



MASTER THESIS

SUSTAINABLE WINE TOURISM

BEYOND THE CELLAR DOOR: DIVERSIFIED TOURISM FOR SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract

Portugal has gained a great deal of international recognition in the last few years as a must-see tourist destination. At the same time, the wine world has begun to recognize that its incredibly diverse landscape lends itself to a varied wine culture. Tourism, especially in Portugal, has the power to be a key economic force in a country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, it is vital to acknowledge the detriment tourism can bring to the inherent attraction of the destination. Tourism gentrification can strip the very essence of a destination and reduce it down to mass replication of unsubstantial value. The sustainability of tourism relies on the preservation of the culturally significant aspects of a destination. As wine tourism grows in appeal globally, destinations need to be savvy and incorporate diversified tourism offerings to visitors, capturing varied levels of interest.

A destination management company (DMC) is one of many stakeholders that can play a vital role in the preservation and sustainability of a tourism destination. Catavino, a DMC in Porto, Portugal is deeply committed to sharing the traditions of Portugal. The thesis will investigate what diversified sustainable tourism can look like and the significance of networks in its development. While interning with Catavino, there will be an investigation of how to develop mutually beneficial partnerships with value-aligned wine and tourism professionals and DMCs. The preservation of tourism destinations requires diversified experiences, incorporating culturally significant elements, and the development of lesser-known rural regions. These elements can contribute greatly to the long-term sustainability of the niche nature of wine tourism offers.

Keywords

Destination Management, Diversified Tourism, Networks, Strategic Development, Sustainable Tourism

List of Abbreviations

DMC: Destination Management Company
DMO: Destination Management Organization
FAM: Familiarization Trip
GDP: Gross Domestic Product
GIT: Group Inclusive Tour
FIT: Free Independent Travelers
KPIs: Key Performance Indicators
SC: Sonoma County
SCT: Sonoma County Tourism
WTTC: World Travel & Tourism Council

1. Introduction

The selection process for the internship in Porto and the investigation of tourism in Portugal holds a personal value to the researcher due to familial ties. While American, the researchers' paternal grandparents were born in Portugal, specifically, in two remote villages called Freixo and Mortagua. These villages are tucked between two well-known Portuguese wine regions, the Barriada and Dão. Frequent visits to Portugal over the past thirty-plus years have provided insight into the recent developments of tourism in the countryside and its major cities.

While tourism is an important economic driver for Portugal, it can also have negative consequences if not managed effectively. Tourism destinations need to be innovative and adaptable to ensure their long-term sustainability. Portugal has seen a very high increase in the number of tourists visiting the country. In 2023, the tourism sector surpassed pre-pandemic levels in the main demand indicators (up 10.0% in overnight stays; up 10.7% in guest numbers, and up 18.9% in revenue from tourism), breaking new records. These figures confirm the weight of the sector in the Portuguese economy, with tourist revenue reaching 9.5% of the country's GDP. (*Foreign Tourism to Portugal Beats Pre-COVID Record in 2023, 2024*)

This thesis will explore how the DMC Catavino can develop partnerships with valued aligned professionals in the United States to help travelers explore a more meaningful connection with the destination. Assessing how Catavino can play a role in promoting sustainable tourism practices, with a focus on incorporating culturally significant experiences and developing lesser-known regions. To develop this idea, a case study of Sonoma County Destination Management Organization (DMO) will be highlighted to show the possibilities of diversification within a wine destination and to showcase the significance of value-aligned network development to promote sustainability.

The purpose of this thesis is to highlight the value of creating networks across varied sectors. The importance of creating collaboration between public and private stakeholders to ensure the development of a more sustainable tourism industry, especially in the case of destinations known heavily for their wine culture. This research will look at specific details regarding tourism opportunities for Catavino in Portugal. The principles outlined in the Sonoma County Tourism Master Plan would do well to be applied to a diverse range of tourism destinations. Many destinations around the world are using tourism and hospitality to grow their GDP. International tourism is quickly growing past carrying capacity within

numerous mass tourism destinations and regional strategic planning is needed to enhance sustainable growth.

This report includes: 1) Introduction, 2) Methodological Approach, 3) Results and Discussion, and 4) Conclusions. The *introduction* gives an overview of Catavino where the researcher interned and related duties. The *introduction* sets the theoretical foundations of this work by exploring how Portugal has been affected by tourism in the last decade through statistics and the current strategic plans in place by the country. The *methodological approach* describes how the research was undertaken by outlining the literature review, data collection through interviews, analysis, and case study of the Sonoma County Tourism organization. *Results and Discussion* reviews research findings through the implementation of the “Reseller” program and the Fortified Travel Network. Finally, *Conclusions* integrates lessons from Catavino, the implications of tourism in Portugal, and the future of the business opportunities to provide considerations for the next iteration of the programs.

1.1 Company Overview

Catavino is a luxury destination management company in Porto, Portugal that focuses on authentic Portuguese cultural experiences and specializes in Enogastronomic tour offers. The business was founded by Ryan and Gabriella Opaz, American expats who have lived on the Iberian Peninsula for over twenty years. Over the last decade, they have established themselves within Porto and the greater community of wine professionals and locals. Gabriella is a communication coach, emotional intelligence speaker, and co-author of “Porto: Stories from Portugal’s Historic Bolhão Market.” Ryan is a wine professional, co-author, and photographer of the James Beard Award-nominated book “Foot-Trodden: Portugal and the Wines That Time Forgot,” and co-creator of the Digital Wine Communications Conference. They use their combined entrepreneurial spirit with the help of three native Portuguese employees to design bespoke tours for international tourists interested in exploring Portuguese culture. As part of their effort to grow social networks within the community of Porto, they also have a wine shop called theLab. TheLab intends to provide an inviting location for collaborations with other business entities, an office to host key stakeholders of Catavino, and a meeting spot for small events to create social interactions within the community.

As a DMC, they can customize experiences based on the unique desires and interests of their clients. Catavino Tours emphasizes the traditional gastronomic regional offerings, historical vinification practices of the country, and culturally significant elements of various communities. Such trails offer a unifying

culinary and gastronomic narrative about the people, process, place, or product mediated through a series of locations (Everett). The motivation of the wine tourist is for an experience with a complex interaction of natural setting, food, cultural, and historical inputs, and above all, the people who service the visitor. A visitor can identify with a specific lifestyle, which involves eating well, appreciating the beauty of nature, and enhancing friendships in a convivial setting (Charters, 2006, p.214).

1.2 Internship Responsibilities

Upon discussing the possibilities of the Catavino Tours internship with Ryan, multiple areas of opportunity were considered. We kept in mind key factors about what the best strategy could be based on the trends and statistics in international tourism, listed in the theoretical background below. One of the primary objectives was to figure out a way to obtain more clients from the American tourism market by developing strategic partnerships with businesses and professionals in the United States. This included developing research and engagement tools, doing competitor research, conducting interviews, facilitating engagements, and liaising with clients. Through interviews and online meetings, it was important to take note of identifying factors that make for a strong potential partnership. There were discussions on how to create and implement marketing and promotional material to further the development of this Reseller program.

Once key partners were identified and discussions were held, it was clear to see the limiting nature of only having a Portugal tourism offer available. There is an opportunity to revive a previous project, the Fortified Travel Network, by developing a strategy to launch a network of expat-owned international DMCs. This requires creating criteria, identifying other tourism destination management companies that align with Catavino, and developing a set of bylaws.

1.3 Theoretical Background

Tourism in Portugal has changed dramatically over the last decade. The country is seeing a large increase in international visitors who fly into the two major airports of Lisbon and Porto. The city areas of Lisbon at 85 km² and Porto at 42 km², are uniquely compact when compared to the other European cities visited heavily by American tourists. This is in comparison to the busiest international routes from the United States, London at 1,706 km², Rome at 1,285 km², and Paris at 105 km². (Which Are The Most Popular Travel Destinations For American Travelers This Summer?) This means that for Portugal to keep up with

and capture this influx of visitors, a great deal of planning and infrastructure has needed to be put in place to increase lodging capacity and allow for ease of traveling within these metropolitan areas.

1.3.1 Portuguese Tourism Statistics

Pre-covid, Portugal was seeing a significant year-over-year increase in tourism. In the last years of recovery since 2022, there are indications of this trajectory continuing. The number of foreign tourists visiting Portugal hit a record of over 18 million in 2023 as it rose 19% from the previous year and 11% when compared to the pre-pandemic year of 2019, official data showed on Wednesday. The United Nations World Tourism Organization expects global tourism to only fully recover from the COVID-19 pandemic in 2024. Overall, 18.3 million foreigners stayed in Portuguese hotels and other tourist accommodations last year, according to the National Statistics Institute, with Spain and Britain making up the two largest sources of arrivals, closely followed by the United States. LISBON, Jan 31 (Foreign Tourism to Portugal Beats Pre-COVID Record in 2023, 2024)

One of the largest emerging inbound tourist markets visiting Portugal is the United States of America. Americans on average tend to spend more money when traveling abroad and contribute a great deal to the daily tourism dollar being spent in Europe. Due to travel restrictions relating to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, international travel spending in the United States fell to 41 billion U.S. dollars in 2020 and 2021. International travel spending increased to 99 billion U.S. dollars in 2022, and that figure was forecast to reach 185 billion by 2026. An April 2023 survey analyzed the expected spending on international travel over the next year in selected countries worldwide. Overall, the United States reported the highest expected expenditure for international trips, with an average of approximately 5.2 thousand U.S. dollars. By contrast, the United Kingdom recorded the lowest figure among the selected countries, with an average expenditure of roughly 2.8 thousand U.S. dollars. (Statista - The Statistics Portal, n.d.)

1.3.2 Turismo de Portugal

Operating under the auspices of the Ministry of the Economy, Turismo de Portugal is Portugal's National Tourism Authority is responsible for the promotion, enhancement, and sustainability of the tourism business. It brings together all the institutional competencies involved in making tourism more dynamic, from supply to demand. The program is based on a long-term vision, combined with short-term action,

allowing for more strategic action in the present and being part of the future European support framework 2021-2027.

This is a long-term shared strategy for tourism in Portugal, with the following goals:

- Offer a strategic framework to be used as a guideline for national tourism for the next 10 years
- Ensure stability and acceptance of commitments regarding the strategic options for national tourism
- Promote integration of sectoral policies
- Generate ongoing joint action between the various tourism stakeholders
- Act with a sense of strategy in the present and the short/medium term.

These are all very broad goals that are structured around four thematic agendas central to the development of the economy, society, and territory of Portugal by 2030. These agendas include People First for inclusion in development, innovation through digitalization, resource sustainability, and cohesiveness of internal and external competitiveness. In acknowledgment of this research and the significance of diversified offerings and rural areas in tourism, the only pillar addressing the importance of these areas of opportunity was,

P3.3.5 Foster the commercial supply of differentiated products A line of action that aims to create a portfolio of commercial supply of unique products, which allows new motivations to visit, adding value to the travel industry, regional destinations, and companies. The commercialization of new, sustainable, responsible, and distinctive products and companies that in recent years have appeared throughout the territory, particularly in inland areas, through collaborative networks as well as companies associated with new investments and approaches such as wine tourism, literary tourism, sports, and industrial tourism, among others.

While People First is placed as one of the top agendas, it seems that the actual residents have been left out of this comprehensive plan. This plan places the economic gain of the tourism industry promotion over its residents. This has created very strained affordable housing availability for residents in an inflated market exacerbated by the short-term rentals allocated to tourists. The housing needed for hospitality workers, public servants, as well as locals who play a vital role in the cultural significance of the destination, are not available at their current compensation level. After an almost 30% increase over the past five years, residential property in Portugal's capital is pricier than in Milan, Madrid, and Berlin. That puts a new

home out of reach for most locals in Lisbon and shows how supply often outweighs interest rates in setting prices. (“Lisbon’s Hot Housing Market Defies Push to Deter Foreign Buyers,” 2023)

The Turismo de Portugal, I. P., in conjunction with the Reactivate Tourism. Build the Future Action Plan (24.07.2023) launched the discussion on the Sustainable Tourism Plan 20-23, a project that includes actions such as re-educating for circular and sustainable catering. The program bears in mind the importance of Portugal strengthening its positioning and competitiveness as a sustainable tourist destination. The Plan includes 119 actions distributed by the 4 axes of action, which result from the proposal presented on 26 October 2020 by Turismo de Portugal and the contributions received during the public consultation, which ended on 26 January 2021.

Of note for reference to the research topic include,

Sustainable Mobility: Sustainable mobility is an unavoidable dimension in destinations and with strong impact on tourism activity. Soft mobility and cycling in the urban context, connectivity between territories, and the adoption of land and maritime means of transport with low or zero carbon emissions, are some of the challenges to be achieved by the Tourism sector.

Enhancement of cultural heritage: As a strategic asset for national tourism, we intend cultural heritage to be valued through measures that contribute to the preservation of tangible and intangible values that characterize and differentiate us as a tourist destination and generate benefits for the national economy and local communities.

Enhancement of natural and beach offer: Affirming tourism in the blue economy as a sustainable activity is a challenge and to accomplish that, is necessary to qualify and valorize the infrastructures, equipment, and services related to this strategic asset, as well as to promote the sustainable management of nautical tourism activities.

Enhancement of natural heritage: As a strategic national asset, we aim to invest in the development of measures that offer enriching experiences and well-being in the enjoyment of natural heritage and that, at the same time, ensure the preservation of natural values and biodiversity, also helping to generate economic and social benefits.

Extend tourism demand to the entire territory and throughout the year: Within the guidelines set out in the Tourism Strategy 20-27, it is important to make Portugal a more cohesive country, enhancing the tourism supply throughout the territory and the year.

Promote responsible tourism and tourists: The Tourism of the future, which incorporates balanced development objectives, implies a change of attitude throughout the value chain - destinations, companies, and tourists. It is therefore important to aggregate everyone's commitment to more responsible tourism, raising awareness for a change in attitudes and more conscious and responsible behavior, and encouraging the adoption of good environmental and social practices, to protect and conserve destinations. A challenge that involves companies and tourists and a call for travel to become a commitment to the Planet, as each person is responsible for reducing the impact of their travel.

(Turismo de Portugal, n.d.)

The researcher reached out to Turismo de Portugal on May 27th to see if there have been any monitored results of the targets and key indicators since its completion. At this moment, no additional follow-up was provided. While some of these goals can contribute greatly to the sustainable development of Portuguese tourism, the concern comes with the application and execution of them in tangible and measurable ways. Of the 119 actions, there are only 9 actions indicated for monitoring of which no progress has been provided on the website.

1.3.3 Positive and Negative Impacts of Tourism in Portugal

Portugal's tourism industry is a double-edged sword, creating both positive and negative effects.

Positive Impacts:

- **Economic Boost:** Tourism is a major contributor to Portugal's GDP, accounting for around 15.8% and generating thousands of jobs in hotels, restaurants, and related services (World Travel & Tourism Council).
- **Infrastructure Development:** Tourism revenue helps fund infrastructure improvements like airports, roads, and public transportation, benefiting both residents and visitors.
- **Preservation of Culture:** Tourism can raise awareness and appreciation for Portuguese culture, traditions, and historical sites.

Negative Impacts:

- **Overdependence:** The reliance on tourism makes Portugal vulnerable to unpredictable events, as seen in the steep decline during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- The strain on Public Resources: Increased Tourist numbers can strain water supplies, waste management, public housing, commuting capacity, and energy resources in popular destinations.
- Cost of Living: The surge in tourism can drive up housing costs and the price of everyday goods, making it harder for locals to afford living in highly sought-after tourist destinations.
- Environmental Impact: Increased transportation, energy use, and waste generation can harm the environment.
- Loss of Culture: Tourism can strip Portuguese culture, traditions, and historical sites by emphasizing misleading replications or misrepresentations of said items.

Overall, tourism plays a significant role in Portugal's economy and culture. However, it's crucial to manage it sustainably to minimize negative impacts and ensure long-term benefits for both residents and visitors. As of the current findings, there seems to be a lack of support in recognizing the local communities and citizens of Portugal as key stakeholders in the sustainability of the tourism industry.

2. Methodological Approach

The methodological approach provides an overview of the research process of this master's thesis. It will detail data collection and analysis for each research method, which was a literature review, interviews, and pitch meetings with various stakeholders in wine and tourism, and a case study of Sonoma County Tourism. Assessing the multidimensionality of sustainability in social, cultural, economic, and environmental dimensions. The objective will be to identify key findings that DMC Catavino can develop based on referencing the strategic plans of other successful strategic plans. The research will reference Sonoma County Tourism which emphasizes collaborative partnerships and those that maximize varied stakeholders to contribute to sustained economic growth and development. This will be done by analyzing the goals, strategies, key performance indicators (KPIs), and sustainability measures set forth by the organizations.

2.1 Literature Review

A literature review was conducted to understand the significance of the key elements the researcher chose to explore concerning sustainable tourism. This involved exploring academic and industry texts that referenced diversified tourism offers, rural development, and the importance of networks among various stakeholders. Developing this idea required the use of preestablished sustainable criteria from another organization that could be referenced and applied to tourism. The context surrounding the project was to

define sustainability as the valorizing of social and cultural resources to work congruent with economic growth and environmental concerns. Researching the evolution and partnerships that can be created between DMC and the local community and stakeholders, as well as, understanding the contributing role of a DMC in creating and promoting additional diversified offers.

2.1.1 Diversified Wine Tourism and Rural Development Opportunities

As COVID concerns receded in 2023 and tourism began to regain its popularity, there is no doubt of the psychological influences it had on a tourist's choice of leisurely activities, especially in travel. Travel is in its very nature a form of escapism from the daily stresses of life and mobility is a huge component of our humanity. When removing the option of travel to those who have become accustomed to it, you sever human will. This loss of choice created a reverberation in the expectations, desires, and decisions as tourists regained access to travel that can be applied to Catavino business development.

A recent 2024 Forbes article discusses the change in the mindset of luxury travelers,

A penchant for long, slow travel People are booking and traveling for longer periods and slowing down while they do. With slow travel, people can immerse themselves more deeply in the local culture and book more experiences that allow them to really explore and appreciate the destination. They are looking to go beyond the typical resort experiences and more willing to head off the beaten path.

A deeper desire for wellness travel and immersive retreats There's been a huge shift about taking care of your well-being and ensuring that you're making time to take care of yourself. According to the new Global Wellness Institute report, the wellness tourism market will more than double from 2022 to 2027, with spending jumps from 2022 (\$651 billion) to 2023 (\$868 billion) to 2024 (\$1 trillion) to 2027 (1.4 trillion). The 16.6 percent annual growth over the next five years will make wellness tourism the second biggest growth leader amidst all wellness sectors except wellness real estate, which comes in at 17.4 percent.

Willingness to travel in the off-season Since peak-season travel to top destinations has become so challenging due to the crowds, traveling off season, for those who can, is working out to be the new prime time. (Berg, n.d.)

The above desires lend themselves very well to wine tourism-related destinations. Slowing down, wellness, and reducing stress by avoiding overcrowded tourist spots are key elements of the type of experience you receive when going to a rural or country setting of a wine region. Research about rural wine tourists' motivations supports both the esthetic and escapist principles within the model. The escapist experience is highly immersive wherein consumers are engrossed in a different time or place. While tourists may gaze at the wine region's vineyard, they may also immerse themselves by participating in wine country recreation, abundant in the natural, rural setting of wine appellations. Rural wine destinations provide ample sports, recreation, and engaging activities in which the tourist may be engrossed. The participatory, immersive activities of performing agricultural or viticultural activities, such as taking part in the harvesting or crushing of the grapes, are applicable to this realm. (Quadri-Felitti and Fiore)

These findings indicate a huge opportunity for innovative DMCs that can provide more diversification in their current tourism offers. DMCs that have local expert knowledge of the country can create unique experiences and offer access to lesser-known destinations which can have a positive impact on undervalued communities. As the field of wine tourism continues to grow within the larger growth of the general tourism industry, an intersection of resources should be utilized. Wine as a beverage for consumption or for wine collectors is just a small element of what wine tourism can offer. Supplemental activities and experiences are a key element to the longevity and sustainability of wine tourism destination regions. Due to society's increasing alienation from nature, the search for authenticity has been intensifying (Gilmore and Pine). Subsequently, today's tourist seeks travel opportunities such as the kind offered by rural wine tourism to bridge this disconnect. (Quadri-Felitti and Fiore) By incorporating the broader scope of cultural, historical, wellness options, recreation, and gastronomy, a wine region can flourish economically and create further opportunities for rural or lesser-known communities. Focusing on diversified offerings promotes greater tourist satisfaction, a wider scope of demographic interest, and beneficial rural development.

At the last Portuguese Council of Tourism Promotion (CEPT) meeting on May 6, 2024, the need for diversification was acknowledged. The Ministry of Economy added, in a statement, the objective that "external promotion for the coming years will encourage the commercial offer of differentiated products for more demanding segments", such as cultural tourism, architecture, gastronomy, and wine tourism, among others. For the Minister of Economy, the strategic importance of the sector for the national economy is "clear". Pedro Reis defended "tourism with added value, capable of retaining talent, with a strong commitment to a green agenda and its internationalization". "We are here to accelerate sustained

growth in our economy, investing in strategic sectors such as Tourism”, he adds in the same statement. (Portugal Looking to Attract Tourists from New Markets, n.d.)

2.1.2 Power of Networks

For smaller DMCs to sustain a competitive advantage in a global market, the development of international strategic networks has proven to be beneficial. Furthermore, firms participating in a network share information and know-how (Zhou, Wu, & Luo, 2007), experiential market knowledge (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009), achieve better access to markets (both domestic and international ones), reduce the time and cost involved in entering new markets and moderate their risk (Zhou, Wu, & Luo, 2007). Thus, they improve their business image (Dalmoro, 2013), develop innovations, identify new business opportunities (Awuah, Gebrekidan, & Osarenkhoe, 2011), and consequently, achieve better marketing terms (Lynch & Morrison, 2007). (Kyriakaki et al., 2019)

Some of the general advantages of cohesive networks are,

Access to Resources and Information:

- **Expertise and Knowledge:** Networks connect you with professionals who have specialized knowledge and experience. This can be invaluable for problem-solving, brainstorming new ideas, or staying up-to-date on industry trends.
- **Potential Clients and Partners:** Networking events, conferences, and online communities can expose you to potential clients or partners who can help your business grow.
- **Funding Opportunities:** Strong networks can connect you with investors, venture capitalists, or angel investors who might be interested in funding your business ventures.

Enhanced Credibility and Visibility:

- **Building Trust and Reputation:** Building relationships with influential figures in your industry can enhance your company's credibility and reputation. Positive word-of-mouth recommendations within your network can go a long way.
- **Increased Brand Awareness:** By actively participating in relevant networks, you can increase brand awareness and get your company's name out there.

- **Media Exposure:** Strong network connections can lead to media opportunities, such as guest articles, interviews, or features that can further boost your visibility.

Improved Business Opportunities:

- **Strategic Partnerships:** Networks can help you forge strategic partnerships with complementary businesses, leading to new revenue streams and market expansion.
- **Joint Ventures and Collaborations:** Collaborations with other businesses in your network can allow you to share resources, and expertise, and reach a wider audience.
- **Lead Generation:** Building relationships with potential clients can generate qualified leads and convert into sales opportunities.

Regarding the future of tourism destination development, we estimate that establishing productive actor networks will gain importance and will emerge more and more on the political and policy agendas. Learning from and linking with other initiatives in other destinations would be helpful, over time offering the possibility to give rise to an ecosystem that spans various destinations, at different spatial scales and governance levels. For academia, a future challenge would be to contribute to a better understanding of the key conditions for the emergence and development of productive actor networks, e.g. via case study research. (Hartman et al., 2020)

There are various stakeholders in tourism due to its international nature, economic impact across various sectors, and the ever-evolving demands on the destination. In the strategic planning proposed by Destination 2030 by WTTC, A destination must assess what are its unique assets and value proposition that will attract visitors; specifically, considering its culture, history, gastronomy, heritage, natural and cultural resources, as well as its infrastructure. It will be important for a destination to also consider how it is perceived by travelers. Beyond their strengths and potential, destinations should identify their limitations and challenges, recognizing that each destination is different. (World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) | Travel & Tourism Representative Council, n.d.) This requires that various tourism businesses collaborate and use inclusive promotion to increase the recognition of their region. Oftentimes, in European wine regions, wineries were apprehensive to encourage the sharing of resources or recommendations with their neighbors. This type of exclusiveness can limit the tourist experience and decrease the potential for greater satisfaction.

DMCs have a unique position of influence to help encourage more sustainable travel for tourists. By having continuous involvement with multiple stakeholders of the destination, they understand the

implications of tourism on various communities. They have the power to build experiences that highlight the wealth of a region rather than just a singular business. DMCs can utilize their deep knowledge of local tourism commerce to manage incoming visitors with intention. They are a hub of communication and can encourage more sustainable forms of interactions by redirecting and/or creating experiences in places that need it. As actors and their actions are interrelated and affect each other, their (self-organized) collective behavior steers and shapes how tourism destinations develop and evolve over time. Collective actions are key to the outcomes of destination development processes. (Hartman et al., 2020) Additionally, if Catavino pursues building a unified network of international DMCs with a cohesive vision, they can provide tangible improvements in sustainable tourism development worldwide.

2.2 Interviews

2.2.1 Primary Interviews

Catavino offers a comprehensive portfolio of tourism options and packages throughout Portugal. The main avenue in which clients are retained is through inquiries that come through the website on the contact page or by word of mouth. While this is the main method that the business started with, Ryan wanted to identify additional modes of capturing clients. Equipped with gastronomy and wine knowledge obtained throughout his career and the growth internationally of Enogastronomic tourism, Ryan saw the opportunity in curated themed itineraries for smaller (8-12 people) luxury group trips. Being a business operating in Portugal and having a predominately American clientele, the desire for continued exploration of partnerships between the two countries emerged. The idea is to find like-minded professionals in the United States who would want to partner with Catavino and provide a value-added tourism offer to their clients. The researcher was tasked with using their twenty-plus years of experience in the American food scene and existing networks to begin primary research through interviews.

The way the interviews were conducted was by first crafting an email that explained what is called the ‘Reseller’ program. The ‘Reseller’ program is in the simplest explanation, a commission-based model, in which the partnered entity becomes a travel agent, but sells an itinerary that is custom-created for their unique clientele. After multiple meetings with Ryan, we identified the key components of the program and crafted an email to convey the idea. A selected group of professionals whom the researcher had an existing relationship with were then emailed. To get a wide reach of input, the idea was discussed with a wine sales distributor, restaurant wine director & winemaker, tourism strategy & development manager, freelance sustainable food business developer, and national food sales & marketing director. This primary

research was done to collect general insight from professionals about who the offer might be better aligned with and to understand how future communication could be clearer when the idea was later pitched to potential partners, “Resellers.”

Some of the key responses documented from the interviews were,

Restaurant Wine Director & Winemaker

- Can see a benefit to this, particularly in a retail wine setting where there is a strong loyal base of regular customers who have been identified to be able to spend on high-end European travel.
- A recommendation for the highest impact would be to figure out a way where the commission seller (reseller) can participate in the trip and low to no cost.

Wine Sales Distributor

- Distributors are very careful of how they create tours to winemakers in a region. Specifically trying to target their winemakers. They don’t have to pay extra for it. What is the tourism operator going to offer vs the winemakers- other elements they can’t get from their inside angle that a local winemaker can’t?
- Grand scheme of things it’s important to dial into the customer's desire to find a place through a person who knows the area well is highly desired.

Tourism Strategy & Development Manager

- We work a lot with journalists/press trips/ media relations, and most are very skeptical about promoting something they haven’t experienced themselves.

Freelance Sustainable Food Business Developer

- At Sagra, the CEO used personal connections to sell the offer and then word of mouth. They did get a PR company to help with the promotion of the brand and had a write-up in the Wall Street Journal and Sunset Magazine. Would highly recommend doing a PR trip to promote the brand.

The discussions proved that the idea was clear and that there was an opportunity to utilize food and wine professionals to generate future client leads by partnering with them through a ‘Reseller’ program. However, developing the actual program and client market would need to be refined.

2.2.2 Pitch Meetings

Upon establishing there was an opportunity for the “Reseller” program, additional research was done to begin to identify potential professionals and businesses to pitch to. The researcher having lived in the

largest American wine tourist destinations, Napa and Sonoma, focused initially on wine professionals in those areas. An additional reason to concentrate on these areas was due to understanding that these destinations attract individuals who will travel for gastronomic and luxury indulgences such as high-quality restaurants, renowned wineries, and luxury hotels. Then through the research, additional potential partnership opportunities were explored with wine importers/distributors, individuals who already curate food and/or wine-related tourism packages, wine educators, and retailers. All the contacts were collected in a Google spreadsheet with additional details and links to their work. The researcher began sending out customizable templated emails in small batches over a few weeks to these individuals. Approximately fifteen emails have been sent out already, additional emails are pending based on further discovery, and six 30–45-minute meetings have been conducted. The meetings involved Ryan, the researcher, and the interested business.

2.2.3 Analysis

After receiving various levels of interest from the email outreach, pitch meetings for those interested in the “Reseller” program were held on Google Chat. Basic introductions from all participants were done first to get a sense of where potential opportunities and timelines could develop. The professionals that we discussed the “Reseller” program with varied. They included a wine professional consultant, wine distributor/importer, winery/DMC, and individuals who already curated bespoke itineraries within Eno-gastronomic tourism. There was a lot of discovery within the conversations themselves. As well as distinct differences in commitment level based on the individuals and their experience with tourism itinerary travel.

For those with less experience in tourism itinerary travel, the conversation revolved more around the general principles of compensation, promotion, and building of trust within the deliverable, i.e. the customized trip itself and Catavino. Within these discussions, it was clear that there would need to be a vetting of Catavino through a familiarization trip, (FAM), which is quite standard in the industry. FAM is a trip designed for media, influencers, bloggers, and travel professionals to learn about a destination, tourism operator hotel board and/or tourism board. This requires a longer development stage; the creation of the partnership is reliant on creating a bond and exploration of the services. The potential partner and Catavino need to arrange calendars to determine a time and location so that the “Reseller” can experience a shortened itinerary firsthand. For those with more experience in itinerary travel tourism, the FAM might not be needed or can be an impromptu meeting to brainstorm general ideas and visit a few locations in the destination of interest. Those who already offer their itinerary-based model seemed to be more interested

in the trip itself and the development process for curating of a unique experience that sets them apart and/or aligns with their already established brand.

At the moment, these partnerships are in the communication stages with the possibility of one developing as early as the Spring of 2025. These trips are intimate and have a larger expense than a standard agency tour package. Being in the luxury tour industry, it is important to build strong connections with these partners and develop unique offers that allow their clients to uncover a part of a destination that is not often seen. In a highly competitive market, it can give the “Reseller” a distinctive advantage in their business by providing their clients a value-added offer only available through them.

2.3 Case Study

The researcher has lived and worked in both the Sonoma County and Napa area, located in Northern California, for various periods beginning in 2008. These are two of the most iconic North American wine regions for wine and food tourism. Coming from first-hand experience, the developments within the last decade and a half have already been noticeable. Witnessing the incredible demand and increase in tourism in Napa Valley and the way it impacts the lives of locals for both positive and negative reasons. Napa Valley as a county has become a destination that can be compared in many ways to a resort, where the actual place is concentrated more towards tourism offers. Finding housing and general goods have become no longer financially hospitable for those who work there or just choose by preference to live there. Sonoma on the other hand is almost twice as large as Napa and has more dynamic forms of commerce as well as geography. Sonoma lends itself well as a great case study to be explored through the lens of Sonoma County Tourism (SCT), a DMO that identifies the residents and cultural heritage as a key asset to the long-term sustainability of its economy. The researcher was able to have an in-person meeting with the Vice President of Community Engagement, Kelly Bass Seibel this past March. The discussion revolved around the role SCT plays in the prosperity of both community and sustainable tourism.

2.2.1 Sonoma County Tourism

Sonoma County (SC), California, is a world-renowned wine region known for its picturesque vineyards, acclaimed wineries, and diverse agricultural landscape. This case study explores the role of SCT, in promoting sustainable wine tourism in SC. SCT does that through multi-stakeholder incentives that offer shared marketing and promotion tactics and leverage the power of the community and surrounding

businesses. SCT is the official destination stewardship organization of SC dedicated to promoting overnight stays and creating a sustainable hospitality economy throughout the region. SCT is a private, non-profit 501(c)6 organization. It is governed by a volunteer board of directors, with input from committees, stakeholders, and the general public. SCT acts as a virtual visitor center through its website by providing thousands of business listings, itineraries, interactive maps, travel tips, and in-depth articles on attractions and events. (*About Sonoma County Tourism*, n.d.)

The SCT crafted a Destination Stewardship and Resiliency Master Plan that would identify key objectives, opportunities, and obstacles around creating a destination and becoming a global leader in sustainability and resiliency. This plan looks a decade into the future through a data-driven foundation to offer programming to guide Sonoma County's evolution to meet the rapidly changing needs of the traveler, the sentiment of residents, and the potential for ongoing internal and external impacts. SCT is not the sole driver of any of the five focus areas. This illuminates the need for partnerships and collaboration to help ensure the achievement of the actions outlined in the plan. The main elements of the plan are listed below.

Vision: SC where industry sectors and communities coalesce around a roadmap for a sustainable and resilient destination, a diversified economy, and a stellar resident quality of life.

Mission: SC inspires a commitment to innovation and community among all stakeholders to achieve a collective long-term vision for Sonoma County.

Overarching Goals for Sonoma County

SC will become the premier destination for responsible travelers.

- SCT will be the catalyst for an evolution in partnerships and community alignment that moves the destination forward toward true resiliency and sustainability.
- SC will have a strong foundation of adequate housing and robust workforce development that sustains the industry growth that will come as a result of the plan.
- Residents will feel part of enhancing the region's quality of life and developing a destination that compels responsible travelers.

Stewardship Principles

Our efforts to promote Sonoma County as a destination and strengthen the tourism and hospitality industry must:

- Ensure net positive impacts to the quality of life of our residents, businesses and communities

- Promote and enable responsibly experiencing our communities, lands and products
- Support and advance responsible infrastructure development that aligns with the character and values of our communities
- Encourage policies, initiatives and behaviors that prioritize the health and longevity of our natural resources and way of life
- Uphold equity, accountability and innovation in our efforts to disperse tourism's economic and other benefits throughout Sonoma County
- Acknowledge and celebrate our unique culture and heritage while embracing and advancing diversity and inclusion
- Seek, model and convene inclusive, productive and collaborative engagement among Sonoma County's public and private sector industry partners and stakeholders for the benefit of both residents and visitors

SCT has taken a proactive approach to the future development of the county. This plan recognizes the economic opportunity of tourism while also valuing the community, sustaining the environment, and encouraging participatory actions with various stakeholders. Working from the goals and stewardship principles, five imperatives were pursued

- Build a naturally resilient destination
- Strengthen the health of the region's economy
- Elevate the resident quality of life
- Enhance the breadth of products and experiences
- Acknowledge and advance Sonoma County's Culture and Heritage

(Strategic Plan FY 23-25 by Sonomacounty - Issuu, 2024)

The plan identifies the key metrics for success, industry sectors/partners required, and strategies. Each imperative highlights the specific areas of focus which could include, transportation, housing, guest experience, Diversity Equity and Inclusion, environmental protection/outdoor recreation, etc. Then the specific area of focus has short-term 1–5-year deliverables, 5-10 year long-term deliverables, imperative short-term critical business objectives and imperative long-term critical business objectives. This comprehensive plan has brought together over 80 community members to devise this plan. It is clearly shown that SCT has placed a significant value on the community, ensuring that value takes precedence over economic output. Knowing that without the collaboration of the community, the economic output would not have long term sustainability.

These ideas and the importance of multi-stakeholder involvement were addressed in the 2022 released, “Destination 2030 Global Cities’ Readiness for Sustainable Tourism Growth Report.” It was issued by the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) and Jones Lang LaSalle Inc. (JLL) and discusses what makes a city better prepared for travel. In recent years, the concept of destination stewardship, an approach that balances the needs of all stakeholders, has gained increased traction. To thrive, destination stewardship must approach needs and goals holistically and requires public-private-community collaboration. Rather than involving different stakeholders in a time of crisis, key stakeholders should be engaged in both the development and the execution of a strategic plan for Travel & Tourism. Engagement of both public and private sector partners builds trust and commitment in the strategic plan as the work towards common goals. (News Article | World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), n.d.)

2.2.2 Sonoma County Analysis

SCT has a staff of about 25 high-level employees in five different departments, business development, community engagement, finance & operations, administration, and marketing & communications. The website is a hub of information that can be used by the public and industry. Within the organization, there are resources for personal trip planning, business development and marketing, travel trade statistics, press releases, and venue planning for corporate or personal events. The website acts as an online informational point, that offers transparency, education, updates, and shared resources.

There are a multitude of ways a business can use SCT. A Sonoma business can use the organization for promotion by using tools on the website to design new integrated marketing for promotion through their various outlets. They have a kit that allows partner business to integrate their graphics with the promotional pieces of SCT. This can be on their printed visitor map, website directory, e-newsletter, and/or their in-house designed Sonoma County app. SCT also has an industry calendar, where they host various meetings for networking, meetings, and business development sessions. They even curate outward promotion through partnerships, such as the [Wine Road Ambassador Program](#) (Wine Road Ambassador, 2024). The Wine Road is an association that acts as a directory for wineries and lodging in SC wine regions. They developed an ambassador program to use wine industry professionals and visitors who enjoy the region, with training materials to turn them into ambassadors of the region. This very notion of a Wine Road Ambassador is a great segue into value-aligned business development that will be used in the Catavino “Reseller” program.

3. Results and Proposal: Value-Aligned Business Development Opportunities

This proposal outlines the creation of a “Reseller” program, specializing in the cross-promotional sales of curated tourism packages using a commission-based revenue model. Catavino aims to develop relationships with value-aligned American food and wine professionals to offer unique and intentionally curated travel experiences to their customers. When researching partners, there was a targeting of various business professionals from consultants, wineries, sommeliers, restaurants and DMCs outside of Portugal. Focusing on professionals who are in American cities or regions that have higher levels of income to spend on leisure, developed restaurant scenes, and in some cases an established wine tourism culture or connections to Portugal. The researcher also aimed to find dynamic professionals who showed a level of savviness in business and would see an opportunity to offer value-added tourism itineraries to their customer base. Leveraging partnerships with established food and wine professionals was a great avenue to provide a diverse range of travel experiences, focused on Eno-gastro tourism.

3.1 Reseller Program

As a DMC, Catavino can provide any range of offers to general clients who are interested in visiting Portugal. That means that they can either plan trips for clients who are Free Independent Travelers (FIT) looking for more independent travel or Group Inclusive Tours (GIT) looking for the complete itinerary package. For the “Reseller” program, GIT travel is the offer being marketed.

An email was sent by the researcher to the potential “Reseller” introducing the company, providing insight regarding the qualifications of the DMC, and explaining the program. The explanation and wording of the program to potential partners proved to be a little tricky for those with no previous knowledge of the tourism industry. The researcher created the below graphic as a mock-up of supplemental material that could be used in the future as the program develops and to help explain the exchange between Catavino and the “Reseller” through a visual aid. It also was a mental exercise to help develop concepts on how the program could evolve.

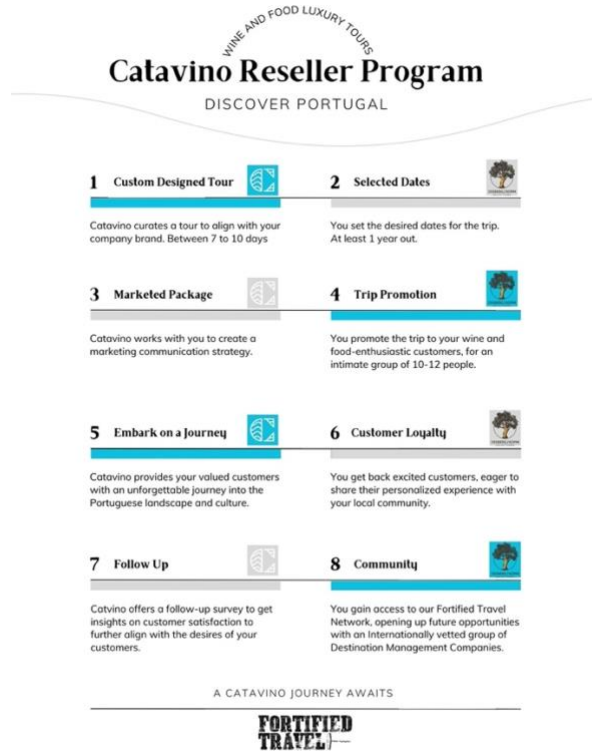


Figure 1. & 2. Catavino Reseller Program Graphic Explanation

For the “Reseller” program, Catavino will provide custom-designed travel experiences, and ensure a seamless booking process for clients and the partners’ preferred level of destination support. The “Reseller” would earn customer loyalty as well as income through the commission-based model. The “Reseller” could choose to be a selling point of the trip by being a leader on the tour or opt to just promote the tour directly to their customer base. Additionally, the tour could be white labeled under the exclusive name of the “Reseller” or as a partnered tour with Catavino listed as the organizer. This availability of options allows the “Reseller” to make the judgment call on how they want to market and promote the tour.

3.1.1 Reseller Partners & Development

As briefly mentioned in the analysis, providing a FAM trip is a very standardized activity for tour agencies and in this case, “Resellers.” It is a way of allowing the “Reseller” to obtain a firsthand experience of the tour, develop a rapport with the employees of the DMC, gain insight into how things operate, create some content for future promotional pieces, see the intimate relationships Catavino has with its vendors, and have a chance to discover and address any potential concerns. This next stage is

about finding opportunities within various schedules to arrange a meeting in Portugal with the professionals. As a generally offered suggestion, "We will be to have you arrive first in Porto at theLab to get acquainted, brainstorm ideas, and have a chance to explore the city. Ryan will arrange a trip to the Douro for you to see, taste, and enjoy the beauty of the UNESCO World Heritage landscape." This can then be adjusted and elaborated on based on the interests and style of the individual. Then dates for the tour would be set, preferably a year in advance and itinerary planning would commence. This would entail a continual dialogue with the professional and a Catavino trip developer, creating an experience that matches the profile of the "Resellers" clients.

3.1.2 Opportunities for Diversification

The "Reseller" program which will have a primary focus on gastronomy and wine, will be a great opportunity to help expand the diversification of tourism offers, in addition to supporting rural development. As established in the literature review, wine tourism is often in more rural or country settings. In Portugal specifically, the wine regions are vastly dispersed throughout the country. The variation of vineyard landscapes and regions allows further opportunities for Catavino to diversify its tours in underrepresented and undiscovered areas. Offering tours that go to Vinho Verde, Dão Trás-os-Montes, Tejo, and Setúbal in exchange or as a complimentary add to the more visited tourist regions of Douro, Lisboa, Alentejo and Algarve.

Additionally, while vacationing and touring, excessive gastronomic pleasures and alcohol consumption can be overwhelming. On seven-to-ten-day itineraries, it is important to supplement other activities. Catavino can incorporate more culturally significant elements of Portugal through offers that involve traditional and/or entrepreneurial music and craftsmanship in various regions. Through some preliminary research, it was discovered that there are some organizations that Catavino could utilize and possibly partner with to develop this further.

Some organizations that can be of use in developing cultural experiences include

- Music
 - [A Musica Portuguesa](#) A cultural association dedicated to documenting, valuing, and disseminating musical processes and practices. Collection of oral traditional and collective memory of Portugal.

- Crafts
 - [Curated Experiences Portugal](#): Curated Cultural Experiences is an immersive project that promotes a return to the manual through a curatorship of personal and artistic experiences in mainland Portugal and on the islands
 - [Homo Faber](#): A cultural movement centered on creative artisans and guides, helping to champion and support creative artisans worldwide.

Ideation of workshop ideas that can be developed through a cultural perspective include,

- [Gazete Azulejos](#) painting in a garden or the National Library with a representation of historical tiles.
- [Antiquing](#) with an expert guide providing insight into the historical elements of the pieces
- Journalism Workshop with [Liveraria Poetria](#), exploring the significance of poetry in Portuguese literature
- Concert at [Casa da Musica](#), of contemporary or traditional Portuguese music
- Casa da Arquitectura [Tours](#)
- Story Telling with [Senhora Presidenta](#)
- Ceramic workshop with [Brâmica](#)
- [Gur Rugs](#) craft
- ROSA ET AL Townhouse [Traditional Cooking Workshop](#)

With some creativity, the wealth of craftsmanship and the cultural diversity of artisans in the country can become the greatest resource for diversified and unique tourism experiences.

Another way in which a DMC can impact communities is through promotion marketing. Ryan, already an advocate of using storytelling, is in the process of conceptualizing documentary-style videos. To develop the idea, we had a meeting with the videographer and discussed the intention of the project. Through this discussion, we identified the fundamental principles that needed to be portrayed, potential themes, places to highlight, and the elements of the shot that were important to capture. The most important element is that the storyline is told through the perspective of a trusted Catavino craftsman/vendor as they prepare in anticipation of the client's arrival. It can be the client arriving at the winery, accommodation, restaurant, experience, etc. Then supporting imagery of what is unique to the region.

A great reference point to this type of work is the WTTC agenda, is Community Conscious Travel, Launched this May. This is the latest global campaign to raise awareness and inspire action to protect the

delicate balance between resident quality of life, traveler experience, and the environment of the destinations we love. Aiming to help ensure communities understand the positive social impact Travel & Tourism can have and leverage this power to thrive and grow sustainably. (*Community Conscious Travel*, 2024) Campaigns like this are a reminder to tourists that you are traveling in someone else's home. It provides an opportunity for tourists to observe and engage with the destination rather than consume it.

“Travel has become easier to attain and is more accessible. The moment that something is easy, you appreciate it less, and you value it less,” Nikolova says. She also points to what she calls the rise of “fast-food culture”: “Travelers are sliding on the surface of the experience; they are not immersing themselves, not mindfully connecting to the place.” (*Are Travelers Ruining Travel?*, 2023) Part of sustainable tourism requires that the tourist acts with an awareness of their destination and by humanizing the place through the storytelling of a community. By developing this concept, hopefully gain a deeper connection and more respectful interactions with the people and place. It is an invitation for tourists, from the community, to highlight the specialties of the area through the stories of craftsmen, agricultural workers, business owners, artists, hospitality workers, etc, of the destination.

3.2 Fortified Travel Network Development

The tourism industry is a highly competitive marketplace with various levels of opportunity for growth as new types of tourism sectors are emerging constantly. Some of these emerging tourism activities are designed around sports and entertainment (concerts, tennis matches, car races), religious or spiritual practices, educational development, space exploration, medical procedures (surgeries and dental care), wellness retreats, etc. Today, the business volume of tourism equals or even surpasses that of oil exports, food products or automobiles. Tourism has become one of the major players in international commerce and represents at the same time one of the main income sources for many developing countries. This growth goes hand in hand with an increasing diversification and competition among destinations. (*Why Tourism?* - *UN Tourism*, n.d.)

Catavino, being a DMC that focuses primarily on Portugal, creates a limitation on obtaining new clients with the majority of travelers wanting to constantly explore new countries. Catavino understands the need to develop a way of staying relevant and expanding its reach while still staying true to its main purpose and interests of Portugal. Keeping this in mind, the ideation stage of The Fortified Travel Network started in 2020 but was halted due to the pandemic. The Fortified Travel Network will be a group of expat-owned travel companies focused on food and wine, as well as offering the cultural and historical

traditions surrounding it. The participating DMCs will be located around the world and dedicated to offering high-quality travel experiences, sharing knowledge, and exchange of client contacts.

3.2.1 Defining the Vision and Objectives of Fortified Network

Catvino has fundamental principles in the way they choose to operate as a business. The fundamental principles include **respect** for clients, culture, place, and people, developing meaningful **relationships**, **re-investing** in the regions they operate, and creating **sustainable** tourism activities. They would like to operate in a way in which they can exceed their client's expectations while fostering and strengthening the communities they work with. This starts with the participatory desires and actions of the traveler. Haugen proposes travelers ask bigger questions in general. "When it comes to travel, the first question has always been 'where,' and I suggest travelers need to ask not just where' but 'why.' Why are we going somewhere? Instead, Haugen suggests "how," with a twist—How are we going to engage in that experience in a way that helps us fulfill our "why"? One suggestion is for travelers to commit to a tour that helps them get a better sense of place. (*Are Travelers Ruining Travel?*, 2023) A fundamental objective of Catavino, would be to capture and retain clients that are inquisitive enough to understand the very reason for their travel as well as the implications of them on the destination.

The Fortified Travel Network would be international and have DMCs in European wine culture focused countries as well as future incorporation of countries with wine-growing regions in North and South America, Australia, and New Zealand. Eventually include DMCs in countries or regions that have a strong recognition of fine dining and highly sought-after gastronomic or drink traditions. Catavino already has a strong relationship with a Spanish DMC, which would be a founding member. Some other countries that are under consideration to form a baseline group would be Italy, France, Hungary, Croatia, Switzerland, Austria, and California.

3.2.2 Established Criteria & Identify Characteristics of Partners

By developing a network of partnerships with DMC companies in various countries, Catavino can maintain and grow client demand by offering a wide selection of destination packages that align with the Fortified brand. To have the greatest impact, there needs to be cohesive established criteria and an ethos that connects these DMCs. In the instance when a client is referred, they will be reassured that by booking within the Fortified Travel Network brand, their expectations will be met in a similar way to the

experience provided by another DMC. Actor networks become productive coalitions when actors are working together in a strategic, organized, and complementary manner based on a (more or less) division of tasks, roles, and responsibilities within the coalition. (Hartman et al., 2020)

DMC Structural Components

- Expat-owned, English as a first language, and proven expert in the destination.
- Small-sized company with at least 5 employees, ensuring the management of timely communication with clients.
- Business stays professionally relevant in the region and industry through journalism, promotional activities, international partnerships, institutional collaborations, hosting public and private events, certifications, etc.
- Employs native speakers who have familiarity with the country's customs, laws, and regulations.
- One DMC per country. *In certain cases where countries have very diverse regional tourism offers, there will be more than one DMC, such as in the case of France and Italy. The intention is to avoid overlapping competition within the network.*

DMC Ethos

- DMC considers the wider socio-economic and cultural impacts of tourism development on host communities. Following the fundamental principles outlined by Catavino in vision and mission statement. Examples of contributions follow,
 - Contributing to the preservation of traditions or regional culture.
 - Portugal examples: Azulejos workshop, cooking class of traditional dish Leitão, participating in wine harvest with foot treading.
 - International engagement and learning through internship hosting.
 - Provide professional development to their employees.
 - Example: The Sonoma County Tourism DMO offers an Accredited Hospitality Professional program to partners. Five classes covering key areas of Sonoma County and its hospitality economy. Each foundational class will provide our professionals with critical tools for creating authentic engagement with our visitors.

The Foundational Five:

- Power of Tourism
- Natural Environment/Sustainability
- Wineries/AVA's

- Art/History/Culture
- Customer Service/Visitor Safety

(Sonoma County Accredited Hospitality Professional, n.d.)

DMC X Factor

- Tour Offerings
 - Businesses that the DMC is in collaboration with such as accommodations and vendors are always vetted by a qualified staff member.
 - Experiential uniqueness of tours and high level of attention to detail regarding customer preferences and special life events.
 - Wine Tour Example
 - Owner, vintner, wine professional and/or expert guide on tour.
 - Winery has traditional components of the region or innovative ones.
 - Portugal-specific examples would include lagar foot-treading or Talha vinification in Alentejo
 - Availability of interesting offerings for those who do not consume alcoholic beverages.
 - Offering a special vintage (birth year or anniversary).
 - Communication about any dietary restrictions to be provided to hosts in advance.
 - Special access to property (caves, private cellars).
 - Expert Guides to validate qualifications and increase the regional valuation of the trained professionals.
 - Examples
 - Sonoma Accredited Hospitality Professional Program
 - European Federation of Tourist Guide Associations
 - Mosel Culture and Wine Ambassador

DMC Clients

- Satisfaction Acknowledgment
 - Proven success record of tours through reviews from reputable industry professionals and past clients.
 - Bespoke tours are designed to meet the needs and interests of the customer in line with the fundamental principles of Fortified Travel Network ethos.

- Pledge
 - Responsible traveler pledge to be outlined and determined by the founding members of the Fortified Travel Network. Just as the DMCs will have cohesiveness, so too should the clients.

3.2.3 Benefits of Fortified Travel Network

With the Fortified Travel Network, there will be an ongoing creation of benefits as it develops and grows. The key starting benefits will be:

- Client Building and Retention
 - Increased Visibility: By pooling resources, the network can increase the visibility of the DMCs through targeted advertising, participation in travel trade shows, and the development of comprehensive destination marketing materials.
 - Retention: Having a diversified catalog of countries in one branded network will create brand loyalty and shared profit from a rotating client base.
 - Profit sharing: Commissions on the sharing of clients through travel agencies.
 - Fortified Network Ambassador Program: Identify and train dedicated DMC employees to be ambassadors of the network across the world.
- Collaborative Community
 - Newsletter: Monthly email of promotional news, general offers, and branded materials that can be sent out to the comprehensive client list under Fortified Network Brand.
 - Branding Strategy Development: Through value-aligned initiatives, the Fortified Network can be a key stakeholder in steering industry standards.
- Professional Development
 - Quarterly Online Meetings to discuss innovative ideas, industry trends, opportunities for collaboration, set and review KPIs, and quarterly/yearly goals.
 - Yearly meeting trip between companies. Develop lectures, workshops, tours, and opportunities for networking between DMCs and country-specific vendors.

To get the Fortified Travel Network restarted, Ryan has begun discussions with his key partner, a DMC in Spain. To initiate the next steps in its development will require allocating funds, time, and a dedicated individual to propel the program forward into formation. The formal proposal needs to address what type of entity the business should operate under, the completion of a business plan, and bylaws to begin the process of recruiting other DMCs.

4. Conclusion

Tourism as a sector has continued to increase internationally due to what the researcher would call, a quick economic injection into the GDP of a nation or region. This financially lucrative sector often has detrimental effects on a community. It is well known within any sector, financial, agricultural, real estate, general business, etc. that diversification is an important element of sustainable growth. This too is true with tourism, which was painfully apparent during Covid. In tourism, diversification is slightly more nuanced and requires that the essence of the attraction, something less tangible, be maintained. The things that make a place sought-after as a tourist destination, are its unique elements. So, to maintain the intangibles of culture, history, traditions, and community element of the place, the key stakeholders of a region need to develop strategic plans to encourage activities and goals that promote these tourist resources. These key stakeholders include the government, local business owners, DMOs, DMCs, and most importantly the community members who have had a vested interest in a place for their livelihood. In the case of SCT, is an example of a DMO that understands the economic output of a tourist destination will be directly correlated to the success of the people, place, and community in which it operates. The plan entitled 'Destination Stewardship and Resiliency' was brought to fruition by the 80+ stakeholders who are a network of resources within a divergent group of community members. The SCT plan can be used as a benchmark in the tourism industry. As a DMC, Catavino can use elements of the plan to develop, create and implement sustainable tourism activities in Portugal. Additionally, by building out the Fortified Travel Network, Catavino can then use a network of DMCs to create more diversified tourism offers across multiple countries and communities. Encouraging, creating standards, and eventually influencing the implementation of more sustainable tourism activities.

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Dedication

To my family, especially my parents Elaine and Joe DeOliveira, who have always fueled my passions and pursuits with their loving support. And to Gerard Krug, for providing unwavering support and encouragement of my dreams, goals, and ambitions. To my pup Cash for being a loving companion.

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