



Summary of the research report

ROOTS TOURISM AND THE PROMOTION OF ITALIAN AGRI-FOOD PRODUCTS AROUND THE WORLD

A FOCUS ON THE OLIVE OIL SECTOR

Sonia Ferrari, Tiziana Nicotera



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Introduction

Roots tourism and valorization of high quality oil

This research on Roots Tourism originates from the idea of studying more in-depth, besides the phenomenon of the promotion of Italian agricultural and food products, the interest in olive growing activities from a tourism perspective, with specific reference to persons having deep bonds with Italian cultural identity.

Roots Tourism - that we can define as a type of tourism based on the search for one's family roots and on recovering places and traditions - is a topic that the University of Calabria has studied in-depth extensively, with the publication some years ago of the First Report on Roots Tourism in Italy. It is a topic that is of considerable interest to CREA's Research Center specialized in Policy and bioeconomy, that began to analyze the sector and the territorial dynamics of areas with a strong olive growing tradition many years ago.

The survey has been carried out in the context of the project "Oleario. Dove l'Italia lascia il segno" that started in 2021, within the scope of the National Rural Network Program, and has the objective of disseminating knowledge on our olive and oil heritage, enhancing the link between food, agriculture, territory, culture and tradition.

The Oleario project is a joint effort of three CREA - Council for Agricultural Research and Economics - centers, each of which is involved according to its area of competence: the Research Center for Policy and Bioeconomy for socioeconomic and territorial aspects; the Research Center for Olive, Fruit and Citrus growing in Rende for agronomy, biovarietal, chemical, qualitative aspects and the Research Center for Food and Nutrition for health-nutrition aspects. Thanks to the collaboration between researchers of the various Centers, the project benefits from a range of knowledge and skills, that are supplementary and complementary to each other in providing knowledge that is useful for users and beneficiaries of different project deliverables, specifically designed to be used by various target groups.

The Italian olive growing sector is a fundamental sector of our economy, culture and history. The second largest producer worldwide after Spain, Italy is the top consumer in the world, also due to oil's crucial role in our eating patterns and in the Mediterranean diet. Cultural aspects are no less important than economic ones, as is also clear from the composition of the landscape. A surface of more than one million hecta-

res covered by olive trees stretching along the Peninsula offers diversified landscapes; from the gentle hills of Abruzzo and Lucania to the terraces of Liguria and Campania, from the dry stone walls of Puglia and Sicily to Calabria's and Sardinia's hills sloping towards the sea, without discarding Central Italy's typical landscapes associated with olive growing. The diversity of the olive growing landscape has enabled the development and valorization of a rich olive tree biodiversity heritage that is still conserved in situ and used in the production that reaches our dining tables with high quality extra virgin olive oil. Hence, in Italy one must not talk about oil but about oils.

Despite the various points of excellence that have been highlighted and the multi-functional character of the Italian olive growing sector, it still has to compete with other countries. It is therefore necessary to be able to rely on recovery strategies both for renewing planting, innovation and enlargement of varieties that enhance the rich biodiversity, and for the development of positive externalities in terms of landscape, maintenance of cultural and historical elements, environmental quality and countering abandonment.

In this context, olive farms have the opportunity to offer tourist services, an activity that has a twofold advantage, namely income diversification and improved market positioning, and that enables to regenerate territories that are often marginal and characterized by limited production, albeit of note, that safeguard common values and memories. These are the places from where thousands of Italian once emigrated and where nowadays return for their holidays with their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren to discover their roots, recovering memories and searching for emotions.

Roots tourism has a strong emotional component connected with memories that have been experienced and handed down thanks to family stories and those told by persons originally from the same place, in which agricultural and food products play an important role. This is the origin of the idea to study more in depth the relationship between olive oil and roots tourism in a moment in which an increasing attention is given to the latter, that can become an opportunity for agricultural producers, facilitating the recognition of a fair value for top quality products.

Milena Verrascina
Oleario Project Leader

The present work is a summary of the report "Roots Tourism and the promotion of Italian agri-food products around the world. A focus on the olive oil sector" available at the following link
<https://www.reterurale.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/1>

Roots tourism: an opportunity for the development of rural areas

1.1 Research purpose and origin

Sonia Ferrari, Tiziana Nicotera, Milena Verrascina

Roots tourism¹ is generated by emigrants and their descendants who wish to re-connect with their roots by visiting their family's homeland during the holidays. This tourism market segment includes persons who travel because they feel nostalgic and have a strong attachment to their country of origin and wish to maintain a bond with their family history. This attachment is often handed down to children and grandchildren, who become second, third or even fourth generation roots tourists.

They are important visitors for the communities of their homeland, not only due to the tourism demand that they generate, but also because they support the valorization of local products, especially those of the agricultural and food sector. In particular, they can help improve the image of certain *territorial brands*, besides directly purchasing products produced where their family originally came from and promoting them, by word of mouth and thanks to specific entrepreneurial activities. Indeed, they are tourists that are interested in *nostalgic products* and truly become Ambassadors of what is known as *Made in Italy* worldwide. Moreover, "people of Italian descent" can contribute to limit *Italian Sounding's* negative impact. All the above can facilitate exports, stimulate local production, enhance communities' pride, increase the sustainability and attractiveness of particular localities.

Olive oil represents a characteristic value of Italian culture. The olive tree plays a crucial role in our eating habits, in the Mediterranean but also Italian landscape, to the extent of strongly marking its quality and beauty. Given these considerations, it is easy to understand how this product may be at the heart of reflections concerning

¹ It is an important tourism market segment, although it is hard to quantify it in Italy, since roots tourism is not included among the main purposes of a tourism trip by ISTAT and the Bank of Italy. Nevertheless, it is estimated that there are between 60 and 80 million persons of Italian descent worldwide. According to data provided by ENIT, during the period 2010- 2019 more than 10 million tourists traveled to Italy to rediscover their origins, considering their main purpose for traveling that of visiting relatives and friends. It is estimated that they spent more than 5 billion euros.

the economies and development of rural areas.

The results of the survey are designed to contribute to the debate on tools and opportunities offered to territories and agricultural producers, with the purpose of outlining new development models, diversifying the activities of producers and the enjoyment of the rural areas that, over the last thirty years, have undergone significant phenomena related to depopulation, the abandonment of dwellings and of economic activities.

The survey on the relationship between roots tourism and agricultural and food products, with specific reference to olives and oil production, was coordinated by Sonia Ferrari, lecturer in Tourism Marketing and Place Marketing in the Department of Business and Legal Sciences of the University of Calabria, co-author with Tiziana Nicotera of the volume *First Report on Roots Tourism in Italy*² and Principal Investigator, on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, of an international research project on roots tourism, with numerous project partners, including the National University of Mar del Plata and the Universities of Turin and Bari.

Tiziana Nicotera has also participated in the research. She is a teaching assistant at the University of Calabria, consultant and trainer on tourism and place marketing, the valorization of agricultural and food and handmade products, as well as Head of the “Return Tourism” Department within the scope of the Confederazione degli Italiani nel Mondo and Vice President of Borghi AICS Italia.

Anna Lo Presti has participated in the statistical survey and has carried out the statistical analysis, she is a researcher in Methodological Statistics at the University of Turin.

The researchers Milena Verrascina and Barbara Zanetti of CREA’s Research Center for Policy and bioeconomy and Gabriella Lo Feudo of CREA’s Research Center for Olive, Fruit and Citrus growing have covered the aspects of the survey related to territorial economics and the tools for product valorization.

The integration of socioeconomic skills linked to the development of rural areas characterized by traditional crops with the academic competence of the University of Calabria, the latter involved in the in-depth study of Roots Tourism, has enabled the fine-tuning of an analysis methodology, of survey tools and to hold meetings and focus groups with the main stakeholders, at national level up to international level with Italian communities worldwide.

2 Ferrari S., Nicotera T. (2021), *First report on Roots Tourism in Italy*, EGEA, Milan, ISBN 9788823847002

During the survey, various persons, entities and other bodies have collaborated in various capacities, participating in interviews and focus groups and have offered their support for the dissemination of the statistical survey questionnaire. Our special thanks goes to: the Member of Parliament Angelo Sollazzo, the President of CIM (Confederazione degli Italiani nel Mondo) and the representatives of numerous Italians Abroad Association worldwide, besides, among friends and colleagues, Giuseppe Emanuele Adamo, Fabio Carbone, Alessandro Crocco, Elvira Stephanie De Giacomo, Maria Chiara Fabbri, Eleonora Formica, Marina Martello, Marcello Notarianni, Monica Sarpa, Anna Maria Sempreviva, Giuseppe Spinelli and Sergio Stumpo.

Finally, we would like to thank Francesca Baldereschi and Enrico Maria Milič (Slow Food), Fabiola Pulieri (journalist) and Simone Marrucci (Associazione Nazionale Città dell'olio) for the useful food for thought offered on the valorization of the olive and oil heritage from a tourism perspective.

1.2 Roots tourism and promotion of Italian agricultural and food products worldwide

Sonia Ferrari, Tiziana Nicotera

There is a strong connection between the tourism and the food and wine sectors (Hall et al., 2003). Food and wine tourism is a type of *tourism linked to specific interests*, that expresses itself through the journeys that one goes on to get to know and enjoy local flavors (Sánchez-Cañizares e López-Guzmán, 2012; Stephen et al., 2008). It is a tourism market segment that is growing (Garibaldi, 2023; Tsai, 2016). Indeed, nowadays tourists wish to try and enjoy typical local dishes during their travels and food and wine is becoming a first class tourism resource.

Consequently, food represents an increasingly significant element in tourists' experience, that satisfies their growing search for *authenticity* (MacCannell, 1973 and 1976). Often, once they return home, travelers wish to keep in touch with the destination they have visited and its community, particularly if the travel experience has generated a significant kind of *place attachment*. Consequently, when they return to their place of residence they purchase and consume the food that they have discovered during the vacations, promoting it among family members and friends (Hidalgo and Hernández,

2001; Jorgensen and Stedman, 2006; Low and Altman, 1992).

Place attachment to the municipality or region corresponding to one's family roots is deeply felt by roots tourists, who hand it down to their children and grandchildren (Duval, 2004; Ferrari et al., 2022; Ferrari and Nicotera, 2021a and 2021b; Marschall, 2012; Stedman, 2006). Roots tourists show a strong spiritual and emotional involvement with their country of origin (Duval, 2004; Lew and Wong, 2004; Pelliccia, 2012, 2018; Stephenson, 2002; Timothy, 2008) and high levels of *place attachment*, that, at times, expresses itself as nostalgia (Hollinshead, 2004; Hui, 2011; Li and McKercher, 2016). Such feelings result in greater loyalty towards a place (to which one generally returns during vacations and with which one keeps in touch) and the desire to support it, making investments, promoting it as well as its products and generating a positive word of mouth that enhances its image. These are states of mind that also create considerable interest for traditional local agricultural and food products that reflect communities' culture and style. Generally, food and wine is not the main purpose for traveling for this type of tourist, but one of their many interests, that drives them to search for, try and buy, to take home, the typical foodstuffs and dishes of the places they have visited (Ferrari and Nicotera, 2021b, 2015; Weaver et al., 2017).

Thanks to the actions taken by roots tourists, who are aware of, appreciate and promote Italian products worldwide, *Italian Sounding* can be contained.

With reference to oil production, Italy has the greatest number of olive growing farms in Europe, a rich biodiversity, numerous certifications and, finally, it has a high incidence of surfaces covered by organic olive farming. This potential can be increasingly exploited from a tourism perspective. *Extra virgin olive oil*, thanks to its centuries-old history, its ties with the territory and landscape, its health benefits, *is a source of attraction for the consumer-tourist, who is increasingly interested in the history of olive growing and increasingly conscious about the product's health benefits.*

1.3 Food labels, certifications and tools to attract roots tourists

Gabriella Lo Feudo

Italy is a coffer of biodiversity, a real treasure that constitutes the archive of collective culinary memory. Local history is often narrated by unwritten traditions, handed down and often transcribed in the kitchen with the flavors that evoke it (Ca-

stellotti and Lo Feudo, 2020).

PDO, PGI, TSG, PAT (Traditional Agricultural and Food Product) and other registrations promote territories and their material and immaterial landscapes. If traveling to visit new places is important in order to become acquainted with new cultures and habits, sitting at a table to eat, drink and enjoy typical local products helps to get to know that specific territory (Castellotti and Lo Feudo, 2020).

The concept of typical product is associated with the following three characteristics that make the product timeless (Castellotti and Lo Feudo, 2020):

- *Territoriality*, that expresses a strong bond with its place of origin.
- *Taste*, once an attribute that was perceived subjectively, becomes objective thanks to the legitimization provided by certification and, in the case of EVOO, also by the official acknowledgment conferred by the tasting panel.
- *Tradition*, that highlights a bond with history and the past. History that becomes a projection of the future.

The most well-known registrations included in the *Reg.* EU no 1151/2012 include:

PDO – Protected Designation of Origin

Indicates the origin of a product, identifying it with a specific place or, in exceptional cases, a Country, whose quality and characteristics are essentially or exclusively due to a particular geographical environment, including its natural and human factors, whose production, processing and preparation take place in the defined geographical area.

PGI – Protected Geographical Indication

Indicates where an agricultural or food product originates identifying it with a given quality, reputation or another characteristic attributable to its geographical origin. At least one of the production, processing and/or preparation steps will take place in the defined geographical area.

TSG – Traditional Specialty Guaranteed

Introduced by the European Union, the label is designed to safeguard specific products characterized by a traditional composition or produced according to a traditional *production method*.

PAT – Traditional Agricultural and Food Product

These products are included in a special list, created by the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies with the collaboration of the Regions. The Ministry updates and publishes the list yearly, as well as disseminating it in Italy and abroad.

The food labels provide information on the history of the food, its origin, its typical characteristics, its ingredients and its nutritional value. Nowadays, many people have a desire to purchase food in a responsible and informed manner. Consequently, interpreting and deciphering the writing on packages is crucial in order to have a responsible approach to our daily diet. Food labels are the only tool consumers have to find their way around the shelves of large retailers. Being capable of reading them is a right but also a duty (Lo Feudo, 2016).

The European Union believes that it is important to develop a sense of responsibility that the citizen/consumer should feel when purchasing food and, although it is aware that problems linked to unhealthy eating should be mainly solved by an accurate nutrition education that starts at school and spreads to all meeting places it considers the label an important tool that one should be informed about and use when purchasing food.

Regulation EU no 1169/2011 of the European Parliament on the provision of food information to consumers is oriented towards consumer protection and informed consumption and has revolutionized the approach to labels and the information provided to consumers, harmonizing existing rules and focusing on protecting people's health and wellbeing. A novelty, included in the preamble, is the label's accessibility, hence it will not only be informative and protective, but also ethical and inclusive.

The olive and oil supply chain that is perceived and known by roots travelers owes most of its "appeal" to the Italians Abroad Association that, besides keeping food and wine traditions alive with festive events and fairs, prizes and dedicated weeks, stimulate the desire to go on vacation and to try the products of their homeland.

During the research there was the opportunity to get to know and appreciate several of these associations, and in Chile and Argentina it was observed that there is an enormous bond, an affection and a 'saudade'³ for Italy.

1.4 Roots tourism and its contribution to the development and dynamism of rural areas

Barbara Zanetti

Starting from the previous century, rural areas in Italy have experienced signifi-

³ In Portuguese and Brazilian, *saudade* is a feeling similar to nostalgia and melancholy for something that has been lost but lives in one's memories.

cant depopulation and emigration phenomena, in some cases to the extent of jeopardizing the existence of some communities and small municipalities. Nevertheless, despite the distance, in many of these areas the ties with relatives and acquaintances who have emigrated have been kept alive over the years thanks to both the relationships started and kept with the Italian communities and Italians Abroad Associations, and to roots tourists, whose journeys are driven by the search for a stronger bond with the country of origin.

The desire to get to know their family origins comes true thanks to tourists' wish to truly regain and make their own their homeland's identity heritage thanks to narration and direct contact with the locals. In essence, during their journey roots tourists do not intend to witness what the place has to offer but want to actively engage with it, by relating with local communities, with the nature, history and traditions of the place. It is a demand for experiential travel that in the case of roots tourism is characterized by the presence of a strong emotional component connected with memories, that they have experienced or heard about, linked to places, traditions and food.

On their part, rural areas meet root tourists' demand, being on the one hand able to rely on a rich territorial capital (environment, culture, cuisine, traditions, etc.) that constitutes and characterizes each specific area (Osservatorio europeo, 2000; OECD, 2001; Belletti G. and Berti G., 2001; Camagni R., 2008; Belletti G., 2010) and on the other, on the knowledge of history, of places and traditions safeguarded by the local population. Ecotourism, food and wine tourism, wine tourism and olive oil tasting tourism, environmental, cultural and wellness tourism, etc. are only some of the types of rural tourism on offer, whose shared characteristic is the experiential approach. Indeed, tourists have the chance to experience a holiday getting to know the territory, its history and traditions with a sustainability perspective and in an absolutely non-standardized manner (EPRS, 2023).

Given the strong fragmentation existing in rural areas between economic, social, cultural and environmental components and between local players, designing a rural offer for tourists requires careful planning aimed at integrating territorial capital components and combining events (fairs, markets, feasts, exhibitions, etc.) and activities (various types of hiking, horse riding, wellness, culture, etc.) that stretch further than hospitality and catering.

The involvement of local players, thanks to a sound information and awareness campaign on the opportunities offered by the implementation of an integrated touri-

sm offer, is of crucial importance for the valorization of local resources and requires accurate governance systems in order to guarantee the provision of high quality, responsible, long-lasting services that are also capable of satisfying tourists' needs.

When planning the tourism offer, local authorities are normally expected to ensure the availability in their territory of public services and infrastructure that permit tourist flows (roads, car parks, transport) and their stay (health facilities, banks, pharmacies) in rural areas (Paisian M., 2015). However, their involvement also becomes significant also for planning of cultural events and, in particular, for the organization of events capable of strengthening, through different forms of art, knowledge of the territory (photography exhibitions, folk music concerts, video projection, etc.).

In rural areas the main activities revolve around farming and its traditions including, for example, local communities' participation in specific phases of agricultural production such as wheat harvesting, fruit picking, grape harvesting, olive harvesting and the processing of some products such as preparation of tomato puree, cured meats, bread and so on, that in the past were truly collective or family festive occasions.

Tourists' experiential enrichment is also supported thanks to the involvement of non agricultural local enterprises such as handicraft enterprises, catering companies and tourism services providers. The tourists, thanks to the organization of guided tours or experiential itineraries in the handicrafts and local cuisine sectors, get to know and learn to appreciate and understand the value of the products of local tradition.

Qualitative research

Sonia Ferrari, Tiziana Nicotera

2.1 Methodology

During the first step of the research, following a review of available literature, an exploratory qualitative survey has been carried out in order to study the research topic from a general perspective, without focusing on specific aspects.

The initial exploratory survey has enabled to provide insights for the following steps of the research, in particular for the statistical survey carried out during a later phase of the work.

It was decided that in-depth interviews of a heterogeneous sample of privileged interlocutors would be carried out, since they have been considered an appropriate data collection method, also because exploratory studies are less structured. Moreover, four focus groups have been organized and managed. Interviewees belong to different categories, including roots tourists, representatives of Italian associations worldwide and in Italy, public administrators, food and wine producers (in particular oil producers), representatives of institutions, experts and travel agents.

The sample has been selected with the “snowball” non-probability sampling method. The semi-structured interviews lasted about 50-60 minutes each, while focus groups lasted about 2 hours. Interviews and focus groups have been conducted by the researchers, in-person or remotely, in Italian, English or Spanish, with a different content for each category of interviewee. Interviews and focus groups have been held in January, February, March, April and May 2023, they have been recorded and subsequently transcribed. The results have been reworked on the basis of the tackled topics, to cover the range of possible answers.

Based on purposive sampling, 40 individuals belonging to different categories have been selected.

Interviews and focus groups are structured on six main topics, addressed and covered, albeit from different perspectives, with all the types of interviewees, namely:

- **Roots tourism and valorization of local agricultural and food products, particularly of olives and oil**

Subtopics:

- Awareness, knowledge and consumption of Italian agricultural and food products, in particular oil, by roots tourists.
- The possible ensuing impact of roots tourism on the sale and export of typical local agricultural and food products, in particular olives and oil, as well as on the image of various *territorial brands* and *nostalgic products*.
- Initiatives taken abroad by producers and/or institutions to promote Italian agricultural and food products, in particular olive products.
- The possible interest by the community of people of Italian descent to benefit from specialist training in Italian olive and oil production.

- **Food and wine tourism and olive oil tasting tourism: links with roots tourism in Italy**

Subtopics:

- Food and wine tourism and olive oil tasting tourism: tourists' characteristics; products presently available in Italy and abroad; ongoing trends; operator's levels of awareness; roots tourists' expectations in these areas.
- The offer of tourism experiences linked to the olive and oil sector with specific reference to the roots tourism market segment.
- The connection between food and wine and oil tasting tourism with roots tourism and, more broadly, with emigrants and their descendants.
- The possible impact of the knowledge and/or consumption of Italian agricultural and food products, especially olives and oil, on travel choices and the demand for food and wine tourism and olive oil tasting tourism.

- **Italian Sounding**

Subtopics:

- Awareness about the phenomenon and interest in the topic shown by persons of Italian descent living abroad and by roots tourists.
- The possibility to contain the phenomenon through actions taken by roots tourists and, more generally, by Italians living abroad.
- *Italian Sounding* in the olive and oil sector..

- **Territorial brands, labels and quality certifications**

Subtopics:

- The importance of labels, territorial brands, certifications, related to agricultural and food products (particularly olives and oil) for roots tourists and for the other Italians living abroad.
- The possible use of the QR Code in order to obtain information on olive orchards, on supply chains, etc.

- **The role of Italians Abroad Associations**

Subtopics:

- Keeping food and wine traditions alive in foreign countries.
- Possible collaborations as promotion/distribution channels for roots tourism and Italian agricultural and food products.

- **Demand-side and supply-side training on Italian olive oil**

Subtopics:

- Training courses on hospitality management for tourists, for Italian oil producers and for specialized profiles providing assistance.
- Providing training/information to roots tourists through tasting and the illustration of oil's characteristics and health benefits.
- Training activities held abroad for consumers and operators of Italian descent.
- Teaching at school and awareness-raising activities for the general public in Italy.

Data analysis has been carried out using an inductive approach. The data was managed manually, analyzing content by topic, based on the above-mentioned topics.

2.2 Interview results by topic

2.2.1 Roots tourism and valorization of local agricultural and food products, particularly of olives and oil

Almost all interviewees declare that roots tourists undoubtedly appreciate typical local products (also agricultural and food) and purchase them, to subsequently promote them once they return home. In particular, “olives and oil products are greatly

appreciated by the Italian diaspora and their descendants”, as one of the interviewees, a tourism researcher, explains. Nevertheless, there is still plenty to be done to promote and facilitate exports.

Root tourists’ perspective is the one that best expresses the link between Italian origins and Italian food, regardless of whether it is consumed in the homeland or in the country where they are presently resident, as a second generation Australian woman of Italian descent attests: “The journey is the history of the bond with the land, because the land communicates the food. For me it is emotional, it is an easy access to by roots. When I taste, I do not taste food, but memories, recollections, stories, love, affection, positive things. It is not physical nourishment, but an emotional one. I feel like myself, it is me. They are flavors that are a part of me”. People of Italian descent often live traditional Italian cuisine in their homes and this helps them to avoid a clear separation, but, on the other hand, to feel a strong emotional and nostalgic involvement: “It is something deeper” the interviewed Australian continues her story “because when I went to school, there was Australian food and when I went home after school, I entered in Calabria. When I opened the door of the house, my mother had baked the bread, there was the aroma of bread, bread and butter, bread and oil. My mother and father also had a vegetable garden, only immigrants had one. When my Australian friends came to play at my house, they thought it was strange that there was not a lawn, but a vegetable garden. I lived this link between the vegetable garden and the kitchen. I knew what we would eat in the evening because it came from the vegetable garden. The food was reassuring at home”. This interviewee who, besides being a roots tourist, organizes and accompanies travelers from Australia on food and wine tours in Calabria, declares that she has never had experiences linked to oil during her numerous travels in Italy, nor has she offered them to her visitors, although she seemed extremely interested in trying these types of experiences in future.

About oil and a visit to an oil mill and adjoining olive orchards, the interviewee declares: “Tasting the oil, immediately after having picked the olives, has a very positive and emotional impact on visitors, because guests often associate the oil’s aroma with a memory, hence the experience is different compared to that of other tourists”. With regard to first-hand accounts provided by travelers and real life experiences, an oil producer mentions: “The last guests who came here have written to us that the experience cannot be quantified in terms of monetary value, it has an emotional value”.

Clearly, according to all the sector technicians who were interviewed, the heart of

the experience is tasting. They believe that when one tastes a high quality extra virgin olive oil one instantly perceives the difference between it and common oil, that does not in the least have the same characteristics at all, such as aroma, color, organoleptic attractiveness, the sour and spicy taste typical of extra virgin oil.

Compared to other tourists, roots travelers search for the connection with the territory to a greater extent, because it is linked to a sentimental and intimate matter. The search for the bond between one's own origins or family origins and an agricultural and food product such as oil, through tasting, can be contained in these observations made by a sector specialist: "As soon as one tastes, there is an immediate perception of the territory, the producers do not sell the oil bottle, they sell all their territory inside the bottle, because it contains the aromas, the history, the differences between more than 530 types of olive trees and, therefore, of varieties throughout Italy. Our biodiversity is self-evident, we do not have only one standard product, each producer has its own, and its story is told inside the bottle. To describe a territory to those who have not lived there, but have heard their relatives talk about it, means giving them the opportunity to experience it much more directly. It means to offer an experience that goes beyond the sentimental aspect, that tourists take away with them wherever they live in the world".

The experience abroad with some Italians, also those who have emigrated recently, proves how much work there is still to do in order to illustrate the characteristics of Italian extra virgin olive oil, as related by an interviewee: "In Stockholm, they wanted to convince me that the cold extraction of rapeseed oil, that came from seeds and not from fruits, would improve its quality that has always been considered poor".

Generally, the bond with the homeland is strong and consequently influences tastes, purchasing preferences and consumer preferences related to food products. A roots tourist says: Calabria remains forever in our hearts. Even if we are used to living here and we're doing great, our roots are there. Our children and grandchildren live here. Our children has been to Italian lessons and we speak to them in the dialect of Calabria. We are here but our roots are there.

According to an oil sector expert who has worked on some projects involving Embassies, one can sense that the consumption of Italian products, particularly Italian oil that represents 2% of world oil consumption, is extremely limited, although they represent a memory, family history. Moreover, one must distinguish between two types of Italians living abroad. On the one hand, there are those who have had the opportunity to reach a certain status, also economic, who are more curious, taste

Italian products, but who then purchase what is commonly known as olive oil from large retailers. On the other hand, there are those who have left as laborers and who have not had other opportunities to fulfill themselves, for whom there is always a willingness to purchase Italian products, but using available sales channels. The interviewee declares: “I have had problems explaining to some relatives, who argued that there (at large retail stores) Italian products cost less than in Italy, that they only sell counterfeit products”.

In Argentina, like in Chile and in other foreign countries, numerous initiatives are taken by various entities, including Embassies, ITA, Consulates, Italian Cultural Institutes, Italians Abroad Associations (often financed by the Italian Regions of origin), Slow Food, to promote awareness of Italian agricultural and food products, besides the Mediterranean diet and Italian cuisine. Nowadays, according to some interviewees, especially the representatives of Italians Abroad Associations, also social media influencers play an important role.

A tourism sector specialist explains: “Italians living abroad have a strong bond with Italian food, who for them is a way to reconnect with their roots. For example, in some areas of Brazil, there are many recipes of Italian origin, clearly modified. In Brazil the large Italian community has greatly influenced many culinary habits and all Brazilians eat pasta with tomato sauce on Sundays. Pasta consumption is higher than that of European countries”. She continues “However, this does not prompt them to promote territories and does not catalyze a type of food and wine tourism, because there is a lack of operators who take care of inbound tourism”. A food marketing expert says: “Cuisine is one of the elements that survive even after the Italian language disappears. For them (Italians living abroad) cooking recipes, having the opportunity of meeting at family lunches is one of the fundamental elements that continues to make them feel Italian”. However, she also explains that Italians living abroad mainly purchase products they find in stores and supermarkets, and it is therefore crucial to manage to export, distribute products and make them available.

A representative of an overseas commercial institution adds: “Roots tourists are not great promoters of Italian agricultural and food products. When they go back, if there is some product that can be found in Argentina they buy it, but this is not an export stimulus”. He explains that also food and wine tourism does not stimulate exports, while “there is an impact when the chefs, who carry out an important role with great promotional effects, come here. This is a situation that one can consider export stimulation. They are normally organized by the Regions, who enter into an

agreement with an association here in Argentina, and they call the chefs who bring all their products. Also, the Embassies participate”.

Also, a representative of an Italians Abroad Association confirms that roots tourism can catalyze the export of typical Italian agricultural and food products. According to her: “There is certainly a correlation between the two phenomena, because there are even contacts that have been established with local producers. For example, an oil producers cooperative of Molfetta sends oil to the USA, precisely thanks to the contacts it has established with emigrants or their children or grandchildren. The search for local products exists”. She continues: “It is definitely easier to export to places where there are communities of Italians living abroad”.

However, there is the problem of limited production and of the fragmentation of production, that reduces Italy’s ability to export. A producer who also has a multi-building hotel declares that “So, there is not much point in focusing only on exports, but one must also think about the impact in terms of food and wine tourism”. Indeed, as a small producer he has been penalized because an important foreign department store chain would have liked to buy his oil but asked for monthly production volumes that could not be achieved by the interviewee’s company.

A roots tourist and numerous representatives of Italians Abroad Associations say that, regrettably, in some distant countries imports are still modest. A member of the association mentions: “Oil producers should have the capacity to export, otherwise everything boils down to a souvenir that one buys at the end of the holiday and takes home. There are things, such as raw seafood, that one cannot take home, even though someone has tried to do so”.

With specific reference to olive oil, in some countries, like for example Brazil and Argentina, Italian extra virgin olive oil is greatly appreciated and considered a high quality product, but it is a niche product, for *anelite*, because it is extremely expensive. Many initiatives taken by ITA, Chambers of Commerce and so on, promote Italian agricultural and food products abroad, but they are sporadic, often repeated yearly, not part of a strategic program nor closely linked to food and wine tourism.

2.2.2 Links between roots tourism and food and wine tourism and olive oil tasting tourism

Most interviewees believe that ancestral tourists are extremely interested in food and wine and experiences and in purchasing agricultural and food products while traveling, but this is not the main purpose of the journey.

Obviously, thanks to the increase in international communication flows, facilitated in the last decades by the new media, nowadays many Italian agricultural and food products are better known and distributed worldwide than in the past, besides being consumed to a greater extent by a segment of customers with medium-high incomes who are interested in high-quality products. “This has occurred also after the spread of more healthy lifestyles, in particular what is known as the *Mediterranean diet*, recognized as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2013, that has stimulated the demand for natural products” says one of the experts that were interviewed.

According to a sector specialist, agricultural producers have understood that diversification, with the integration of production and hospitality, is strategic and can compensate income loss on the agricultural and food production side.

An oil producer who also manages a multi-building hotel explains that: “Roots tourists are interested in tasting, etc., but they do not come here only for that purpose. No tourist comes to Italy for the wine or the oil (unless traveling for work), but they all come for the experience, to get to know the culture, the food in general, the music, the history”. He continues: “In order to generate the stimulus to travel, that may also come from a product, I give small size oil and honey items as farewell gifts. When I take them around, I try to convey to them the worth of this territory and of local products and at the end I invite them to become Ambassadors of the territory, so that they may promote them when they go back home”.

On the other hand, there is who, as tour operator, offers food and wine itineraries from Australia that have cultural connotations also attributed to food, as contained in this part of an interview, that illustrates the various experiences that groups of tourists have: ‘It is the history of populations. For example, when we go to Civita, we find arbëreshë history’.

When asked if a journey can strengthen the knowledge of the product that results in its subsequent purchase in the country of residence or whether the knowledge of a product may motivate to travel to see where the product comes from, a roots traveler replies: “I believe that they are both true. To say to truth, I have always go to know a product while I was in Italy; I have learned, I have seen how one can eat it and after I have brought it here or purchased it here. If you talk to me about olive oil and of the experience, I find it interesting. There is a *wine route*, there may also be an *oil route*’. We ask the interviewee: “Would you leave to attend an oil tasting and information course in Italy?” and her reply is: “If the tickets were

not this expensive, I would come”.

According to a food marketing expert, roots tourism is tightly interwoven with food and wine tourism. “But”, she says, “I believe this occurs provided that the process is managed, because otherwise it all becomes episodic, left to chance, to the moment, to the individual. In order for it to become structured and a driving force for development, it must become a coordinated process, setting the date, like for marriages, supervised by someone”.

Knowledge and perception of the product may improve if oil mills are open to hospitality and also engage in oil tourism. This is what a sector specialist believes, stating: “In general, at the supermarket one does not understand that oil derives from olives”. Besides Italian consumers’ limited awareness of high-quality products, a project manager that was interviewed pointed out that often it is the same oil producer that has a poor knowledge of these topics and suffers from a lack of strategic vision of foreign markets, indicating that training and refresher courses are crucial.

A person responsible for a local association, who proposes experiences linked to oil and food and wine as a whole, illustrates the workshops offered on the premises of various agricultural producers in the area, that also take into account the seasonality of production: “We offer the dairy farms event, because one can milk the cows, with the production of cheese, of provola cheese, of mozzarella cheese. Then we hold another workshop to learn how to make tomato sauce. Finally, we present the event *From the vegetable garden to the table*, in April we have picked strawberries, we have prepared a dish with broad beans”.

Among the experiences, besides those that are already offered by some agricultural producers, there are new workshop proposals, that follow the trends and exploit digital tools, as one operator suggests: “In addition to the tasting and snack in the olive orchard experience, we could offer meditation in the olive orchard, what is known as *mindfulness* or *forest bathing*, that in this case would become immersion in the olive orchard. Thinking about roots tourists, besides the offer on site, one could consider using technology, for example the metaverse, reproducing the environment of the olive orchard, inside which people could practice yoga with musical accompaniment. In this way, roots tourists, but not only them, could continue to come into contact, albeit virtually, with that environment at any time. We will have meta olive orchards in the wake of meta villages”.

About the possibility that a journey may be stimulated by a product like oil, due to the curiosity and interest it generates, besides the desire to get to know the farm

and the place of production, one of the interviewees, a tour operator, makes a distinction: “In Calabria no, in Tuscany yes. A bit like investments have been made in films on wine or on chocolate, one should also invest on the oil product. It is a matter of creating trends”.

Opinions differ, as a producer’s reflection demonstrates: “In our area there is a very strong oil culture, indeed Argentinians and Brazilians of Italian descent show curiosity about visiting olive orchards, seeing the difference between young and centuries-old plants”.

In any case, the fact that a product comes from one’s homeland often determines the purchasing decision about which product to buy and which destination to visit made by roots tourists. On this subject, an oil producer says: “These tourists are 100% interested in agricultural and food products and the associated tourism. By linking food and wine tourism to the roots one strikes gold. The fact that the product is local makes the difference. It is taken home by roots tourists to introduce it, showing pride in their territory of origin. People who arrive may be later enticed and come back thanks to the products. Those who opt for the tasting experience in the olive orchard buy that oil for the rest of their lives and become *brand ambassadors* of the product and also of the territory”.

Concerning oil tourism, an oil sector operator highlights a specific problem, saying: “In order to make investments a minimum size is required. It is the same for wine. Small producers do not have the economic resources or the staff or profiles that push in that direction. In any case, the two things, production and tourism, are a good match”. While in some countries the oil production industry is more concentrated, in Italy it is more fragmented. We were told, by a representative of Italians Abroad Association, that “In Chile, where the tradition of producing olive oil is recent, it was started by large producers. The owners of vineyards and olive oil producers were not small producers, they were cooperatives that subsequently merged. Generally, they were people with large amounts of capital, who have facilitated the development of the territory, because they were also interested in generating tourism. Chile developed agritourism at a very early stage. As the size of wine-producing and oil-producing estates began to grow and have started to support the development of the territory, a tourism linked to these activities was born, without any knowledge of the concept”.

However, according to some of the interviewees, to promote food and wine tourism for ancestral visitors there is in any case the need for centralized control, a project

shared by public and private operators, with joint coordination, something that has not occurred in most of the territories.

2.2.3 Italian Sounding

The interviewee's opinion on this subject is that the role that persons of Italian descent can play in helping to counter *Italian sounding* depends on the roots tourists category that is considered. A hotel manager says that "Some are interested in food and are well versed, others are interested but are not well versed, others are not particularly interested".

Many people think that the mere interest in Italian agricultural and food products is not enough to fight against the harmful phenomenon of *Italian Sounding*. An expert explains that "Specific highly focused communication campaigns should be run, targeting the above-mentioned segments of tourists, who should act as ambassadors of *Made in Italy*. Cinema and audiovisual industries, as well as Consulates and Italians Abroad Association, through their cultural and commercial activities, could be agents for this change. Moreover, an expert explains that: "Roots tourists should verify what is true and what is not. There are things that do not exist in Italy. I always give the example of spaghetti with meatballs. I am fighting a crusade against fettuccine Alfredo made with an Alfredo sauce that is very famous abroad. In Italy they do not exist, despite the fact that some people say that the recipe comes from. If they come here they realize. However, the process should be directed territorially".

A producer clarified that entrepreneurs and institutions should have primary responsibility for countering the phenomenon. He says that "This ought to be done also using traceability, new technologies, certifications (DECO (Municipal Designations of Origin), DOC (Controlled Designation of Origin), PGI), that increase the intrinsic value of the product in terms of communication". The interviewee suggests that a protected niche should be created for local products through these tools, if the territory is well preserved, avoiding relying on large retailers as sales channels. He explains that "In this way a market for high-quality products is created, with *block chain-based* traceability". He continues: "On my oil packaging there is a QR Code that provides a range of information: day of harvesting, of milling and of bottling, for whom the product has been bottled, etc.".

Many other people believe that *Italian Sounding* could be countered thanks to new technologies that enable traceability. Nowadays there is a greater awareness

of products' authenticity, although many still cannot distinguish between different certifications. An expert explains that "Traceability, can be useful to identify the geographical area of origin and this can generate tourism activity linked to food and wine".

It is important to respect traditions and authenticity. An expert illustrates an interesting case, from Brazil: "Nowadays, pizza, in the absence of control, has undergone a transformation. There is pizza with papaya and other variations. Nobody has defended pizza's original characteristics. The introduction of product regulations, as was done four years ago for *margherita*, has facilitated the sale of many products of Italian origin, from Caputo flour to high quality products of important producers. Brazilians have noticed the difference between the pizza that was made ten years ago and the one that is prepared today, starting from leavening. Today's consumers demand higher quality but matched with more information and training provided to operators, since, for example, previously pizza makers did not know the difference between various leavening processes".

Something similar is also happening in the oil sector, where in some territories training courses and tasting events have been launched targeted not only at sector operators but also at the public.

In any case, some say that promoting our country's products abroad, especially among persons of Italian descent, helps counter *Italian Sounding*.

2.2.4 The importance of labels, territorial brands and quality certifications

All interviewees agree that they are important communication tools, that have a strong impact on agricultural and food products' image, in particular olives and olive oil.

A specialist explains that "There are plenty of examples worldwide of territorial brands and certifications that are truly tools that guarantee the quality of raw materials and of processed products". Moreover, a representative of a cultural association adds,

"Territories are increasingly promoted together with their products". A representative of an Italians Abroad Association says: "For example, interestingly over the last 3-4 years, Neapolitan pizza has not been promoted on its own, but distinguishing it from American pizza, that is known as *pizza veloce* (*pizza dough made with*

rapid-rise yeast). They have also started to show Naples' territory. For this reason, the *verace pizza napoletana* (*real Neapolitan pizza*) brand promotes the product and the territory, something that was not done previously, perhaps due to prejudice against the South of Italy".

But what is the territorial brand's role? According to an expert "It is certainly important also as a relationship collector, in order to create networks of producers, and to generate awareness of knowledge and skills related to product processing". In fact, she agrees with a producer that thanks to territorial brands "sometimes products become destinations".

A roots tourist says that regrettably there is very little knowledge of Italian products outside Italy. He says that "More ought to be done to make people living abroad aware of products and territories, also to ensure that brands are reliable and not managed by organized crime. Information is crucial, also to fight against *Italian Sounding*. As regards oil, it often comes from Italy, but the olives come from other countries".

An Australian of Italian origin declares that she does not trust oil that is generically called Italian, given the great scandals on this subject and states: 'I keep away from *Italian oil* or *Italian style*. There is a problem with the information on the labels. You are stricter in Italy, what is written must be correct, while here there is a lack of rules. I look for the producer's address and sometimes I do not realize where the product comes from because, for example they put CS for Cosenza. In Australia we do not know what CS means, also Italian Regions should be illustrated and specified better".

2.2.5 The role of Italians Abroad Associations

Since many people of Italian origin are members of some of these associations, some representatives were interviewed who are aware of their behaviours, preferences and collect their requests. Moreover, the associations have an important role in keeping alive in the current place of residence numerous Italian traditions and in promoting our country's culture from every angle, including food and wine. On this basis, the interviewees, who are interested in roots tourism and oil production in various capacities, have been asked some questions, to look into whether the associations presently or potentially represent a channel to promote the roots tourism-Italian agriculture and food combination.

Generally, there does not seem to be any evidence of ongoing collaboration to promote roots tourism through associations, perhaps also because often the associations' role is underrated. Only one of the interviewees mentions a producer from Calabria who operates with associations in Germany and Scandinavia. However, the idea is greatly accepted.

It is one way to publicize an Italian agricultural and food product and promote the related import by a foreign country, but also future travel in order to gain more in-depth direct knowledge of the product, it can be linked to events organized by the associations, that strongly focus on food and wine. One association representative mentions that oil or the tasting of Italian oil or oil preserved products have not been promoted during these events and illustrates which products are on the other hand considered during such events: 'Each Region covers something that belongs to its typical cuisine, especially pasta, for us always the *turdilli* from Calabria, we have also spoken about hot chili peppers, about '*nduja* and the red onion'.

Indirectly, the qualitative survey and the statistical survey illustrated below can also perform the task of raising awareness on the topic, on the purpose of assessing associations as a possible tool to facilitate the promotion of travel to Italy and the purchase of Italian agricultural and food products like oil.

2.2.6 Demand-side and supply-side training on Italian olive oil

The training topic is introduced by the exploratory survey that is carried out to understand whether there is an interest in benefiting from more or less structured and specialist training on cuisine and agricultural and food products. The interest may vary depending on the target audience, that is Italians living abroad as simple consumers of experiences and products (oils and oil products) or as entrepreneurs/organizations interested in business activities (import/export, restaurants, producers, event planners abroad, etc.).

Another aspect arose during the survey, namely training designed for operators of agricultural farms providing hospitality, as well as for future operators in school environments. This is an aspect that was not taken into account when formulating the initial hypotheses and has emerged thanks to in-depth interviews. The lack of training targeted to agricultural producers is indicated as a gap that ought to be filled to carry out the joint promotion of tourism and food and wine.

A representative of the Oil Tourism Movement asserts: "One often thinks that

training means training Panel Leaders, but it is not so. The training is always carried out when we go round to promote our products. The characteristics of a high quality oil is the result of an excellent balance between sourness, tingling and aroma. People prefer sweet oils, because in the past they have been accustomed to eating rectified oil. What we explain to our customers is that the sourness and tingling are synonymous with quality”.

Tasting itself is part of the training. An interviewed expert explains “Differently from wine, nobody invites you to drink a glass of oil. A tasting event lasts 30-60 minutes. It is considered a nuisance, because one gets dirty, it is greasy. Some training must be provided but it should be adequate because often, compared with wine, in the case of oil an immediate evaluation must be made of the difference between buying a normal supermarket olive oil and an extra virgin olive oil”. An expert who was interviewed argued that tourism is different from agriculture and that operators who would like to engage in this activity do not know what to do and, therefore, training becomes crucial.

According to an expert, whoever conducts a tasting experience must be a trained person, capable of proficiently explaining the product that is being tasted, but also of telling the story of his/her farm and family. She mentions: “A training that is inadequate not only in terms of tasting, when preparing producers to talk about oil, but also in terms of hospitality. At the beginning it may be sufficient at family level, but then one must improve, because others progress, also outside Italy, like in Spain, Portugal, Greece and now also Jordan. One must answer the phone and talk to American tourists and write e-mails in English. Also roots tourists who want to gain a more advanced knowledge of products prepare themselves before they leave, when they arrive they already have some information, we have to welcome them in the best possible manner”. According to the expert, in many Regions, such as Calabria, there are very few producers who can provide oil-related hospitality and one must take steps in order not to disappoint expectations.

Statistical survey

Sonia Ferrari, Anna Lo Presti, Tiziana Nicotera

3.1 Purpose and methodology

The main purpose of the statistical analysis is to investigate the extent to which root travelers of Italian origin are interested in Italian food and wine and agricultural and food products, in particular those of the olive and oil sector. Hence, the subject matter of the study is the possible correlation between roots travel in Italy and the purchase, consumption and promotion among friends and acquaintances of Italian agricultural and food products and cuisine, both during the stay in Italy and after the journey (import from Italy and/or purchase in the foreign country, respect of traditional Italian cuisine, etc.). The research has also investigated the topic of a possible role that roots tourists may have in countering *Italian Sounding*, that negatively affects many Italian food and wine products, such as olive oil.

The survey also aims to understand whether high-quality Italian food and wine products may be a driving force for roots travel, that is to become a purpose that may push people of Italian descent to travel to their homeland.

Survey results are expected to respond to the following research questions:

- What is the level of *place attachment* that is the strength of the bond that roots tourists feel towards their homeland?
- Do roots tourists express their bond with their homeland also through their interest in Italian food and wine (agricultural and food products and typical cuisine), and, specifically in olive oil?
- What is the level of knowledge acquired by roots tourists on Italian olive oil and on the Mediterranean diet and how strong is their possible desire to gain more in-depth knowledge on the subject by taking training courses or through other initiatives related to oil culture, its special features and its health properties?
- Does the decision to purchase Italian olive oil only depend on the perceived quality or also on emotional aspects and the link with one's origins?

- Do Italian food and wine products, among which olive oil, represent a possible reason to undertake roots tourism by people of Italian descent?
- What is the level of satisfaction of Italian communities worldwide related to their olive oil-related experiences during roots traveling and/or to what extent are they interested in having them or repeating them in future?
- How important are labels, territorial brands and certifications of Italian olive oil for roots tourists?
- What role may persons of Italian origin living around the world have/may have in countering *Italian Sounding* that negatively affects Italian olive oil?

The questionnaire used in the statistical survey to acquire information has been structured considering the results of the previous exploratory survey conducted through personal interviews and focus groups with *stakeholders* and different categories of individuals, who have provided interesting insights and interpretations of the phenomenon (Ferrari et al., 2022; Ferrari and Nicotera, 2020).

The target population of the statistical analysis consists in roots tourists, that is Italian emigrants and their descendants who live abroad and have traveled at least once to Italy⁴. The survey has been conducted using a structured questionnaire, with mainly closed-ended questions, filled in by the respondents, available online in Italian, English, Spanish and Portuguese. The questionnaire was anonymous and voluntary⁵.

In order to limit possible sampling bias, the questionnaires have been distributed through diversified channels. A first channel was represented by the Confederazione degli Italiani nel Mondo and by the associations of Italians in various foreign countries, who have used available tools to distribute the questionnaire among associates and their families (direct contacts, newsletters, social media pages, in-person meetings, etc.). In order to reach individuals who were not members of associations of Italians living abroad, the survey has been advertised by organizing various initiatives such as webinars, conferences, round table discussions and various events, broadcasts on digital channels, contacts with the Comites and with foreign Universities; sharing information on the “Turismo delle Radici” Facebook page, dedicated to all study and research initiatives on the subject; publishing of posts with the purpose of persuading to compile the questionnaires on social network communities/groups of Italians living abroad, or those related to the search for one’s origins; personal

⁴ Participants had to be at least 18 years old.

⁵ The sampling plan that was used is defined as (*convenience sampling*).

contacts of survey organizers; write-up of articles on the media and of television and radio broadcasting.

To obtain estimates pertinent to research objectives, it was verified that the sample met certain pre-established criteria in a reasoned manner, with specific reference to tourists' distribution by areas of origin, generation and age.

The survey was launched in March and conducted in April, May and June 2023. More than 600 roots tourists participated. However, 424 questionnaires were completed and validated in respect of quality.

41.5 % of respondents are first-generation immigrants and 59.5% belong to later generations. Age has a normal distribution, with mean 51.8 years and standard deviation 14.1 years. The proportion of young people, between the ages of 18 and 29, is equal to 3.7 %, while that of old people, between the ages of 75 and 90, is equal to 4.7%.

The questionnaire consists in 52 questions, all close-ended, except for one that is open-ended to collect suggestions concerning products that are Italian Sounding and have negative effects on our country's GDP. In the multiple choice questions, one may insert a maximum number of answers from a list of predefined options. In some cases rating scales with numerical values are used and the Likert scales. To check sample composition, some questions on demographic variables are included.

3.2 Results

3.2.1 Roots tourists' profile and attachment to Italy

More than 50% of respondents are of Italian descent. Looking at each generation, they are mostly people who have personally emigrated from Italy (41.5%), followed by second and third generations that are only separated by about half a percentage point (respectively 21.5% and 21.9%).

Almost two-thirds of respondents come from very distant Countries, some historically considered destination countries for migration flows, such as Argentina and Brazil (respectively representing 17% and 10% of the total). Spain is the European country with the highest number of respondents (8.3%).

Almost 60% of the sample is a member or participates in the activities of associations in foreign countries that group and represent many people of Italian descent.

Implicitly, to be able to talk about roots tourism, people of Italian descent must

have visited Italy at least once, with particular reference to their places of origin (Region and municipality of birth or where their ancestors were born). This is also a prerequisite for participation in the survey. The Italian Regions that have been most frequently visited by respondents are Calabria (37.3%), Sicily (15.6%), Lazio (13.7%), Marche (11.6%), Campania and Veneto (13%).

The strength of the attachment to Italy depends on whether they have relatives in the places of origin. The visit to relatives and friends, or the discovery of branches of the family tree in the homeland for those who are unaware of their existence before planning the journey, is one of the main purposes of roots travel and also what is considered to be one of the most emotional and satisfying experiences. Survey results indicate that 80.9% of respondents have relatives who live in the Italian Regions of origin, only 6.8% do not have any relatives where they or their ancestors originally came from, while 12.3% has no information about their relatives. Indeed, 82.3% declare that they have contacts with people of the local community.

Firstly, the survey has focused on the bond with the homeland, that is the extent to which respondents feel emotionally attached to Italy, according to a rating from 1 to 10 (where 1 indicates a very weak attachment and 10 a very strong attachment). Survey results show an extremely high average of rating equal to 8.9. Most roots tourists declare that they have a very strong (70.8 %) or strong (20.7%) attachment to their country of origin, while in total only 3.6% of respondents express a weak or very weak attachment.

The second part of the survey is dedicated to travel to Italy. Among those who have taken at least one vacation in Italy during their lives, 54.5% have returned to Italy four times or more during the last decade. This data can be interpreted even more positively taking into account the interruption in travel during the pandemic. Moreover, in a time frame of ten years, the journey is repeated also by 9% of respondents, who returned three times, and by 15.8% of respondents who returned twice. 16.5% of respondents have gone on only one journey during the last decade, while 4.2% has not come back to Italy during the last 10 years.

3.2.2 The journey in Italy, experiences connected with cuisine and the purchase and consumption of Italian agricultural and food products during the stay and in the country of residence

The length of stay is rather long and ranges from three weeks to more than one month (54.2%) or one-two weeks (36.8%). Only 9% of respondents indicates a length

shorter than a week. This data confirms that one of the positive aspects of this type of tourism is that on average the length of stay is longer, during which people of Italian descent wish to feel “at home” and live authentic experiences, discovering the Italian territory (Ferrari, Hernández-Maskivker and Nicotera, 2022).

About the type of accommodation, tourists mostly stay in houses, be it the houses of friends and relatives (31.4%) or their own house (23.8%). Rented houses are also a rather high percentage compared to other accommodation options (13.7%). The hotel is the accommodation facility that is mentioned most frequently (21.2%) compared to a bed & breakfast (5.7%), multi-building hotel (1.9%), farms (0.2%) and campgrounds (0.2%).

These results substantially confirm those of a previous survey conducted in 2021 on Argentinian roots tourists that analyzed the same types of accommodation (Ferrari and Nicotera, 2021). Also in that case, albeit with different percentages, hotels and friends’ and relatives’ houses had been indicated as the two main choices for overnight stay in places of origin.

Local cuisine introduces the food and wine topic and is greatly appreciated with an average rating of 4.8 out of 5. As much as 96% of roots travelers loves the cuisine of the places of origin.

Indeed, among the activities carried out by roots tourists during the holidays, tasting local food is indicated as the experience that they engage in most frequently. Local cuisine provides a link with Italian agricultural and food products in the following question. Survey respondents state that after having traveled to Italy they purchase Italian agricultural and food products more frequently and that they also advise relatives and friend to purchase the same type of products (40.3%), while others are more inclined to only purchase the products for themselves without becoming ambassadors with their network of contacts after the journey (11.8%). For 37.7% of roots travelers the relationship with Italian cuisine has not changed after the vacation experience.

The core topic, that is to understand whether the roots journey has stimulated the purchase of Italian agricultural and food products, both during the stay in the homeland and after the journey (such as import from Italy and/or purchase made in one’s country of residence for available products), is tackled with a specific question that includes four possible answers (besides that of not remembering).

Only a small part of respondents do not purchase any of those products (6.6%), while many of them (about 80%) make such purchases during the vacation. A part

of the latter (39.2%) also buy Italian agricultural and food products after the journey.

In addition to the journey and to the declared emotional attachment, it was decided that the survey would also analyze the extent to which respondents respect Italian culinary traditions in the new homeland. The answers that were given confirm the great interest in Italian cuisine also outside Italy. The rating scale from (very little) to 10 (greatly) that was presented to participants has been re-scaled with different answer options: not at all or very little (1-2), little (3-4), quite a lot (5-6), very much (7-8), greatly (9-10). The results show that as many as 86.3% of people of Italian descent declare that they keep them alive greatly and more than 90% of interviewees (93.4%) declare that they have purchased typical Italian foodstuffs during the last six months. Most roots tourists purchases such products frequently during the indicated time period (61.6%), while one third of roots tourists buy them less frequently, but not insignificantly (31.8%).

The sales channels that are mentioned most frequently by respondents are supermarkets (63.1%) and specialty stores (52%). Just short of 20% of interviewees imports products from Italy through direct contacts with producers or through relatives or friends. E-commerce is used by approximately 16% of survey respondents.

3.2.3. The purchase and consumption of Italian olive oil, knowledge of health aspects and labels, marketing channels, the purchase of olive products

The first question of this set concerns the main product used as accompaniment in the kitchen. The product that is used most frequently, far more than others, is olive oil, mentioned by almost 85% of interviewees. On the other hand, results show that the consumption of extra virgin olive oil is extremely low in the houses of Italian communities living abroad (0.5%).

One of the characteristics of olive oil is linked to its health properties compared to other products used in the kitchen. For this purpose, the survey has investigated roots tourists' knowledge of the effects that an accompaniment can have on health. Most respondents seem to have developed a high level of awareness on this aspect (82.3%). The Mediterranean diet, of which olive oil (in particular EVO) is one of the main foods, is known by almost the entire sample (as many as 96.5%).

Roots travelers are specifically asked whether they have ever purchased Italian olive oil. The result is that it is purchased by the vast majority (87.3%), mostly regardless of whether they have traveled to Italy. 67.2% of those who purchase Italian

olive oil state that they have always purchased it, compared with the following different options that link the purchase to travel to Italy: only after the journey (4.1%), only during the stay in Italy to take it/ship it home (12.2%), both during the journey and afterwards (16.5%). Hence, the connection between Italian origins and food and wine, expressed through Italian olive oil, seems to be separated from having got to know the product during the vacation.

Those who have always bought Italian olive oil are almost equally divided between those who purchase the product during the stay in Italy to take it or ship it to their country of residence (48.2%) should they not be able to take it themselves, and who, on the other hand, do not make this purchase decision (50.2%).

A further question explores in depth aspects related to the purchase of olive oil in Italy. The objective is to highlight the places where that type of oil has been appreciated by those who have purchased it during their stay and then took it themselves to the country of residence, or by those who have only ordered the product in Italy and then asked the producers to ship the requested quantities. Analyzing the answers provided by roots travelers, it is clear that word-of-mouth communication is the most effective tool to spread knowledge on the product (33.6%). Also the tourism experience *tout court* is capable of influencing the purchase decision, obviously if it is structured including oil tourism (27.4%). If to this last data one adds experiences that can indeed also be included in a tourist tour or that can, in any case, be offered in terms of structured tourism, like cooking courses (10.2%), farm visits (4%), tasting (1.8%), visits to stores (1.3%), one can understand the great potential that the journey and hospitality can have in promoting a food product like Italian olive oil. In this way, respondents who gain knowledge of the purchased oil through tourism experiences represent as many as 44.7% of the sample.

Food service also plays an important role in determining the choice of Italian oil. 12% of respondents declare that food service (classic and as *home restaurant*) is the channel through which they met Italian oil.

As regards the aspect of the certifications of Italian olive oil purchased by roots travelers, both in Italy and in their country, the majority (54%) choose registered oils, while for few of them (9.2%) certification does not represent a factor that influences purchasing decisions. There is a rather high percentage of respondents (36.8%) who do not remember whether the purchased product has been awarded a certification. This result indicates that not enough attention is paid to labels on which a possible quality certification is displayed, among other information.

Among those who purchase certified olive oil, the most frequently mentioned certifications (the answer can include more than one certification) are on a par that of an organic oil and of a PDO oil (28.4% and 28%), followed by the DOC (Controlled Designation of Origin) certification (26%). The decision to purchase PGI oil was less frequent (8.5%). Respondents also mentioned other certifications not included among the mentioned ones. There is still a high percentage of travelers-consumers who, despite answering that they have purchased certified oil, do not remember or do not know the type of certification (19.4%).

With reference to olive oil, for research purposes, it is important to understand which stage of the product life cycle the product has reached abroad⁶ and especially the attitude towards such a product, that is crucial for nutrition in Italy and the basis of the Mediterranean diet, of Italians living abroad and of their descendants and of those who have experienced roots tourism.

Firstly, as regards the consumer decision-making process, some *variables that may influence the choice of type of olive oil*, have been identified, in order to assess to what extent they influence purchase decisions made by the interviewed roots tourists. Results show that in a rating scale from 1 (insignificant) to 5 (very important), almost all the suggested variables have obtained a fairly high rating, ranging from 3 to 4, hence they have a rather significant influence on purchase decisions. The exact knowledge of the oil's place of origin is the most important variable (3.7), followed by prior consumption experience (3.6) and the presence of certifications (3.6).

The place of origin may be an important criterion for purchase decisions by roots tourists for two kinds of reasons. Firstly, because it may be the roots tourists' area of origin, hence, the weight given to such an element would reflect the emotional attachment or *place attachment* to one's territory of origin. Moreover, this result may depend on the growing competitive importance of *territorial brands*, that link the image of a product with the place where it is produced in terms of quality of the final product and of the raw materials that have been used, healthiness, specificity of production, etc.

6 In this regard Coldiretti's data for the year 2022 is interesting, indicating that the value of *Made in Italy* olive oil exports increased by 23% that year. The greatest importer was the United States, that reached 62% of the total value of purchased products, followed by Germany, France Japan and Canada. Italian oil's success, as the report explains, is due to the rich of biodiversity heritage in our country, that is one of a kind worldwide with 533 varieties of olives for a total of 250 million trees. Furthermore, Italy produces the largest number of extra virgin olive oil with a designation of origin in Europe, with 42 PDOs, 7 PGIs and numerous local products. On the other hand, according to Ismea data (2023), in 2022 Italian olive oil exports have grown by 14% in terms of value, while in terms of quantity there have been a slight decrease (0.4%).

The variable that deviates most from the average rating, in negative terms, is advertising, that seems to have a relatively lower impact, with a score equal to 2.4.

About half of roots tourists declare that they *feel that it is important to know olive oil's exact place of origin because* “it affects the quality of the product” (50.6%), while a much lower percentage of interviewees believes that it is important because “in a specific place the oil production production process is carried out using traditional techniques” (16.8%) or because there “might be a specific attachment with this place” (10.8%).

Contrary to the scarce importance attached to a possible personal bond with the place of production, but the confirmation of previous hypotheses, in reply to the question on *the reasons why it is considered important that olive oil comes from one's place of origin*, a large percentage of respondents (37.4%) declares that the reason is linked to a strong emotional attachment to one's place of origin” and, albeit with smaller percentages, to “knowledge and appreciation of the product” (22.8%) and to “knowledge of production techniques” (17.3%). Other reasons score much lower percentages.

Nevertheless, roots tourists' choices on which olive oil to purchase does not seem to be only influenced by emotional or nostalgic factors. Indeed, regarding the comparative quality assessment of Italian olive oil with that produced by other countries, a vast majority of subjects (73.3%) thinks that *Italian olive oil is better quality than that produced in their country of residence*.

This result becomes extremely important if one considers that most interviewed roots tourists declares that they *can tell the difference between the various types of olive oils* (55.9%), hence these are people who believe they are sufficiently experienced to make correct and rational choices. However, about half of interviewees *do not know any variety* (48.6%); the best known varieties (more than one answer could be given to this question) are Frantoio (mentioned by 31.6%), followed by Leccino (14.6%) and by Nocellara (13%). This data shows that, although there is a good knowledge of the product and its characteristics, in the sample there are few experts and sector operators.

Roots tourists were asked whether they were interested in acquiring further knowledge on Italian olive oil, also by attending specific courses. They generally expressed a strong interest. Indeed, 43.2% of the total declare that they are interested in attending specialist courses, while 37.9% would like to learn more about Italian olive oil, but without following specialist courses.

These results show that it seems that olive oil is moving in the same direction as wine, that has become a product that is appreciated and known by a growing number of consumers, also thanks to tasting, visits to canteens with tasting, vineyard tours, wine routes, courses for wine lovers and enthusiasts, events and other initiatives. This phenomenon has also been stimulated and has itself generated various types of wine-related tourism, or *wine tourism*, that has developed in Italy starting from the 90s of the previous century⁷. Something similar could happen with oil, stimulating oil tourism.

3.2.4 Food and wine tourism

The next section of the questionnaire is designed to investigate whether roots tourists' consumption of olive oil may influence different types of tourism related to food and wine and vice versa. For this purpose, respondents have been asked to indicate their *level of satisfaction with reference to a series of experiences linked to Italian food and wine* that they have possibly had during some of the journeys made to their Regions of origin (in a scoring scale ranging from 1, unsatisfied, to 5, extremely satisfied).

The experiences that most respondents had are wine tasting (82.1%) and local oil tasting (73.1%), visits to local food specialty stores (80.2%), to canteens (58.3%), to wine bars (54.4%), to vineyards (46.7%), to oil orchards and to other types of crops (43.2%), to oil mills or other places linked to the olive oil production (44.1%) and to places of production of other agricultural and food products (51.2%).

Data related to meals as residents' guests (81.1%) and at home restaurants (74.3%) are very significant. These results confirm that by now food and wine tourism is a well-established type of tourism. Nevertheless, roots tourists are also extremely interested in experiences linked to oil, therefore oil-related tourism has the potential to develop significantly in future.

As regards levels of satisfaction, they are all rather high. In a rating scale from 1, slightly satisfied, to 5, extremely satisfied, they never go below 3.6. The highest values are those related to the most popular experiences. In particular, average satisfaction for wine and local oil tasting is equal to 4.4 (the highest score overall). Also meals as residents' guests obtain the highest score (4.4), likewise meals at home restaurants

⁷ Source: Wine Tourism Movement, *Il portale dell'enoturismo* (www.movimentoturismovino.it).

(4.4). This would seem to confirm that roots tourists are interested in *authentic* experiences (MacCannell, 1973 and 1976), that they can have living in close contact with local communities, enabling them to get to know their life styles.

Clearly, the roots tourists who were interviewed have not always had all the recommended experiences. The main reason why respondents declared that they lacked some of these experiences was that they had not had the time or that they had not thought about it (47.4%) or, less importantly, that they had not been offered to them (30.4%) or that they were not interested (10.6%).

To be able to plan an expansion of the portfolio of initiatives within the scope of oil tourism, both in Italy and abroad, interviewees have been asked to indicate four experiences from the list related to the oil world, that they would like to have or repeat in future when traveling in Italy or in their country of residence. The experiences that they would be most interest in having or repeating are tasting Italian olive oil (21.9%), besides visits to olive orchards (15.9%), to oil mills or other places linked to the production of olive oil (15.7%) and to specialty stores (14.1%). An increase in the offer in this sector also in those tourists' countries of residence would be useful, because it would generate a greater interest in a rather new type of tourism offer, that requires promotion and efforts to increase visitors' awareness, but also specific investments by tour companies and oil producers.

The questionnaire continued to cover food and wine tourism and oil tourism, asking respondents whether their knowledge of Italian agricultural and food products has stimulated them to travel in Italy, also to visit the places of production, cultivation or breeding. This has occurred quite frequently: in 30.4% of cases often, while in 27.3% rarely.

3.2.5. Promotion of Italian agricultural and food products abroad and Italian Sounding food

The strong *place attachment* and appreciation of Italian foodstuffs, leads many roots tourists, in addition to purchasing and consuming them, also to promote them in their countries of residence among relatives and acquaintances. An extremely high percentage of respondents, that is 87.6%, declare to do so.

This is one of the effects of *place attachment* described in the literature (Ferrari et al., 2022), together with strong loyalty and the wish to return, to make investments,

to support the territory where one is originally from in various ways⁸.

An overwhelming majority of the sample (82.8%) also try to avoid foodstuffs and agricultural and food products that are not *Made in Italy* but that imitate Italian specialties, with misleading images, brands, colors and/or names. Roots tourists are interested in the problem of *Italian Sounding*, talking about it with persons of Italian descent and other people (43.2%) or only people of Italian descent (20%).

Certainly, trying to avoid products that are not *Made in Italy*, but that pass off as Italian, as well as talking about *Italian Sounding* with other people, both of Italian descent and from other countries, may help fight this phenomenon that is extremely harmful for Italian exports and for the image of many products, as well as for Italian food and cuisine worldwide.

An open-ended question has also been included on the *Italian Sounding* phenomenon to draw inspiration and suggestions that may be useful for roots tourists.

Some of the remarks made by roots tourists are detailed below. Firstly, some respondents have stated that they do not feel concerned about this phenomenon that is harmful for our country for a range of reasons. A roots traveler writes: “We have to promote authentic Italian products, but it is wrong to consider, *Italian Sounding* those inspired by Italy that were created in America by immigrants many years ago, when ingredients coming from Italy were unavailable and one could not therefore talk about *counterfeit*. On the contrary, the first immigrants were those who changed, for example, the eating habits of Brazilians, when imports were forbidden and who created an important market for *Made in Italy*’. Another roots tourist asserts: “Some products Made in the USA are more similar to current original Italian products”. A declaration made by a person of Italian descent plays down the phenomenon: “I have not noticed the phenomenon in my country of residence. Indeed it is difficult to have a range of Italian products. We are flooded by Spanish olive oil”. Another respondent declares: I am not very worried about it. For now, I hope that my country opens up to imports, because at the moment it is almost impossible to buy Italian products”.

There are also those who prefer to buy and consume local products of the Country they are living in, such as oil, for reasons linked to quality but also due to environmental sustainability.

The perception of the phenomenon by Italians living abroad and by people of

⁸ Please see the introduction on this subject.

Italian descent is, overall, very high, on the other hand policies designed to limit the spread of products that are not truly Italian and to increase people's personal commitment to help, insofar as they can, people living in foreign countries detect the distinguishing characteristics of Italian food in terms of quality and authenticity, are poor. It is interesting to extract some specific attitudes, observations and opinions, even if all the answers have been analyzed on the basis of similar content and grouped in a more limited number of items that include such content. For example, a roots traveler reports: "Unfortunately abroad for non-Italians it is very difficult to understand whether a product is truly Italian or not. The truth is that people who are not of Italian descent have different eating habits, they eat anything and are not interested in quality. At least it is like this in Germany. I was born and grew up in Italy. I know what is Italian and what is not. My cuisine is Italian. I only eat Italian dishes". Regarding the concept of Italian cuisine culture and the difficulty in educating residents in foreign countries another respondent declares: "My diet is Mediterranean. Unfortunately, it is difficult to counter the *Italian Sounding* phenomenon, because there is no culinary culture in other countries. They know their product, that is in any case not of good quality, but the rest of the products are consumed only because there is "Italian" written on the label. Furthermore, they do not care whether it is Italian or not. They trust it because they lack knowledge. There should be greater awareness. But it is difficult to get a country interested in specifically getting to know the product of another country".

The role of Italians living abroad, especially first-generation, as informal Ambassadors of high quality Italian products, is alive, but efforts made by individuals are considered unproductive if they are not matched by Italian Government policies. The prohibition to use symbols that evoke Italianness, especially the Italian flag, is one of the aspects that is repeatedly mentioned in answers given by survey participants.

Statistical indicators

Anna Lo Presti

Some *original* statistical indicators built within the scope of this research for the purpose of measuring some latent variables, that is variables that cannot be directly observed but inferred from other observable variables, are illustrated below.

4.1 Root tourists' *place attachment* to their family homeland

This survey has aimed to assess roots tourists' attachment to their homeland, Italy. With this purpose, a normalized indicator on a scale of 0-100 has been created using three variables, namely:

- the declared intensity of attachment to Italy
- the number of roots journeys they have been on during the last 10 years
- keeping in touch with Italy.
-

The indicator has been re-scaled as follows:

- weak attachment: score 0-50;
- average attachment: 50.-75;
- strong attachment: 75-100.
-

Predictably, the average value of the indicator is very high, that is of 79.4 and standard deviation of 15.1. As many as 42.7% of respondents reaches an average score of 100; 23.1% of subjects shows an average attachment and 66.5% a strong attachment.

Such an important feeling, that influences culture and lifestyles, is guaranteed to affect tastes and preferences. Consequently, the research has tried to estimate how strongly *place attachment* influences certain behaviors of roots tourists regarding their interest in Italian agricultural and food products and the wish to buy and consume them. 90.3% of respondents have purchased Italian agricultural and food products during the journey in Italy (to take home with them or ship to their country of residence) or later.

Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that there is a significant difference between those who declare that they have a strong attachment to their homeland (93.3% of this segment purchases Italian agricultural and food products) and those that, on the other hand, declare that they have a weak attachment to Italy (in this case the percentage of those who purchase the above-mentioned products decreases to 75%); in any case, also the percentage of the latter that have purchased such products seems to be very high.

Clearly, it is crucial to achieve the goal of making Italian agricultural and food products known and appreciated by these tourists during the vacation, particularly involving them in experiences that enable them to taste, savor, try them via visits to places of cultivation, breeding and production, meeting chefs and experts, tasting events, cooking courses, meals offered in the homes of members of local communities and moments of learning of recipes and specific dishes. One must not forget that roots tourists are interested in food and wine from various perspectives. Indeed, roots tourists search for and have numerous types of experiences related to food, such as eating and tasting some dishes and agricultural and food products, looking for recipes, especially old ones, taking cooking lessons, carrying out farm work and buying food as a souvenir (Timothy, 2015). Eating traditional food, especially in old style restaurants but also in home restaurants or as guests in friends' or relatives' homes, makes many people feel like a member of the local community, especially if the agricultural and food products they consume come exactly from their homeland. Others think that it is important to look for old recipes in restaurants, libraries and archives. The cooking courses with local chefs attended during vacations in places of origin have a significant experiential impact because, besides enabling tourists to get to know local cuisine, they give them the opportunity to enjoy typical products or foodstuffs. On the other hand, others opt for the experience of working as volunteers, carrying out the agricultural activities of their ancestors. Finally, one of the most common habits is to buy food as a vacation souvenir.

It is also interesting to try to understand whether and to what extent *place attachment* affects behavior in terms of respect for Italian culinary traditions in their own homes. Results show that such traditions are widely respected by all, also by those who have a weaker attachment to Italy. Specifically, almost 99% of those who claim they have a strong attachment say that they respect them fairly (values from 5 to 10).

Also, for this reason, the purchase and consumption of typical Italian products during the six months prior to the survey are definitely high. Nevertheless, a very

high percentage of those who claim that they have a high *place attachment* often buy typical Italian food products (67.4%), while the percentage decreases for those who have an average (52%) or weak (45.5%) attachment. In any case, percentages are always rather high.

Regarding consumption of typical Italian food products and *place attachment*, one can observe that the stronger the attachment to one's homeland, the greater the consumption, as one would logically expect. Specifically, 58.5% of those with a strong attachment to Italy have declared that they consume typical Italian food products more than once a week and 20.2% roughly once a week. These percentage decrease respectively to 45.5% and 13.6% for those who are associated with a weak attachment.

As regards interest in Italian olive oil, this product clearly strongly appeals to roots tourists. Indeed, more than 87% of respondents declare that they have purchased it (as previously illustrated), while only 12.7% declare they have never done so. Specifically, 53.3% of interviewees have declared that they have bought oil in Italy during a journey and have subsequently taken it to their country of residence.

Behavior related to oil purchasing does not change depending on the intensity of attachment to Italy. The purchase of oil in Italy does not seem to be significantly correlated, under the same conditions, neither with the intensity of the attachment nor with the generation of emigrants to which interviewees belong, nor with the country of residence⁹. However, it is interesting to note that a greater percentage of those associated with an average or strong attachment have purchased oil in Italy and shipped it to the country of origin. As many as 31.4% of those who have an average attachment and 29% of those who have a strong attachment, versus 20.5% of those who have a weak attachment, seem to have got to know Italian oil during their journeys.

This aspect can be explained on different levels. On one hand one must consider that *place attachment* also depends on the number of journeys made to Italy and, therefore, an increase in travel may increase the amount of Italian goods that are purchased before and after the journey, as well as knowledge and, therefore, a propensity to purchase various types of goods in their homeland. Furthermore, those who travel more often to their homeland probably manage to create greater contacts and to keep them, hence facilitating the search in Italy for suppliers of their liking.

⁹ All relevant Odds ratios are not considered to be statistically significant.

4.2 Knowledge of the world of olive oil and interest in acquiring further knowledge on the subject

The questionnaire tackles the topic of levels of awareness, information and expertise in the olive oil world through two ad hoc normalized indicators on a scale of 0-100.

The first refers to *knowledge of the world of olive oil* and is based on the following variables:

- knowledge of the difference between different types of olive oil;
- number of known varieties;
- having tried local oil tasting;
- having visited olive orchards and oil mills and/or other places of production of olive oil;
- having visited olive oil museums and/or oil cellars;
- having attended cooking courses related to the use of olive oil;
- having met olive oil experts.
-

The second is related to *the interest in acquiring more in-depth knowledge* through courses or ad hoc activities and has been created using the following variables:

- interest in experiences including visits to olive orchards, to oil mills or other places associated with olive oil production, to olive oil museums and oil cellars;
- Interest in Italian olive oil tasting events, participating in introductory courses on olive oil and in meetings with olive oil experts.

The results show that there is very poor specific knowledge of the olive oil world. Indeed, on a scale from 0 to 100 (where 0-25 represents extremely limited knowledge, 25-50 poor, 50-75 average and 75-100 high), the average score is of 23.1 with standard deviation of 16.5.

Specifically, it can be observed that almost 62% of participants' scores do exceed 25 (very limited knowledge); while only 4.5% are in the average scores range (average knowledge) and 0.4% are in the high knowledge range, that of the real enthusiasts.

Also in this case, under the same conditions, there are not significant statistical differences related to the level of knowledge of the olive oil world for important demographic variables such as respondents' country of residence (European or non-European), level of education or generation.

The interest in acquiring more in-depth knowledge is shown by the data, where

the 0-25 score range corresponds to extremely low interest, 25-50 poor interest, the following one (50-75) average interest and the last one (75-100) high interest.

Perhaps, it is precisely because of the awareness of their scarce or non-existent knowledge that on average the score related to the interest in acquiring more in-depth knowledge through attending courses or ad hoc activities is higher, that is of 46.1 with standard deviation of 18.2. Indeed, almost half of respondents (48.2%) have expressed an average interest in participating in courses or experiences linked to the oil world in order to acquire more in-depth knowledge on this product. However, nobody has expressed a high interest.

4.3 Choice of the type of olive oil to be purchased

Considering that about 85% of respondents uses olive oil, it seems important to study the determining factors when choosing the type of oil to be purchased. Two indicators, normalized on a scale of 0-100, have been created for this purpose.

The purpose of the first indicator is to measure the *choice determined by product quality* and has been created by summarizing the following variables:

- level of importance given to the knowledge of the product's place of origin (some respondents believe that the place of origin influences the quality of the product and/or that in that place production is carried out using traditional techniques);
- level of importance given to the fact that the product comes from one's place of origin (the origin in one's homeland can be significant for the following reasons: the respondent is familiar with the production techniques that are used and/or knows the producer; the product has been tried and appreciated and/or it has been recommended by relatives and friends; the product is certified; and/or, finally, relatives and friends have provided information).

The purpose of the second indicator is to measure the *choice based on emotional factors* and has been, on the other hand, created by summarizing the following variables:

- level of importance given to knowledge of the product's place of origin, given that there is a strong attachment to this place;
- level of importance given to the fact that the product comes from one's place of origin, given that there is a strong attachment to one's place of origin;
- Evoking Italianness (in the brand, colors, name, etc.).

The two indicators have been used in a scale that includes the following score ranges: 0-25 (of no importance), 25-50 (of little importance), 50-75 (important); 75-100 (very important).

In general, quality is the first product requirement. In the case of olive oil, approximately three-fourths of the subjects have replied that they perceive that the quality of Italian olive oil is higher than that of olive oil of their country of origin. This result does not depend on the geographical location of respondents' place of residence.

The choice indicator based on quality has reached an average value of 51.6 with standard deviation of 25.7.

Almost 60% of interviewees have declared that they consider choices determined by product quality important or very important (score higher than 50).

The importance given to emotional factors is one of the elements that determines *place attachment*, that is in any case also based on information and more rational elements. For the sample of respondents, the weight of emotional elements in determining choices is much lower compared to the weight of quality. The average score is 28.3 with standard deviation of 23.1. Indeed, only 22% of interviewees consider the emotional attachment to their place of origin an important or very important factor (score higher than 50) in determining choices.

As concerns choices made on the basis of emotional attachment to their homeland, although statistically non significant differences are observed between the various generations, it is interesting to note how the last generations of Italian descent give the same importance or a slightly higher weight to choices based on emotional factors compared to previous generations.

Conclusions

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The results of the research, that are consistent with previous studies, show how roots tourists of Italian descent are strongly attached to their homeland. This is reflected, among other aspects, also in a high interest in the culinary traditions of their family's homeland and in Italian cuisine, that drives them to purchase and consume Italian agricultural and food products both in our country and when they return home after the journey.

Food and wine tourism segments are clearly interwoven with and partially overlaps with roots tourism: there is still plenty to be done to fully exploit the potential of this phenomenon, given roots tourists' strong desire to live experiences linked to food and wine and the growth in the offer of this type of experience, also within the scope of oil tourism.

Targeted investments would seem to be necessary to promote Italian agricultural and food products abroad and facilitate their export. If high-quality Italian food and wine products are an important driver, not only for production and exports but also for tourism, being capable of attracting international tourist flows, the combination of the agricultural and food and tourism sectors is best expressed through the roots traveler segment.

Roots tourism can represent an extremely valuable ally in the valorization of the national olive production since it can directly contribute to the growth and diversification of agricultural producers' incomes, to the rediscovery and enhancement of the historical and cultural richness of territorial systems with a high density of olive trees, including marginal ones, and, finally, it can help ensure proper recognition for an activity and a product that is our present and our future.

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