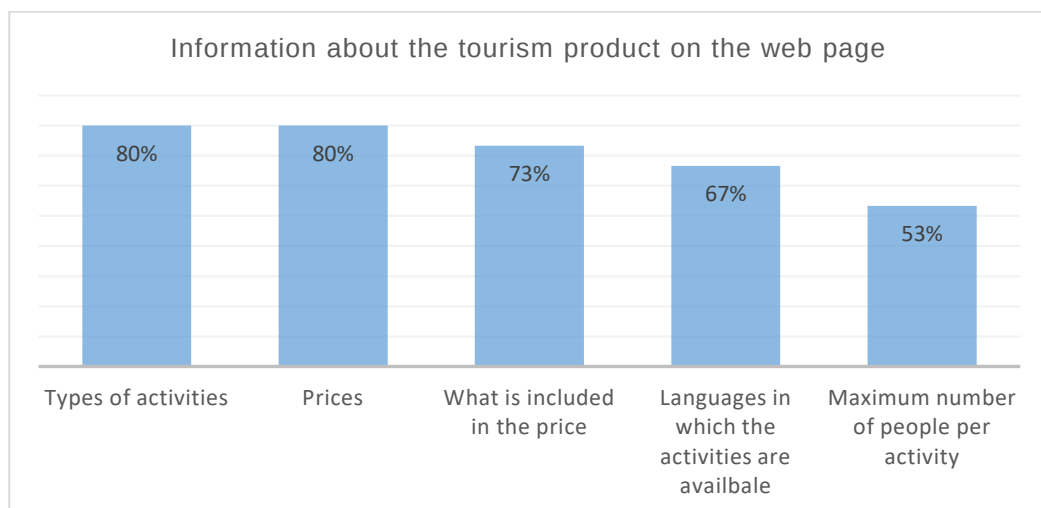


Figure 2. Information about the tourism offer on the web page. Source: own elaboration.

Another important aspect is the accessibility, the information that companies have available on their web pages about if the infrastructures are adapted to people with reduced mobility or if the visits are adapted to blind or deaf people, for

instance. There are only 3 companies that have this information on their web page, which represents 13% of the total.

This question was not thought to analyze if companies have their tourism product adapted to disable people; it only evaluates if they have information on their web pages about the accessibility, if their visits and experiences are adapted to these visitors or they are not.

The last aspect analyzed about the online communication is about the online reviews in platforms like TripAdvisor or Google Reviews, for example. The next figure (number 3), shows how often companies answer the online reviews. 61% answer “always” or “often” these visitors’ opinions, 26% do so “sometimes”, 9% “rarely” and the rest 4% “never” answer them. The ones who have answered “never” or “rarely” were asked why they do not respond to these online reviews; the most common answers were because they do not have time for that (they said they lose time answering those comments) or because they think it is not useful at all.

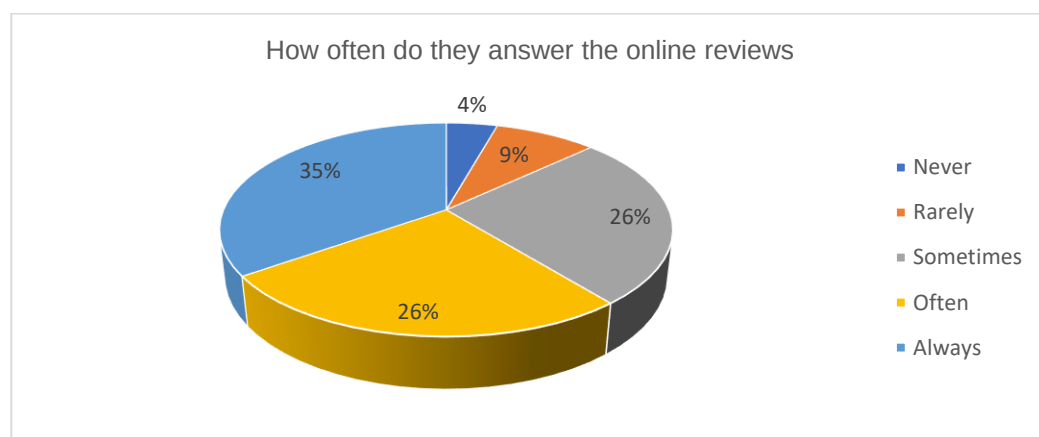


Figure 3. How often they answer the online reviews. Source: own elaboration.

b. Offline communication

The last two points are not related with the web page, here it is analyzed how often they answer the phone or the email during their working hours. 88% of the companies have answered that they “always” answer the phone and the rest 12% answered “often”. None of them has responded that they “never”, “rarely” or “sometimes” answer the phone during the working time.

The other question was about when they answer the emails to potential visitors. 75% of them responded that they answer the emails the same day they have received them, 12% the next day and 13% in a maximum period of 2 days.

3.1.2 RESERVATIONS

This section analyzes the process visitors can do to make a reservation of a tourism experience.

First of all, it is important to know which are the channels available to make these reservations. As it is shown in the Figure 4, 96% of the companies make reservations from phone calls or emails. 79% accept a reservation from people who contact through their social media profiles*, 58% receive walk-ins (people who does not have a reservation and go directly to the place to try to book the service) and only 38% have their own booking system on their web page. 54% use other online platforms like Booking.com, Winetourims.com, Expedia.com, Escapadarural.com among others.

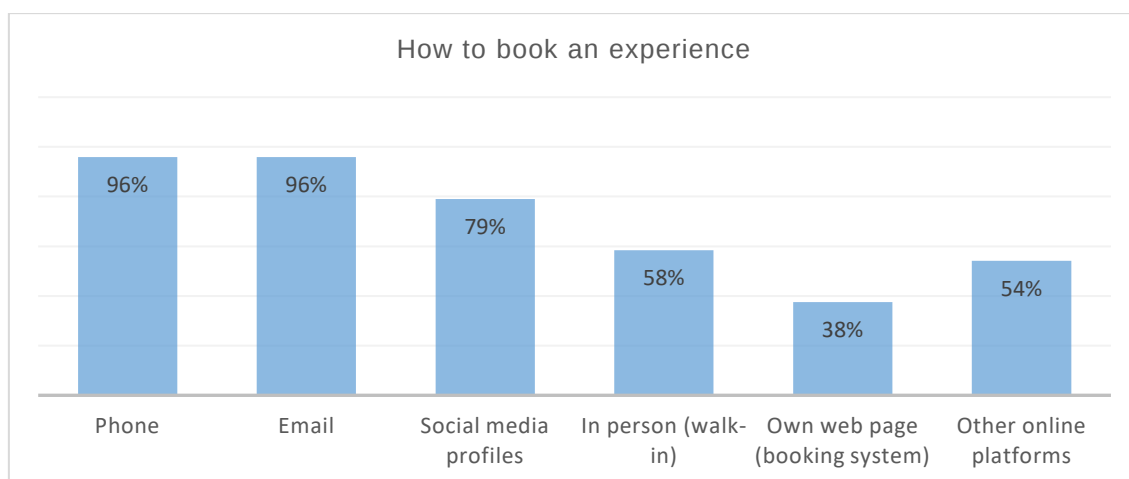


Figure 4. How to book a tourism experience/product. Source: own elaboration.

*The question about the possibility of making a reservation through social media pages does not include accommodation companies. The reservation of a night in an accommodation is more complex than just booking a meal in a restaurant or an activity in a winery.

The second question is about the confirmation email or message that companies send to their clients to confirm the reservation. The results of this question have been calculated out of 21 companies; the restaurants were not asked about this because their reservations are, normally, more immediate, for the same day or one or two days in advance and there is no need to send an email of confirmation.

As it is shown in Figure 5, the information they send the most (68%) in those confirmations emails is time in which the activity is going to take place or the check-in and check-out times. 64% include the contact details, 59% the prices, 50% send

information about how to get there or the address and information about the parking. Less than the half, 45%, inform about what exactly is included in the price clients are paying.

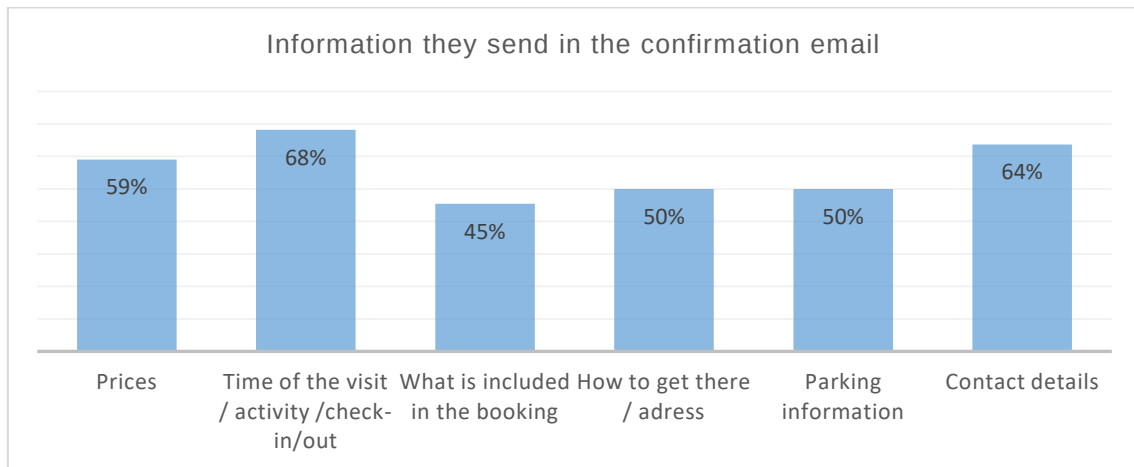


Figure 5. Information sent in the confirmation email/message. Source: own elaboration.

3.1.3 PERSONNEL

This third section is about the staff of the companies, the workers who have direct contact with the visitors.

The firsts aspects analyzed are the languages they speak and their level of English, as it is the most important foreign language for working in tourism nowadays. All of them can speak perfect Catalan and Spanish but, related to foreign languages, the most spoken ones are English (75%) and French (54%) (see Figure 6). 13% of the companies have someone in their staff who speaks Russian and German, 8% Italian and 4% Portuguese, Chinese and Hebrew.

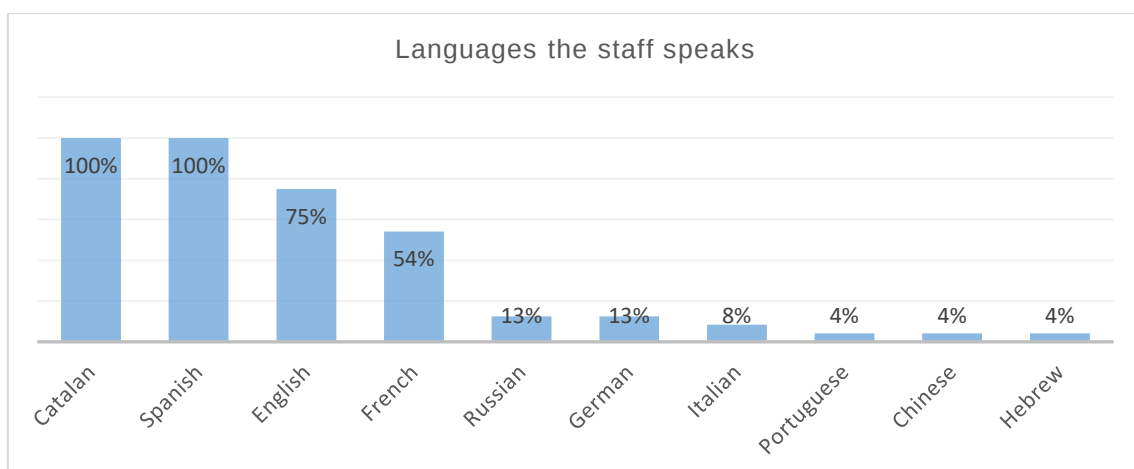


Figure 6. Languages the staff speaks. Source: own elaboration.

Even though the 75% of the companies answered that their staff speaks English, it is important to mention that the level of English of the 42% of the personnel who has direct contact with visitors is medium, low or almost none. On the other side, 21% has a high level and 37% very high level. See Figure 7.

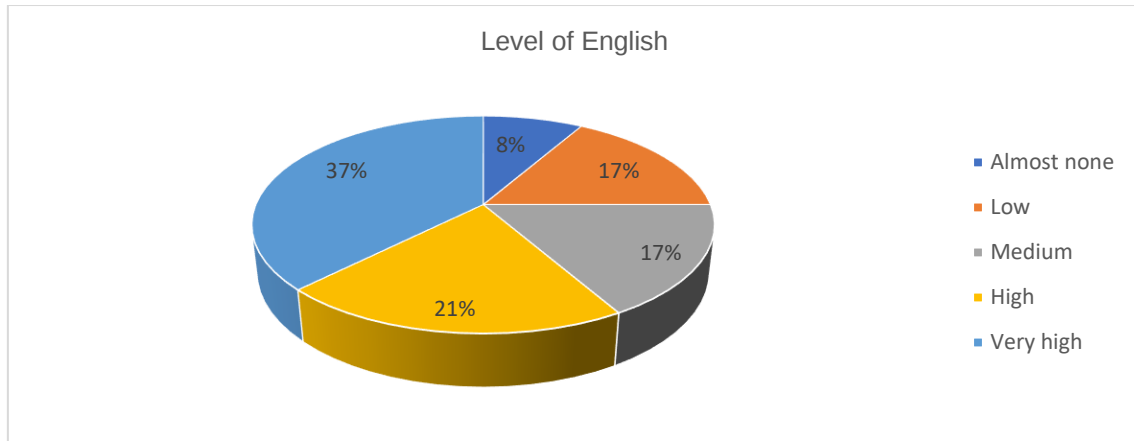


Figure 7 Level of English of the staff. Source: own elaboration.

The next question is about the corporate image companies have, if they wear some kind of uniform or something that indicates that they are working in the business (an apron for restaurants, a badge with the worker's name and the company's logo...). Only 6 companies answered that they have some kind of uniform or something that identifies them as workers, it represents a 25% of the total.

When analyzing the attributes and competences that a wine tourism worker should have, it is very important to have knowledge about the region where the company is located. This knowledge allows the workers to give good recommendations to the visitors about other activities or places to go nearby and give information about important facts of the destination. This point is even more important for companies that belong to an association like Priorat Enoturisme, that represents somehow a wine destination.

The results show that 87% of the companies have staff with a "very high" or "high" level of knowledge about other products and experiences in Priorat and only a 13% has "medium" level (see Figure 8).

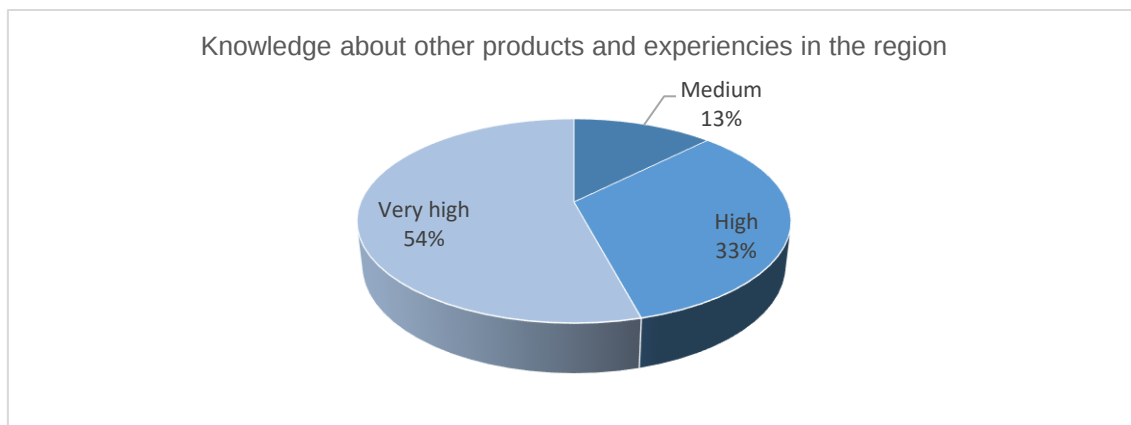


Figure 8. Knowledge about other products and experiences in the region. Source: own elaboration.

The next Figure (number 9) shows the knowledge that workers have about the culture and history of the region. 83% answered that their workers have a “very high” or “high” level of knowledge about the history and culture of the destination. The rest 13% has “medium” level.

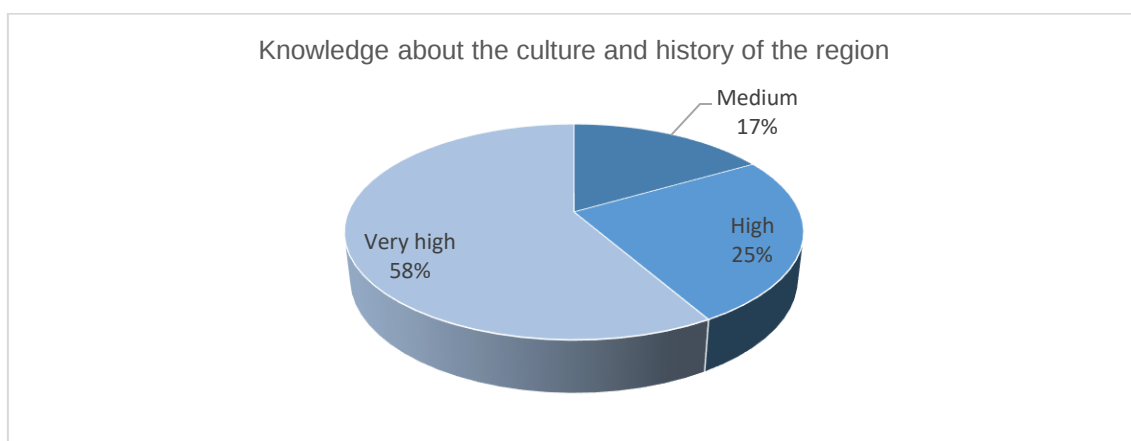


Figure 9. Knowledge about the culture and history of the region. Source: own elaboration.

The last important aspect to analyze in this section is the capacity that workers have to adapt their explanations about wine and oil (production information or tasting notes) to the customer’s level. This capacity allows the staff to explain this technical information in a simple way to visitors who are having their first tasting in their lives and in a more complex and detailed way to people who has experience in those subjects.

The answers show that 67% “always” adapt the speech to the visitor’s knowledge, 28% do so “often” and the rest 5% “rarely” (see Figure 10).

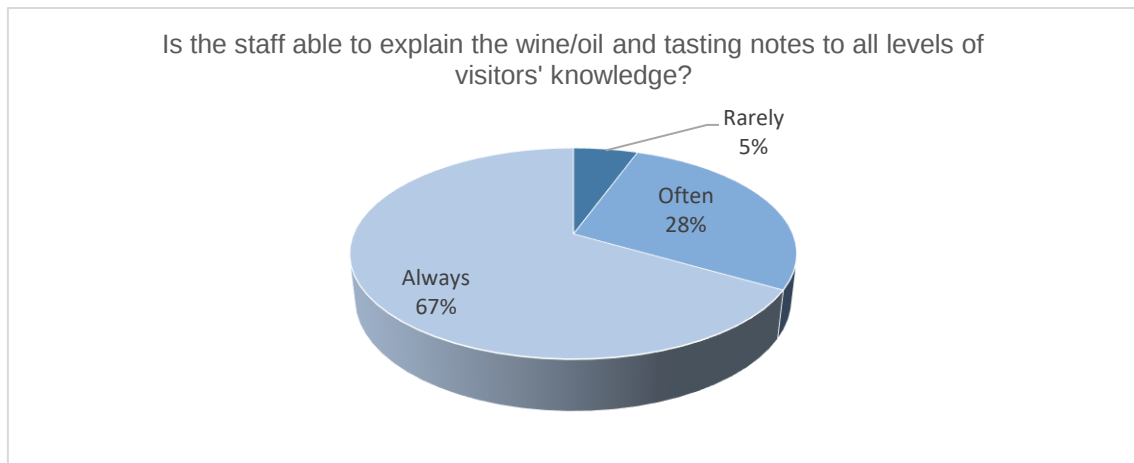


Figure 10. Ability of workers to adapt their speech to visitor's knowledge. Source: own elaboration.

3.1.4 PHYSICAL SPACE

In this last unit of the results of this study, it is analyzed the physical space, how adapted it is to offer a pleasant experience to the visitors. This part only includes 20 companies: wineries, oil mills, accommodations and restaurants. The travel agencies and the taxi are not included because they do not have a physical place.

Firstly, it is important to check the arrival, how easy it is to get to the different companies. The results have shown that only 2 companies, 10%, do not have the exact address in Google Maps.

The signposting is another important point to rate the arrival and 40% of the companies do not have a good signposting (see Figure 11).

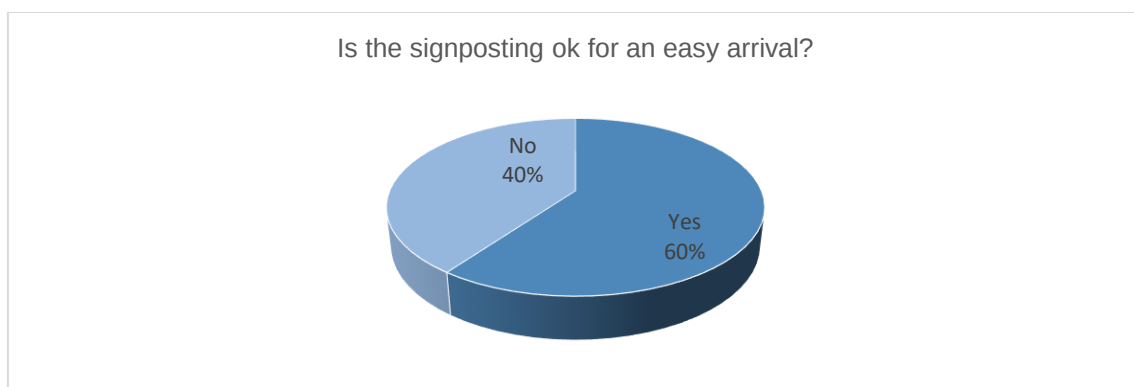


Figure 11. Is the signposting ok for an easy arrival? Source: own elaboration.

The analysis about the parking shows that 90% of the parkings that companies offer (located in the property or the closest ones) are well maintained and they have enough capacity considering the number of visitors that they normally receive.

Other important points about the physical space are the characteristics of the indoor, how adapted their infrastructures are to receive visitors and the basic services that they should provide for a high-quality wine tourism offer.

The 100% of the companies of this study (except travel agencies and taxi) have affirmed that they accomplish the following items:

- The corridors are wide enough to facilitate visitors' transit.
- The floor is clean and safe; especially for wineries and oil mills, it is normal that the floor is wet due to the production work of wine and olive oil but it does not mean that it is dirty or unsafe.
- All spaces and surfaces are clean.
- The lighting is ok in all spaces.
- They have the correct glasses for tastings.

All the companies have also affirmed that they have free WiFi for their visitors.

In the case of wineries and oil mills (12 companies in total), they have been asked about the material they have for the tastings. All of them have spittoons and napkins available to visitors but only 67% of them have water without having to ask for it (see Figure 12).

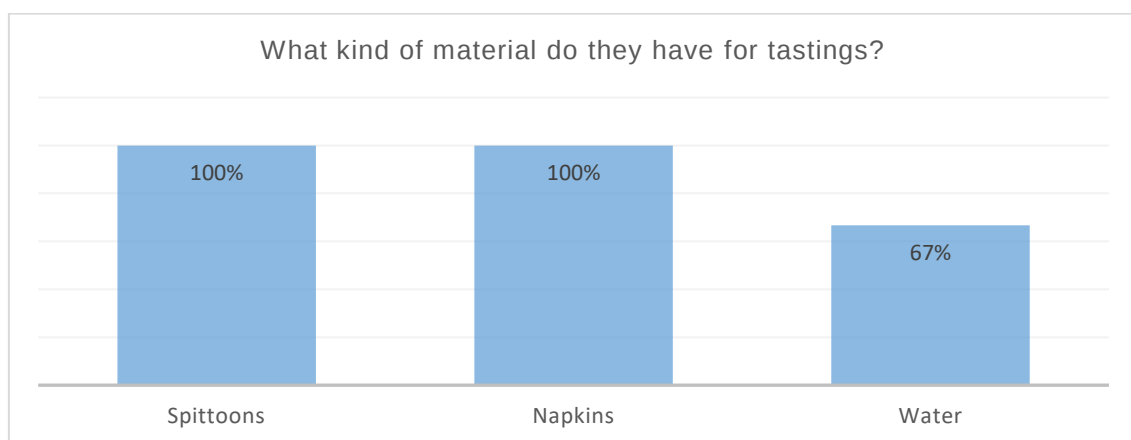


Figure 12. Material they have for tastings. Source: own elaboration.

For tastings it is also important to analyze the comfort that visitors can have during tastings, there are 2 companies (17%) that do not have seats for their visitors to sit during the tasting (see Figure 13).

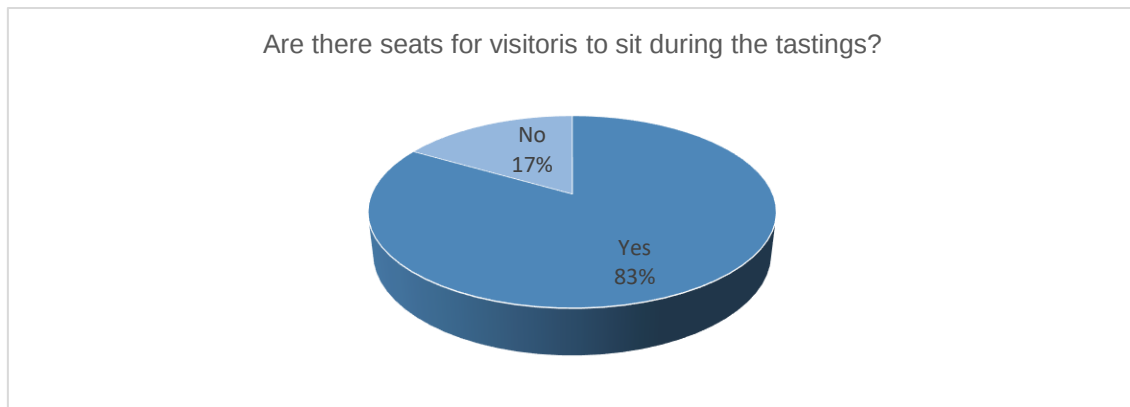


Figure 13. Are there seats for visitors to sit during the tastings? Source: own elaboration.

3.2 DISCUSSION

This section tries to identify the most common weaknesses that the analyzed companies have in which they should work more on to improve the quality of the tourism offer. To make a more detailed analysis, it is divided into 4 different points: communication, reservations, personnel and physical space.

3.2.1 COMMUNICATION

Nowadays the technology is part of our lives, we use it for almost everything and tourism is not an exception. When people plan a trip, they access to the information needed (where to go, what to do, where to sleep, where to eat...) through internet. The web page plays a very important role for the communication, normally it is the first contact that visitors have with the companies; they create part of their first impression about the business as a result of their website. That is why companies should have a web page and it should be visually attractive, easy to navigate and it should have all the information that potential visitors could need.

On the one hand, the results are positive because, out of the 24 companies of Priorat Enoturisme that have participated in this study, there is only one that does not have a web page. It is a good result because it means that a large majority of the companies are conscious of the relevance of this aspect. But on the other hand, almost the half of them do not care so much about the maintenance of it. There are many websites that are not visually very attractive, that have information out-of-date or are difficult to navigate through. This is especially negative not only because they are not taking advantage of this important communication tool that is the website, but also because they are creating a negative image on the customers' mind.

Moreover, when we talk about tourism, in a region internationally known as Priorat, it is crucial to have the web page available in different languages. It is good that many of them have their website in English (which is the most important foreign language) but it is not as positive that there are very few web pages in other languages as French, Russian or German, for example.

The web page is a communication tool, this means that it has a utility to communicate information and this information has to be the exact data that customers need and companies want to transmit to them.

Visitors need to get easily the contact details like phone number, email address, the physical address or the opening times to know when they can contact with the company. The results of the study are quite positive because a great majority of the companies have these contact details on their web page; except the opening times, that only 61% have them.

Other important information that should be detailed on the web page is the tourism product they offer. This data facilitates that potential customers get to know all the details they need to plan their trip. It is positive that the majority of the companies analyzed in this study have information about the type of activities they offer, how much they cost, what is included in the price and the languages in which the activities are available. Only 53% of them inform about the maximum number of people that can participate in an activity or if it is a private visit or with other people that they do not know. This aspect is especially important nowadays with the pandemic situation; visitors prefer not to have much contact with strangers and they might plan their trip depending on if they can have private visits or not. In contrast with the previous points, the results about the information of the accessibility were not very positive. A great majority does not have this fact available on the website, potential visitors need to call or send an email to ask about it. This can make people to visit other places or consume in other companies where they can know easily that disabled people can go without any problem.

Online communication is not only the website, which is a unidirectional communication, it is only the company who provides information in the way they want. Online communication includes other online pages like social media or reviews platforms, where people can interact with the company and with other visitors or clients. These new tools give enterprises the opportunity to hold conversations with their clients and to thank them

their confidence to have chosen their company to spend their time and money. The results about how often they answer the online reviews in pages like TripAdvisor or Google Reviews, show that many companies do not care so much about these online comments because almost a 40% do not answer often those comments from the clients (negative and positive). They think that they lose their time answering online reviews and they do not want to answer them because they think the majority of the clients who write those comments just want to damage the company image and it is not worth it to spend their time on them. They should change their mind and start to see these online tools as an opportunity to improve the company's reputation.

To avoid that the potential clients get frustrated when they are planning their trips, it is very important to always answer the phone and the email. If they have to call more than once to get to speak with someone or if they have to wait more than one day to get an answer from an email, they can give up the contact and decide to visit or consume in other companies. It is positive that no one in the study has said that they do not usually answer the phone and a great majority (87%) answer the emails the same day they received it or, maximum, the day after.

3.2.2 RESERVATIONS

Analyzing the results of the study about the reservations, it is clear that the most common ways to make a reservation in the companies that have participated in this project are by phone or email. These tools to book a tourism service are useful and necessary but both of them require an active answer from the company. Only 38% of them have a booking system on their own web. Nowadays the more and more people demand those kind of booking systems because it allows them to book any service at any time in the day (there is no need to make the reservation during the working times) and it shows availability at real time. It is a faster way of booking because there is no need of interaction with a real person.

Once the reservation is confirmed it is needed a good communication from the company to the clients, it is necessary to give them all the information they need to know about the company and the experience beforehand. It is very important to send the correct information in those confirmation emails or messages. The results have showed that not many companies are conscious about the importance of sending the right information. The most common content these emails have is the starting time of the activity/visit and the time for check-in in accommodations and the contact details in case they have any

unexpected event. Half of the companies have not thought about the importance of giving parking details or how to get there, even though this information is crucial because the majority of the tourists are visiting them for the first time, they do not know the place and they can get lost or frustrated because they do not know where to park the car. Other aspect that more than the half did not consider is to specify what exactly is included in the price they are paying (type of activity, tasting, type of room in an accommodation...). This information can avoid future misunderstandings with visitors because they know what to expect from the experience and they will not be disappointed.

3.2.3 PERSONNEL

Workers are the most important part of a company but in the service companies they are even more important. Tourism is a product that is consumed while it is produced; it means that a great part of the tourism product depends on the performance that employees make being in direct contact with the clients. They have to be professionals well-formed for welcoming visitors from all over the world and be able to adapt their product to the people and the circumstances.

The results of this study have shown that there is a lack of knowledge of foreign languages, every company should have workers who speak perfect English as it is the most important foreign language. The percentage of companies that speak English is only 74% and French 54%. Priorat is a region internationally known, it receives visitors from all over the world and to be able to offer a high-quality tourism experience it is mandatory to speak, at least, fluent English.

Even though, 74% of the companies affirmed that their workers speak English, the level they have is not great. Only a 58% of the companies have employees who really have a high level of English, which means that the rest of the workers cannot have a proper and fluent conversation in English, they only know the basics and this is not enough to offer a high-quality experience. When visitors are expecting a high-quality experience, they can, easily, get disappointed when they find out that they cannot even hold a proper conversation with employees, the tourism experience lacks a very important part, which is interaction with locals.

The corporate image is also something important to analyze. Wear a uniform or some detail that identifies a person as a worker is important, it gives an image of professionalism. In Priorat Enoturisme they need to work on that because only one fourth of the companies accomplish this point.

The results about the workers' knowledge of other products and experiences in the region and about the culture and history of the territory were very positive. The great majority of them has a "high" or "very high" level of knowledge of these aspects. This makes employees able to give good recommendations to the visitors about what they can do in Priorat and teach them about some interesting facts of the region.

In the case of workers of wineries, oil mills and restaurants, it is very important that employees adapt their speech or their explanations about their product to the clients they have in each moment. For instance, it is not the same explanation that a wine lover is expecting when he or she visits a winery than a person who has never participated in a wine tasting or who has never visited a winery before. Their knowledge is very different and they need adapted explanations to their level. It is not interesting for visitors when they are listening the same explanation (wine making process, for example) for the tenth time or when the explanations are that too difficult for them to understand, they can feel unintelligent and the whole tourism experience will be affected in a negative way.

3.2.4 PHYSICAL SPACE

When a company decides to do tourism, they need to be conscious about what this activity implies. Normally, they need to make an adaptation of the space and it is directly related with a monetary investment; especially wineries and oil mills because tourism is not their main economic activity, their priority is to produce wine and olive oil. Many companies do not have this invest capacity and they decide to boost other strengths they have outdoors as, for example, the vineyards or the olive fields, in which they take advantage of the Priorat landscape. This option is completely right but it is always better to have a proper indoor infrastructure to receive visitors because outdoor activities cannot be carried out during the whole year due to the weather conditions and they need to have other options for rainy or cold days.

The first aspect analyzed in this section is the arrival. Nowadays a lot of people use Google Maps to go to everywhere, so it is crucial that the address is ok on this online platform. The results were positive because only 2 companies do not accomplish this point. To have an easy arrival it is also very important to have a good signposting to guide visitors until the entrance, this assures them that they are going in the right way, especially when the arrival is trough rural roads. This question had less positive result, only 60% of the total have a good signposting for an easy arrival. They need to improve this point because if visitors get lost while they try to arrive to a winery, oil mill, accommodation, restaurant or to a shop, they can be frustrated and stressed because

they got lost in an unknown place and this is never pleasant and this aspect will negatively affect the satisfaction of the whole experience.

In mountain destinations like Priorat where the majority of the visitors use the car to move around, it is basic to have a proper parking or, in case the property is not big enough to have one, it is very important to be sure that there is a good parking nearby. In this case, the companies that are part of this study achieve this point because all of them have a parking well maintained and with enough capacity (taking into account the number of visitors they use to receive).

Furthermore, a very positive point is that all the companies have their indoor well adapted to receive visitors. The corridors are wide enough to avoid crowded spaces, the floors are clean and safe, all surfaces are clean and the lighting is ok; however not all spaces are beautiful and cozy. In a winery or an oil mill it is normal that the production area is cold and not very beautiful because its main objective is to be practical to work in; but the tasting room (where visitors usually spend the majority of the time) needs to be cozy, well decorated and in a good temperature. This is a common weakness that happens mainly in small companies.

Also, all of them have Wi-Fi available for visitors. This aspect is very important especially for foreign tourists and for places where there is no coverage, it allows people to have internet connection and, if they want, to share photos or videos in social media at real time. The result was very positive, however more than the half of the companies have password and it is not in sight, visitors need to ask for it and this can make them feel that they are annoying the employees if they ask for it. It should be open Wi-Fi or have an easy password and put it in a place where visitors can easily see it.

To be able to offer good tastings it is necessary to have a minimum material as proper glasses, spittoons, napkins and water. Companies always have these items for tastings, except the water. There are some companies that only offer water if the clients ask for it; it is important to emphasize that this is not correct because some people can feel intimidated to ask for water, it has not to be seen as something bad, especially in the wine tastings where they are drinking an alcoholic beverage and they do not want to get drunk or if they cannot drink for any reason.

The last point analyzed in this section is if the tasting rooms have seats to sit and the majority of them (83%) answered that they have seats. This is very important because a visit in a winery or in an oil mill lasts, minimum, one hour, and during that time visitors are stand up the whole time. The tasting at the end of the visit should be a place where visitors can relax and enjoy the wine or the olive oil.

3.3 PROPOSALS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE QUALITY OF THE TOURISM OFFER IN PRIORAT ENOTURISME

This section tries to define the best proposals to improve the quality of the tourism offer in the companies of Priorat Enoturisme.

Priorat Enoturisme is an association formed by very different kind of companies of all sizes and with very different economic activities. This diversity makes very difficult to fix some quality standards for the tourism offer, each company has its own strengths and its own characteristics.

The results of the points analyzed in this project show that there are some points in which the companies should definitely work more on to improve their image and their tourism offer. Some of these points are the lack of answers by the companies of the online reviews, the corporate image with uniforms (or something that identify them as part of the company), the need of having an online booking system in their web pages, the information inside the confirmation emails, the open WiFi (or with the password in sight), the importance of having a welcoming tasting room or the availability of water during the tastings. All these aspects will upgrade the quality of the tourism products that the establishments of Priorat Enoturisme have, however there are some initiatives that the association could carry out to help to this improvement of the tourism offer and, therefore, the tourism experience.

Bellow they are exposed the different proposals for Priorat Enoturisme to improve the quality of the tourism offer of its companies:

1. Share knowledge between the different members of the association.

During this study it was found out that there are some companies that have higher quality offer than others, this is, in general, directly related with the monetary resources that each company has. For this reason, Priorat Enoturisme can organize some meetings or open doors day in which every company can participate and share their knowledge about wine tourism. It can happen four or five times per year and every time will be a different company who organize the open doors day. The utility of these open-doors days for the members of the association are varied:

- Companies can get some ideas from what others do. The aim of this is not to copy other's products, it is more about identifying which good things others do and see how they can adapt some ideas to their own business.

- These events let workers to know better what other companies offer, they will be able to see it in first-hand. This will help workers and owners to make better recommendations to their customers.
- These events will allow workers to have more contact with other workers from other companies, they will see each other more frequently. This is always positive because, being part of the same association, they should be in permanent contact between them.
- During these open-doors days companies will be able to create more synergies with other members of the association. This will facilitate the collaboration and cooperation between them and it will boost the activity of the association.

2. Online communication courses.

Many companies in the association are family-run businesses, they are very small and they have very few workers (in some cases the owner or owners are the only people working in the business). During the visits to the different establishments, some owners have expressed the need to get some professional training about online communication, especially in those companies in which the owners are old.

Priorat Enoturisme could offer its companies the possibility of offering some course to improve their online communication. These courses could be online or presential, but their aim is to teach workers and owners how to manage the web pages, the importance of having a good and attractive online image nowadays and some basics about online positioning (SEO and SEM). In these courses they could also be taught about social media pages and how to manage them.

3. Languages courses (mainly English).

One of the main weaknesses found in this study is the lack of languages. Although 75% of the companies have answered that their workers speak English, only a little more than a half (58%) have affirmed that they have a good level of this language. Having in mind that Priorat is an internationally known region that receives tourists from all over the world and English is the most important foreign language, it is basic that workers who have direct contact with visitors speak fluent English and are able to have a proper conversation.

From the visitors' point of view, it is very disappointing and frustrating to try to have a conversation with the person who is looking after you during a tourism

experience, to learn more about the company and the region but he or she does not speak proper English.

This is why, Priorat Enoturisme could offer some language courses to its members, this will help to improve the quality of the experience offered. These courses should be for all levels, so it allows to workers who already have a good level of English to improve it if they want to. This could also work for other languages like French, it is the second most important foreign language and France is the first foreign nationality that visit Priorat.

4. Signposting provided by Priorat Enoturisme.

Priorat is a mountain region in which roads are not easy to drive on and many places do not have coverage. These characteristics make more difficult the arrival to some places, especially those that are not in villages and the arrival is through rural roads. Nowadays almost everyone uses Google Maps to get to places, but this tool is not useful anymore in the cases where there is no coverage or for people who come from outside Europe and cannot use internet. That is why it is very important to have a good signposting and Priorat Enoturisme could provide it.

The association could supply all its members with good signposting in which appears the name of the company and the logo of Priorat Enoturisme, all signposts should have the same design. This is an initiative that will help the visitors' arrival and the creation of a corporate image of the association. Thank you to these signposting visitors can identify more easily that there are some companies that belong to the same group which is Priorat Enoturisme.

4. CONCLUSION

This study had the objective to know how the quality of the tourism offer is in the companies that are part of Priorat Enoturisme and, with that information, propose some actions that Priorat Enoturisme can do to improve the tourism offer and, as a consequence, the tourism experience.

To get to know the current situation of the tourism offer that companies have it was necessary to do a previous analysis. This analysis consisted on doing an online communication research, visits to the different establishments of Priorat Enoturisme and a self-evaluation survey. All this research made possible to obtain all the results presented in this study.

To expound the results in an easy way to explain and understand them, they were divided into 4 different categories: communication, reservations, personnel and physical space. This fact allows to go more in depth on these categories and be able to better analyze all the points needed to have a complete analysis of the current situation. Thank you to that, it was possible to make some proposals for the main weaknesses found.

On the one hand, the results have shown that there are some strengths that are common to all the analyzed companies, for instance, the frequency with which they answer the phone and the emails, the knowledge that the staff has about Priorat (history, culture and other products that tourists can consume) and how prepared their physical spaces are to receive tourists.

On the other hand, the most remarkable weak points that this study has found are the lack of knowledge about online communication (before and after the visit), the booking system (obsolete and not practical), the corporate image, the lack of foreign languages spoken by the staff, the signposting or the equipment of the tasting rooms in wineries and oil mills.

Priorat Enoturisme is a very diverse association, the companies that are part of it are divided into 7 different sectors: accommodations, restaurants, wineries, oil mills, travel agencies, wine shops and transport. In addition to this heterogeneity, there are companies of all sizes and with very different resources; this makes more difficult to create some common quality standards. However, this study proposes some initiatives that Priorat Enoturisme can carry out to improve the tourism offer of its companies and give them the tools needed to be better trained to develop tourism.

The first proposal consists on organizing some open-doors events in which companies can visit other's business and learn about them, its main objectives are to share

knowledge between the different workers and owners and give more opportunities to the companies to create more synergies that will beneficiate the companies and will help to boost the activity of the association.

The second is to offer to the companies some online communication courses in which the workers and the owners of the businesses can learn about the importance that this kind of communication has nowadays and how to get the most out of these online tools.

The third proposal is to provide the workers and the owners with language courses, principally English. This will help the companies to offer a higher quality experience to foreign visitors that go to Priorat.

The fourth and last proposal is to improve the signposting to all companies that belong to Priorat Enoturisme by providing common signposts with the name of each company and the association logo. This will help visitors to get to the different establishments and it also gives a corporate image of the association.

To conclude, Priorat Enoturisme is formed by very different companies and it makes difficult to offer some heterogeneity in the quality of the offer, but there are some common points that every company should achieve to be able to offer a high-quality tourism experience, independently of the size of the company or the economic sector to which it belongs.

Limitations in the study:

This study has had an important limitation during the analysis, more specifically during the visits to the different companies. Due to the pandemic situation and the mobility restrictions, many companies were closed to the public and it has been impossible to make those visits as it was planned, as a mystery shopper. The perfect way to make an objective evaluation of the experience is doing the real visit or consuming in the company while the staff do not know that they are being evaluated. This was not possible but the research has been developed in the best possible way taking into account the Covid-19 restrictions during this period of time.

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