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AGRICULTURAL THEME ROUTES AS A DIVERSIFICATION STRATEGY: THE WESTERN CAPE WINE ROUTES CASE STUDY

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Abstract

Agritourism implies specific positive contributions towards the utilisation of natural resources and the stabilising of farm income at micro-level, as well as contributing towards broadening the experiences of visiting tourists. Within this arena of agritourism, the product route phenomena have a somewhat unique character in the sense that three goals are combined namely tourism, produce sales and product brand promotion. The wine routes of the Western Cape that evolved through the years each present a distinct character to its visitors. A study of these routes revealed various interesting facts about modus operandi, problems and achievements, which is of significant value to those interested in establishing similar routes. There seems to be similarities in the reasons for the establishment of each route, being mostly that of the regional promotion of brand names and the promotion of the area itself, as well as promoting product sales. This case study of the Western Cape wine routes provides sound principles and inputs for the development of both the local tourism and local agricultural sectors in the endeavour to improve the quality of life for all through a strong and healthy, sustainable agritourism sector.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism in rural areas has progressed from being a primarily passive and minor element of the landscape to a highly active and dominant agent of change and control of that very landscape and of associated rural communities (Butler, Hall & Jenkins, 1998). These changes have drawn increasing attention to the contribution of tourism towards sustainable agriculture and sustainability *per se*.

Agritourism implies specific positive contributions towards the utilisation of natural resources and the stabilising of farm income at micro-level, as well as contributing towards broadening the experiences of visiting tourists. Within this arena of agritourism, the product route phenomena have a somewhat

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unique character in the sense that three goals are combined, namely tourism, produce sales and product brand promotion.

The Western Cape Province of South Africa is internationally renowned for its natural and scenic beauty as well as its well-developed tourism infrastructure which encourages tourists to visit Table Mountain, Cape Point – the place where the Atlantic and Indian oceans meet, the various nature reserves, cultural sites and the various established wine routes. The Province has eleven wine routes that link various cellars to provide the tourist with an experience that varies from wine tasting and buying to on-site restaurants and entertainment shows.

2. PROBLEM SETTING

Wine tourism can be defined as “...visitation to vineyards, wineries, wine festivals and wine shows for which grape wine tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of a grape wine region are the prime motivating factors for visitors.” (Hall & Macionis, 1998). They also identified the following incentives for visiting wineries:

- Sampling and purchasing
- Festivals and events
- Socialising with family and friends
- Country setting/vineyard destination
- Learning about wine and winemaking
- Restaurant facilities at wineries
- Winery tours
- Entertainment
- Meeting the winemaker
- Other attractions and activities

Although the list above suggests that location and place play an important part in both wine production and tourism, very little research has been done on the development of wine tourism and marketing. The wine routes of the Western Cape that evolved through the years each present a distinct character to its visitors. Against the provincial background of proposed ‘theme-based’ routes, interest groups need to take various factors into consideration before establishing routes such as an olive route, cheese route, etc. There seems to be a lack of appropriate knowledge regarding the *modus operandi*, problems

and achievements of the wine routes. This study attempts to gather sound information regarding the above in order to provide some guidelines for the establishment of theme-based tourism routes.

3. METHODOLOGY

Arrangements were made for meeting the public relations officer/manager of each wine route, as well as the chairperson of that route. Eleven routes were subsequently visited and informal discussions were structured with the aid of an open-ended questionnaire. These discussions took place at the offices of the representatives of the various wine routes.

The information collected was both quantitatively and qualitatively analysed and discussed by the researchers to get a common understanding of the philosophy and functioning of each route. This was necessary in order to be able to lay down guidelines for groups endeavouring to start similar tourism theme routes.

4. EVOLUTION OF WINE ROUTES IN SOUTH AFRICA

Visits to vineyards have been part of organised travel at least since the time of the ancient Greeks and Romans (Vandyke Price, 1985). Wine trails have been part of the German tourism industry since the 1920's. The *Weinlehrpfad* (instructional wine path) contributed to the selling of wine, and by the end of the 1970's practically all eleven wine regions had their own *Weinstraßen* (wine roads). Eastern European countries such as Hungary and other European countries such as Portugal and France have also started developing wine routes in wine-producing regions (Hall & Macionis, 1998). Italy, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand followed suit. The overriding objective was to improve the quality of the service of all wineries on the trails, at the same time promoting the individual characteristics of the wineries. The emergence of wine tourism is the result of several catalysts that significantly increased the accessibility, knowledge and appeal of wine to the public.

The first wine route in South Africa was established in April 1971 by the owners of three wineries who set about encouraging producers to bottle their own wine and to introduce the public to the 'mysterious' estate wines which, until then, were beyond their reach (Rust, 1996). The idea of a wine route was conceptualised earlier in 1969 by one of the founder members during a visit to the *Route de Vins* at Morey St Denis in Burgundy, France. Eleven wine producers were eventually incorporated as the first members of the Stellenbosch Wine Route. This historic event has, however, not gone without

any problems. Legislation such as the Liquor Act had to be amended in order to allow visitors to enjoy wine tasting at wine farms and to enable the members of the wine route to erect signboards.

Since its inception in 1971, the Stellenbosch Wine Route matured into one of South Africa's favourite and main tourist attractions and up to date it boasts of 41 members. Many an inhabitant of Stellenbosch will acknowledge the fact that along with the University of Stellenbosch, the Stellenbosch Wine Route was one of the major forces of economic development in the rural town of Stellenbosch. Since the establishment of the wine route, guesthouses (about 1700 beds at present), 76 coffee shops, pubs and restaurants have developed within the vicinity of Stellenbosch. In recent years this wine route attracted up to 800 000 visitors per annum. To complement this sudden growth in local tourism facilities, some of the members of the wine route also adapted to tourist needs by offering on-site restaurants (the first wine estate restaurant opened as early as 1972), picnic baskets, conference facilities, guesthouse facilities, and even entertainment shows.

The success of the Stellenbosch Wine Route and the positive impact it had on regional and rural tourism eventually led to the establishment of various other (eleven) wine routes in the Western Cape of South Africa. Throughout the interviews the authors had with the relevant members of the wine routes, it became evident that the initial aim of selling wine directly to the tourist, developed into a more diverse mix of goals for the routes. The modern set of goals seems to have a deliberate dualistic nature. From a wine farmers point of view it still encourages direct and indirect wine sales on location, it co-ordinates collaborative promotion of its members' products and it stimulates generic brand advertising, but it also extends its aims towards tourism itself through the promotion of regional tourism through various means. This is achieved by the knowledge of personnel of the rural environment regarding tourism attractions, guesthouses, hotels, restaurants, etc. The various wine route brochures are also proof of this as they attempt to provide a package of tourism information to the visitor. Close collaboration also exists between the public relations officer/manager of each wine route and the local tourism offices in that region. In many instances the wine route personnel share offices with local tourism bureaux in order to streamline and co-ordinate tourism marketing and promotion efforts. This leads to the sharing of information and costs, and seems to be a critical factor in the success of a wine route.

5. THE MODUS OPERANDI OF WINE ROUTES

With the aid of the interviews it was hoped to try and identify an organisational structure that would suit the management of a wine route best. A diverse range of organisational structures was, however, identified, each of which, according to its members, was working efficiently. This ranged from highly formal structures such as companies and co-operatives, to well-organised societies, down to only a chairman/coordinator and no structure at all. It became evident that the higher the number of members, the more formal these structures tended to be. Where there were seven or less members within a wine route, the structure had a more informal nature, mainly due to more intimate business relationship between these members. Thus, the bigger in terms of members a wine route becomes, the more formal its structure should become. Besides having an elected chairman, secretary, treasurer and two to five ordinary members, it was interesting to note that some of these management structures also made provision for committee members in charge of marketing (promotion, festivals, etc.) and technical development (training, education, etc.). Consensus was reached that the size of a wine route committee should be as small as possible. Most of the wine routes indicated that their members meet once every two months and that meetings are generally well attended. One of the smaller wine routes indicated that they have no structure at all and that, should the need arise for a meeting, a member would simply ensure that all members attend an organised meeting to discuss the relevant topic.

A critical factor that was identified, was that each route has a highly motivated and dynamic public relations person, each of whom is knowledgeable about the wine industry, the environment with all its attractions and facilities which might be of interest to tourists. During interviews and discussions it soon became evident that these people with their well-developed communication skills are the driving force behind the success of the wine route concept. As mentioned earlier, their offices are often in the same building complex where the local tourism bureau has theirs, which enable them to add value to the experience of the visiting tourists. The various public relations officers/managers of the routes established a Wine Route Forum, which has monthly meetings providing the important opportunity to discuss various matters of interest that may help raise standards. Collaborative projects (wine festivals, agricultural shows, etc.), *ad hoc* audits of facilities and sales personnel are but some of the matters, which receive attention. This forum seemed to focus on devising inventories of winery tourism facilities, understanding winery visitor needs, improving the standard of cellar sales and facilitating and improving wine industry and

tourism industry linkages and involvement to the advantage of all communities involved.

An attempt was made to determine what the initial capital layout was to start a wine route, but this proved to be unsuccessful as records were outdated or not available. Most of the routes were, however, more than willing to disclose their annual budgets to the authors. This provided insight into both the cost and income components. These components are summarised in full in Table 1. On the cost side it seems that advertising/promotional activities and material (35,7%) and personnel costs (31,9%) take up proportionally the biggest share of the average annual budget.

An analysis of the income structures showed that the contributions of individual members towards their respective wine routes differs considerably. Four main types of contributions were identified:

- Wine routes that had no formal levies
- Wine routes with fixed levies per ton of grapes produced
- Wine routes that had flat rates for members
- Wine routes that categorised members and adapted levies according to the categories

It appeared that in the first instance wine routes without a management structure turn to their members for contributions as the need arises. Should they for example need new brochures, they will simply get an estimation of the total costs, to which members then contribute equally.

The second method is more widely used and involves of a fixed amount (levy) per ton grapes produced. This has the disadvantage that although larger and smaller members' contributions differ, they share in exactly the same benefits. In some cases this does lead to friction amongst members. It was of interest that at a certain wine route, members who produced table grapes were also willing to pay the levy per ton of grapes produced. They argued that the benefits of the wine route spill over to the region as such and are not only relevant to wine producing farms.

The third method involved fixed monthly levies for two categories of members (smaller and larger). The wine route that applies this method endeavours to eventually change to a flat rate for all members so as to prevent any dissatisfaction amongst them.

Table 1: Analysis of financial components of 1999 budgets for wine routes of the Western Cape Province of South Africa

Components	Average: All wine routes	Average: Larger wine routes	Average: Smaller wine routes
Number of members	19	26	7
<i>Income</i>	Percentage		
Membership fees	23.8	33.4	18.7
Regional funds	41.6	42.2	45.5
Wine sales	4.1	5.9	0.0
Wine tasting	0.7	1.0	0.0
Festivals, etc.	3.7	6.5	2.1
Interest	22.3	3.3	32.0
Other	3.8	7.7	1.7
<i>Expenditure</i>			
Advertising	4.4	6.6	3.4
Radio marketing	4.5	7.2	0.0
Brochures	13.3	5.5	19.3
Festivals, shows, etc.	7.3	13.4	3.5
Promotions	6.2	13.4	5.0
Banking costs	0.7	0.7	0.7
Liquor license costs	0.1	0.1	0.0
Property tax	0.3	0.5	0.0
Electricity	1.0	1.6	0.0
Levies (regional)	0.2	0.3	0.1
Repairs and maintenance	0.7	2.0	0.3
Rental: buildings	11.2	8.5	15.7
Rental: office equipment	3.0	2.3	3.1
Maintenance: buildings	0.8	1.2	0.0
Maintenance: plot	0.2	0.4	0.0
Maintenance: equipment	0.4	0.7	0.0
Office equipment	0.2	0.1	0.3
IT equipment	0.1	0.0	0.2
Consultation	3.0	4.7	0.0
Audit fees	0.7	0.9	0.6
Transport	1.7	3.6	0.6
Salaries and bonuses	31.9	23.1	39.7
Stationery	1.0	0.5	2.0
Telephone	3.5	3.0	4.0
Insurance	1.9	3.0	0.0
Entertainment and catering	0.9	0.5	1.0
Postage	0.2	0.5	0.1
Annual meetings	0.1	0.1	0.0
Subscription/membership fees	0.2	0.3	0.0
Route signage/boards	0.0	0.0	0.0
Miscellaneous	0.4	0.4	0.7

With the fourth method there is discrimination amongst the three categories of members:

- Category A: wine sales and tasting, on-site restaurant, lunches, cellar tours, special attractions
- Category B: wine sales and tasting, and cellar tours
- Category C: wine tasting and sales only by appointment

When asked whether the capital outlay and annual membership contributions were realising an acceptable return on investment, the respondents unanimously agreed that it did. However, when asked how they established this, they were unable to provide a satisfactory answer. There seemed to be a lack of adequate record keeping of the seasonal flow of tourists, and no records could be produced of the members' individual promotional costs over and above of their contributions to the wine route. Hall & Macionis (1998) also documented a lack of sound record keeping in Australia:

"...in some cases it was clear that the winery had little, if any, idea of the breakdown of cellar door sales by wine type or of the number of visitors to the winery. Furthermore, almost 50 percent of the Victorian wineries had either no record of visits, or had records which they admitted to being somewhat vague."

The other major income component is so-called 'regional funds'. This is a legacy of the KWV's control in the wine industry and its obligation towards generic promotion of wine. Wine routes can claim back levies on a regional basis if they can prove regional and/or generic wine promotion.

6. SOME PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED

Wine routes situated within an hour to an hour and a half's drive from the Cape Town Metropolis do enjoy a comparative advantage over the routes further away. Routes closer to Cape Town identified a strong positive relation between bad weather (windy and rainy) for tourists and visitors on the route. It seems that inclement weather drives the holidaymakers away from beaches and encourages them to rather experience the nearby wine routes. Routes further away, however, have the problem of tourists not regarding their environment as a destination. Major marketing drives are regularly conceptualised to change this and this remains one of the challenges to wine routes in the hinterland areas.

Some of the wine routes experience that some members do not adhere to visiting hours and are lax to open their premises to tourists over weekends, especially on Sundays, which is the day when most wine farms are visited. Again this phenomenon is not unique to South African wineries. A lack of a consistent policy regarding opening times, which could frustrate intended tourists, has also been documented in Australia (Hall & Macionis, 1998). It became evident that in order to be successful in the tourism market, extended business hours will be necessary. All members of a specific wine route should become tourism-friendly in this respect.

Some routes experience a lack of co-operation from local town councils in the sense that they do not seem to understand or accept the importance of tourism within rural areas. Littering, crime and in some cases an antagonism towards tourists are but some of the areas that have not been satisfactorily addressed. In certain cases personal and political agendas seem to be the order of the day, inhibiting a close and positive relationship with tourism organisations.

As was pointed out to the authors, some members of wine routes are more inclined to invest in technical agricultural inputs than in the development of their human resources. This could have a negative impact not only on the individual member in question, but on the whole region because of the tourist's holistic perception of the South African wine production sector. Another problem area is that of 'signage', problem where a lot of red tape is involved. Policies regarding this seem to change quite often, resulting in frustration amongst tourism organisations.

7. GUIDELINES FOR PROPOSED THEME BASED TOURISM ROUTES

During all interviews the management of the various wine routes were asked to provide some tips for new entrants to theme-based tourism routes. A fairly comprehensive list was made, which also constituted a valuable contribution towards the identification of critical success factors. The recommendations for the establishment of a new agricultural theme route are the following:

- A suitable public relations officer – the so-called driving force behind the route – is essential
- The exact locality of the route should be identified
- The name of the route is extremely important
- The route should be accessible from all directions
- Visible road signs should be erected

- The sales person should be appropriately knowledgeable
- The continuous training of personnel is essential
- Personnel must be able to operate under pressure
- Personnel should know their environment with its other tourist attractions well
- The reception facility and staff are very important
- Tourism information given should be accurate
- The facilities should be big enough to handle groups of up to 30 people
- Organised bus tours should be accommodated by appointment
- Good relationships with tour operators are essential
- Suitable toilet facilities for both men and women should be available
- Buses should be able to turn with ease
- Parking should be available and safe
- Other facilities such as the cellar, wine-tasting area and reception area should be made tourist-friendly and accessible – also for paraplegic tourists
- Tourists should be educated about production processes and be shown around
- Surrounding towns and the environment should be clean and litter-free
- Good working relationships with local town councils are essential
- Management should have a written tourism plan to create team spirit amongst members
- All members who share in the route's benefits should contribute financially
- The smaller the wine route, the more informal should the management structure be
- New members should commit themselves to the vision and goals of the wine route
- The hours open to tourists should be applied to accommodate tourist visits – after hours as well as during weekends
- Other theme-based routes could key in with wine routes as long as they have their business in order
- Tourists would like to see more value-added products under the same roof

- Each route should offer something different
- Management should concentrate on what the specific route can do well
- Financial management should be cost-effective
- Marketing knowledge should be pooled to the benefit of the route and all its members
- The chairman of wine route organisation should not dominate the public relations officer during meetings
- Routes will only function as good as the information disseminated – therefore sound communication is of great importance
- The acknowledgement of the synergy between a wine route and tourism as such is important and requires that same facilities be shared
- Members' facilities should be audited periodically to ensure that they are up to standard

8. SPIN-OFF CONSIDERATIONS

The concept of sustainability in rural areas often ends within the context of sustainable agriculture or sustainable environmental conservation. Butler & Hall (1998) state that for rural areas to be sustainable it is inevitable that the whole range of associated activities be integrated and co-ordinated. Rural communities are seldom capable of being economically sustainable without a diverse economic base, with tourism and recreation becoming an increasingly important part of that base. In the midst of a wide range of diverse definitions of sustainable agriculture, sustainable development stresses the fact that economic development is dependent upon the continued well-being of the physical and social environment on which it is based. Denman (1994) identified the following broad criteria for sustainable tourism:

- Sensitive development appropriate to the local environment
- Support for conservation
- Support for the economy at a very local level
- Ecologically sound practices
- Providing visitors with a genuine appreciation of the area

It is evident that the wine industry has in recent years played a major role in rural tourism and unlike other agricultural and tourism-related industries, winery sales proved to have a significant multiplier effect because there is less leakage outside the local economy. The recent explosion of the wine-industry

within South Africa led to a drastic increase in a wide range of wine cellars, which are indicative of the economic successes of these ventures. It has been shown that farm tourism as such plays an important role in terms of both economic and rural development.

A sound social spin-off of the profitability of the wine industry is the relative enhancement of the quality of life of the participants within the wine-industry. It is a well-known and recognised fact that both the export-orientated agricultural industries, the wine and fruit industries, are willing to invest in their employees to better the quality of life of all of them. Better than average remuneration packages, training, and facilities such as homes, schools, etc. are proof of the valuable positive social spin-offs of a profitable wine industry. It is also acknowledged that communities are starting to recognise the importance of a flourishing wine industry within their region (Dodd & Bigotte, 1997).

Since 1971 when the development of wine routes started, tourists came flocking to farms and this fact on its own necessitated the upgrading of all there is to see. Not only are there specific sectors of the tourism industry that want to ensure that labourers are happy and well cared for, they also want to know more about productions processes and the quality of the environment in which the vines are grown. This together with the fact that strict phytosanitary measures are in place, forced viticulturists to adapt to a more environmentally and socially aware customer. They had to implement practices that would be acceptable to all parties involved. Integrated pest management and water recycling schemes are but two of the control measures that contribute towards a healthier environment and thus the quality of life.

The moment an agriculturalist accepts the presence of a tourist on the farm, he is forced to invest in socially acceptable practices, which includes improving the quality of life of employees in the social and production environment. Being a member of a wine route, he then has the responsibility to adhere to these conditions and the availability of his premises to tourism adds value to the diversity of sites and experiences, which encourages sustainable tourism at regional level. In conclusion, a visit to a wine farm on a wine route or the opening of a wine farm to tourists, contributes towards sustainability in that it provides an environmentally and socially compatible form of tourism (Embacher, 1994).

9. CONCLUSION

This study of the wine routes of the Western Cape revealed various interesting facts about *modus operandi*, problems and achievements that are of significant value to groups interested in establishing similar routes. The study *inter alia* revealed that there is various structures found in the wine routes of the Western Cape varying from highly informal associations to those based on thorough business principles. There seem to be similarities in the reasons for the establishment of each route, being mostly that of the regional promotion of brand names, the promotion of the area itself, as well as boosting product sales. It is important to take note of the various ways each route is funded and managed, as these are in many ways the pillars that facilitate harmony amongst members and also ensure financial viability of activities. Diversified funding structures provide a way of differentiating between larger and smaller cellar members, and the establishers of similar tourism routes should take note of this method.

The close liaison between the local tourism bureau and the wine route organisation harmonises strategies to encourage the attraction of tourists in a sound way for agreed upon reasons. This natural synergy between the agricultural and tourism sectors seems to be of the utmost importance if strategies are to be successfully implemented. Critical success factors identified are as follows:

The appointment of a knowledgeable public relations officer/manager – During all interviews this factor stood out as the most critical one for it is this person who is in a position to be the driving force behind the project. This person should have a strong personality and good human relationship skills, especially communication skills, and must understand both the wine production process and the tourism environment within the route's boundaries. A special case was also made for the person needing sound financial skills in order to manage the financial budget and cash flow of the wine route. In addition the person should be willing to learn from colleagues at the Wine Route Forum and to share ideas to add value to the wine route concept. Long & Nuckolls (1994) summarise the importance of this person as follows:

"To be successful in tourism development, there needs to emerge at least one individual, who, in addition to being somewhat knowledgeable about the tourism industry, is enthusiastic, energetic, and able to motivate others."

The establishment of a wine route forum where public relation officers can share information and ideas and learn from each other, thus avoiding isolation. This provides the correct platform to discuss frustrations or innovations that may be of benefit to all, and to share positive energy amongst members.

Close collaboration and co-ordination between the wine route and the local tourism bureau – It is imperative that wine routes tap into the natural synergy between themselves and tourism per se. This can be achieved if offices and facilities are shared. The tourist needs a one-stop information centre where he can get all the necessary information to add value to his experience in rural areas. This close co-ordination and shared relationship will ensure that correct and accurate information reaches the tourist.

The accessibility of wine facilities to tourists – In order to get people to visit a location, the facilities should be attractive and should especially be open at specific hours, which includes weekends when most tourists travel. This should be enforced upon all members.

Policies and strategies should be directed towards the encouragement of greater linkages between the wine and tourism industries to enhance the ability to promote places in order to attract investment and visitors and to encourage employment. The rural wine and tourism industries are complementary and have enormous potential to contribute to each other and serve as a strong base for the development of a healthy rural economy. The case study of the Western Cape wine routes provides sound principles and inputs for the development of both the local tourism and local agricultural sectors in the endeavour to improve the quality of life for all through a strong and healthy, sustainable agritourism sector.

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