Alonso, A.D. and Northcote, J. (2010) The development of olive tourism in Western Australia: a case study of an emerging tourism industry. International Journal of Tourism Research, 12 (6). pp. 696-708.

The Development of Olive Tourism in Western Australia: A Case Study of an Emerging Tourism Industry

Abel Alonso and Jeremy Northcote

Abstract
The recent development of olive growing in Western Australia, and its amalgamation with tourism and hospitality, provides opportunities for growers to showcase their products and for visitors to experience olive-tasting and learn about an ancient food culture and rural activity 'transplanted' into the 'New World' from its 'Old World' roots. The present study examines the dimensions of this emerging niche market in Western Australia. Face-to-face and telephone interviews were conducted among 23 small olive-growing operations located in this region to understand their scope for developing olive tourism. Overall, respondents' comments suggest that their involvement in olive tourism and hospitality could substantially provide benefits for visitors to rural areas and become a complementary alternative to other activities. To fulfil this potential, however, growers heavily rely on greater collaboration within their own industry, as well as on local authorities and tourism bodies in ways that include assistance, partnerships and promotion. Moreover, collaboration between olive growers and regional/tourism stakeholders, as well as government support may not only contribute to the sustainability of olive growing, but also to the emergence of olive tourism. In turn, these developments may also help develop a culinary identity and a tourism concept that may help minimise the threats of outside competition (cheaper olive imports) and rural decline.

Keywords: Olive growing, olive tourism, rural tourism, Western Australia, operators.

Introduction
In Australia, as in other countries, new agricultural industries are emerging in rural areas as traditional farming industries, such as sheep and cattle, undergo restructuring in the changing global market. Rural decline in both Australia and other industrialized nations is well documented (see, for example, Hanson and Bell, 2007; Markey et al., 2008). Olive farming – traditionally carried out in Mediterranean regions – is one such industry that has emerged in Mediterranean-like climatic regions around the world. In one such region, – the Gingin area of Western Australia – olive farming has emerged alongside grape growing and more traditional farming industries centred on sheep and cattle.

Tourism is another industry that has taken hold in Western Australia, promoted - as it has been elsewhere – as a key strategy for preventing rural decline. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in how agricultural industries, both old and new - might be compatible with tourism in order to promote regional sustainability. In the case of olive growing, a relatively new industry in Western Australia, some olive growers are becoming involved in hospitality and tourism ('olive tourism') as a means of marketing their olive oils and related value added products. However, to date research focussing on olive tourism, not only in Western Australia but also around the world, is almost non-existent.

The new phenomenon of olive tourism, as well as its spillovers into hospitality, is explored in this study among Western Australian olive growers. These dimensions are examined from owners' perspectives, with the dimensions of the olive tourist not included in the current study. Fundamentally, the study seeks to understand how olive farm operators in an emerging tourism destination attempt to capitalise on opportunities to expand their operations to cater to visitors. The purpose of exploring this issue is to better understand the factors that benefit and constrain the involvement of small businesses that may be peripheral to the local tourism industry but which, through innovation, might become more integrated. More knowledge in this area would benefit growers and the industry as a whole in several ways. For example, gained new insights could raise awareness among local and state governments about the potential of olive growing. Such a scenario may lead to more assistance and support for olive growers to gain access to increased business opportunities such as on-site sales.

The rural dimension, associated activities and trends

For many years, tourism and recreation have not only contributed to changes in rural areas (Williams, 2003), but have also been fundamental in changing and controlling rural landscapes and local communities. Rural areas nowadays play multiple roles and are seen as places of entertainment, leisure or second homes (Bessière, 1998). Further, for many travellers, acquiring knowledge while vacationing can be a critical motivator (Dodd, 1998). Not surprisingly, all these elements have led to an increased awareness and interest of the purpose of tourism and leisure in rural areas (Butler et al., 1998). In addition, these events have magnified the critical role of rural regions and rural industries in the development of rural tourism, sometimes referred to as 'farm tourism' (Clarke, 1996; Busby and Rendle, 2000), in different parts of the world (Alexander and McKenna, 1998; Ateljevic, 2007; Cánoves, et al., 2004; Hall, 1998; 2004; Huang, 2006; Armesto-López and Gómez-Martín, 2006; Roberts and Hall, 2001).

The European Community (EC) defines rural tourism as all tourism activities carried out in rural areas (Roberts and Hall, 2001). Rural tourism, while not a new phenomenon (Busby and Rendle, 2000), amalgamates different components (Clarke, 2005) that together contribute to forming "an important tourist destination" (Page et al., 2004, p. 349), including the 'natural' combination between local products, landscape, and leisure. For example, there is evidence of the importance of scenery as a 'pull factor' among visitors (Kao et al., 2008). The availability and the increasing demand of locally produced foods among visitors to rural areas can create links between tourism and local agriculture (Torres, 2002; Tregear et al, 2007). At the same time, for operators rural tourism can be an alternative to agricultural activities and diversification (Barbieri and Mahoney, 2009; Fleischer and Tchetchik, 2005; Sharpley and Vass, 2006).

Some researchers suggest that rural tourism can be a less costly venture in terms of capital, training, and investment credit, and can be developed in a more independent manner than other types of tourism (Wilson et al., 2001). Despite the positive outlook of using tourism as a tool that can contribute to rural and community development, it is also true that "developing tourism in regional areas poses many problems" (Beames, 2003, p. 205). Moreover, the danger exists that the potential real effects of tourism might be oversimplified, including the assumption that tourism is a cure or 'panacea' (Briedenhann and Wickens, 2004; Sorensen, 1990, in Walmsley, 2003) for rural communities to fight against their decline. The growth in popularity of wine tourism (Hall et al., 2000) in the last decades demonstrates how rural based activities can be amalgamated under the umbrella of rural tourism in different ways. Wine tourism, essentially visitation of vineyards and cellar doors (Cambourne, 1998) to taste the wine product (O'Neill et al., 2001; O'Neill et al., 2002), has been 'adopted' in many old and new wine regions.

In fact, the wine product, a tradition in many European countries for many centuries, is now a rural feature in numerous other areas of the world. Wine, the winery and the tourism component can all integrate to 'connect' winery visitors to culinary and educational experiences. Along these lines, wine routes help emphasise the culinary elements of rural areas (Arfini et al., 2002), particularly in cases where winery visitors may not only be looking for wine but other culinary experiences (Hashimoto and Telfer, 2003).

The olive product

The olive growing industry, while by no means experiencing a similar growth as that of the wine industry in newly wine producing regions and nations, has also been developing in areas other than its traditional Mediterranean-European, Middle East, or Northern African environments. For example, olives are now grown in regions that like some parts of California (Ferguson et al., 2002), Argentina (Ravetti et al., 2002), or New Zealand (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, MAF, 2001), enjoy climatic conditions similar to those of traditional olive cultures. While still a young industry, olive growing has also been developing for a number of years in Australia (Reichelt and Burr, 1997), where it is now considered an emerging industry (Kailis and Sweeney, 2002).

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2008), there are approximately 400 olive growers in Australia, with 2.7 million trees producing approximately 57,000 tonnes of olives yearly. The information in Table 1 shows that despite the progress the Australian olive growing sector has made, including Western Australia's sector, olive product imports are still very predominant.

Table 1: Olive production statistics in 2008.
Adapted from: Australian Olive Association Ltd (2008)

Year	Production Estimates for Australia (tonnes)					Extra virgin olive oil		Table olives	
	Table Olives	Olive Oil	SA	VIC	WA	Imports (tonnes)	Exports (tonnes)	Imports (tonnes)	Exports (tonnes)
2001	-	500	-	-	-	27,680	385	11,545	74
2002	-	750	-	-	-	28,987	300	12,618	199
2003	-	1,500	39.00%	28.00%	9.00%	28,447	278	14,483	138
2004	2,000	2,500	16.00%	47.00%	16.00%	32,657	501	13,711	265
2005	2,700	5,000	16.20%	40.10%	26.20%	29,062	1,652	15,143	215
2006	3,200	8,650	18.20%	53.90%	15.40%	34,511	2,988	15,608	230
2007	2,500	9,250	14.60%	49.20%	23.90%	43,404	2,502	16,364	207
2008	2,200	12,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

An estimated 42 olive growers operate in Western Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008). However, the real size of the industry is difficult to estimate, as often olives are planted in association with vineyards (Kailis and Harris, 2004). Olive growing was initiated over a century ago in Western Australia, after a group of Spanish Benedictine monks established a monastery in the rural area of New Norcia and planted olives for self-consumption (Bainger, 2004). The tradition of growing olives on the monastery's premises has been kept alive until today and the monastery over the years has become a tourist destination. Olives are planted in areas that today stretch from Geraldton to the Great Southern in Western Australia. The area in and surrounding the shire of Gingin near Perth is where most olives are grown in Western Australia, with approximately 70% of the current production (Taylor and Burt, 2007).

The Shire of Gingin comprises the town sites of Gingin, Guilderton, Seabird, Ledge Point and Lancelin in a 3,325 square kilometre area and has a population of 4,100 inhabitants (Shire of Gingin, 2008). The Gingin area, where most operators are based, is located on a major state highway that is the main link between the populous southern region of Western Australia and popular holiday destinations to the north, including nearby Geraldton. In terms of attractions, the entire shire is only in its initial stages of developing tourism. Popular visitor areas are located in the coastal town site in and around Lancelin, where commercial rock lobster, beaches, fishing and recreation are the main attractions (Shire of Gingin, 2008).

While the rural landscape and the existence of a nearby Gravity Discovery Centre (Experience Perth, 2007) provide incentives for the occasional traveller to explore Gingin's surroundings, the area's growing olive industry and tourism appear to be lacking a strong alliance or concept. According to Leiper (2004), "Tourism defined in a systems framework would enable each of its basic facets to be identified" (p. 30). These facets revolve around tourists, geographic, industrial components "and various interactions with broader environments" (Leiper, 2004, p. 30). However, quite possibly due to the olive growing industry's recent history, as well as the lack of an established tourism industry (Gingin, after all, is a transit route rather than a tourism destination per se), these facets are still to be defined in the Gingin area in a clear way.

Limited existing knowledge of olive growing and olive tourism

Within the Australian context, the emerging olive industry, and the olive tourism concept has received scant attention from an academic, or even from practitioners' perspective. Among the few who ventured to investigate the olive growing industry in Western Australia, Kailis and Harris (2004), explain the existing constraints on olive production, such as high harvesting costs, lack of production facilities or expertise. Furthermore, Michels (2006) examines Western Australian olive oil consumers and their perceptions on Western Australian olive oil, not surprisingly identifying a general lack of knowledge about the product (olive oil). Michels (2006) also concludes that there is not enough information about Western Australian olive growing from an international perspective.

The lack of research is even more obvious in regards to the olive tourism concept, namely, of olive growing operations open to the public in the form of cellar doors, or in combination with hospitality related activities, including selling food or providing on-site visits and accommodation. While still far from reaching the proportions of the wine tourism phenomenon, olive tourism is known in other parts of the world, if scantily. Mili (2004), for instance, explains that "olive cultivation is increasingly a rural activity combined with tourism" (p. 3) in the Mediterranean context. Clearly, olives are a cultural feature of that part of the world, and their connection to tourism appears to be a natural process.

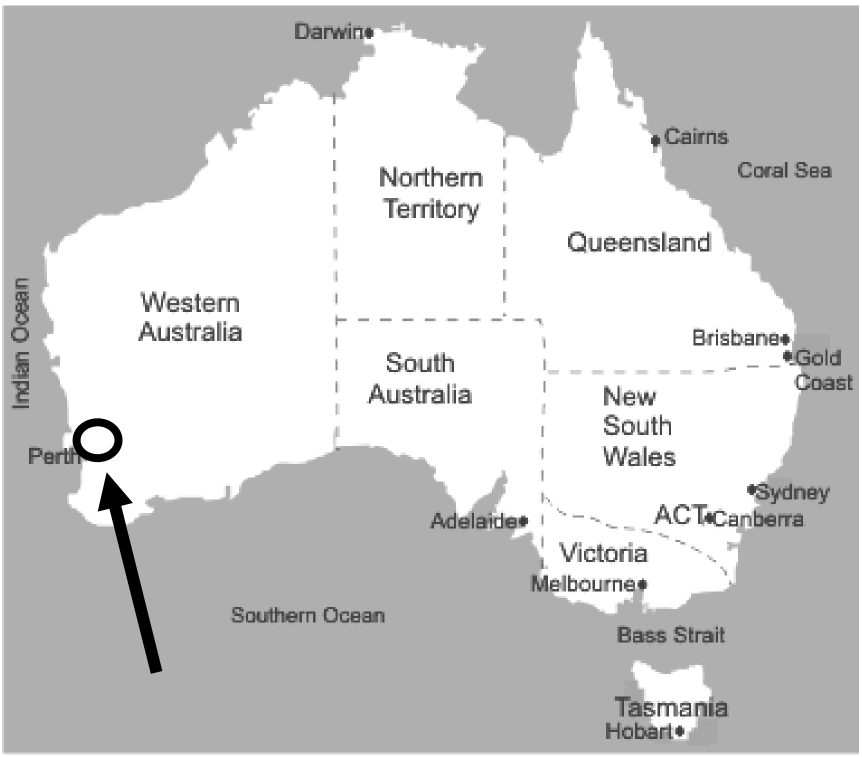
Because of the relatively short time since olives have been grown extensively in Australia, tradition and cultural links between rural communities, operators and the groves are still lacking in new olive growing regions. The following exploratory study seeks to address these under-explored dimensions from olive growers' perspectives.

Methodology

This study was part of a larger project investigating rural industries in Western Australia using both an exploratory and qualitative approach. A first step in this process was to contact olive growers during November 2007. This time of the year was chosen as it did not clash with any major activities on olive groves, such as olive picking or pruning. Initially, 28 olive growing operations were identified, mainly in the Western Australian Shire of Gingin, using databases that included those of the Australian Olive Association Ltd. (www.australianolives.com.au/), the Moore River Association north of Perth (http://www.mooreriverolive.asn.au/), as well as from some of the operations' own websites.

Due to the developing nature of the olive growing industry, any comprehensive formal listing of Western Australian growers is still unavailable. In addition, because olives are in many cases grown in combination with other farming activities (Kailis and Harris, 2004), the identification of olive growers was limited to using the tools described above, that is, databases. The main focus during the process of identifying olive groves was on operations in and around the Shire of Gingin. According to the Moore River Olive Association (2008), most of olive growing in the state of Western Australia (over 70%) takes place in this geographic area (See Figure 1). Therefore, it was believed that contacting this shire's olive growers would not only provide a representative sample of respondents but also, in view of their greater number, a sufficient number of respondents.

Figure 1: Approximate location of participating operations (see circle).
Source: Gold Cost Australia Travel Tips
http://www.gold-coast-australia-travel-tips.com/map-of-australia.html



Subsequent travel by one of the researchers to interview operators also contributed to the identification of a further five olive groves, two of which were not advertised to the public. Hence, the total number of olive growers approached was 33. While arguably sufficient as an initial step to explore the olive growing industry and its links to hospitality and tourism, it is acknowledged that the number of respondents and the localised focus in this study may not allow for making generalisations about olive growing and/or olive tourism in other parts of Australia and overseas. As a case study of an emerging olive tourism area, however, this was not seen to be problematic in terms of the particular objectives of this study.

From all 33 identified operators, 20 were contacted by mail, eight by email and five were approached directly. The letters and emails explained the purpose of the study; phone calls followed up this first contact in subsequent days, inviting operators to participate in the study in a face-to-face or telephone interview. In the five cases where operators were approached without previous letter introduction, the researcher provided operators with a copy of the purpose of the study; four operators agreed to be interviewed impromptu, and one by telephone at a later stage.

From all potential respondents, 24 accepted the invitation to participate in the study. However, it was noticed that one of these olive growing business is much larger in size compared to the small size of all other participating operators and is currently managed as a corporate commercial entity. Because the study sought to understand the nature and challenges of small/family size enterprises, that is, operations of fewer than 20 employees as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2002), a decision was made to exclude this operation from the study.

The total number of participating businesses was 23, a 69.7% response rate. From these operations, 11 were interviewed face-to-face and 12 by telephone. All interviews were undertaken between December 2007 and January 2008. The interviews were conducted on respondents' terms, that is, at a time and place where the interview would not disrupt work at the operation. The format of the interviews was semi-structured and the length was on average 15 minutes. All interviews were digitally recorded, then transcribed; the data sets were textually analysed as they formed part of respondents' answers to specific questions. Additional comments of respondents were also textually analysed. Respondents' comments were labelled as Operator 1 (O1), Operator 2 (O2), and so forth.

Participants were prompted to respond to the following research questions:

- What is the background / history of the operation? For instance, when were the olive trees planted? How many olive trees are planted?
- Is the operation open to the public? If yes, why?
- If the operation is/was open to the public: In what ways is the operation open to the public, for example, through a cellar door, offering food / accommodation to visitors?
- What are the main challenges that olive grower operations face?

Once again, the exploratory nature of the study suggested an initial 'general' approach to identify key dimensions in operators' interactions, if any, with hospitality and tourism. Furthermore, the very limited number of growers identified determined the decision to use a qualitative approach, as it was believed that face-to-face or telephone interviews would elicit more responses and more in-depth comments from potential respondents.

Findings: Profile of participating businesses

As illustrated in Table 2, 12 (52.2%) of the 23 olive growers interviewed had been involved in operating olive farms for less than ten years, and the oldest operation was established in 1994. In addition, eight respondents (34.8%) had farms with only a few hundred trees, eight (34.8%) had farms with up to 3,000 trees, and three with over 20,000 trees. Responses indicated that six (26%) operators had their own processing plants or mills for producing olive oil, with facilities for packaging bottles for distribution. Table 2 also illustrates considerable variety in the markets that operators distributed their products to, with several being involved in different strategies simultaneously. For example, two operations focused on the export market and also on on-site sales as well as in hospitality / retail outlets. Predominantly, however, the participating operations were selling their products at selected local retail outlets and restaurants, or on-site.

Table 2: Selected demographic characteristics and sales strategies among participating olive groves

No. operations	**Time growing olives ***	**No. operations**	**No. trees ***
3	**2 years or less**	**8**	**180 - 700**
9	**5 – 8 years**	**8**	**1,000 - 3000**
6	**10 – 13 years**	**3**	**20,000+**
Sales on-site	**Sales at restaurants**	**Sales to retailers**	**Exports**
1**	1	1	-
1**	1	1	-
1**	1	-	1
1**	-	1	1
1**	1	-	-
1**	1	-	-
1**	-	1	-
1**	-	1	-
-	1**	1	-
-	1**	1	-
-	6	-	-
1	-	-	-
-	-	1	-
Total: 9 (39.1%)	**Total**: 13 (56.5%)	**Total**: 8 (34.8%)	**Total**: 2 (8.7%)

* Not all operators indicated the size of their groves or the years in this activity.

** This grower had more than one sale strategy.

Olive growers, olive tourism and hospitality

A total of 10 (47.6%) of the respondents indicated that their olive groves were open to the public, and 13 (52.4%) were not. While the percentage of operators open to the public may seem high, it must be acknowledged that the majority of the operations contacted are located in and around Gingin, a township with easy access to main roads and visitor traffic. However, there may be many other olive groves that are isolated from towns and main roads and therefore not open to the public; hence, the findings of this study are treated with caution. One grower (O1) that also owned a vineyard and a cellar door acknowledged that *"We sell everything here,"* while two growers (O2, O3) combined on-site sales with those in the local area:

- *"At the moment I have a stand at the local café, selling my products because we do a lot of value added products."*
- *"I have a little side-line shop with local foods and produce available for sale."*

A total of 12 (52.2%) participants acknowledged being involved with tourism. Furthermore, the relationships between the olives, tourism and hospitality became obvious in the case of one operator whose business had a diversified farm concept, with olives, wine and upscale accommodation. In this case, the respondent (O4) mentioned having a *"cellar door, which doubles up as olive oil and wine."* Such was also the case for three other operators, whose businesses combined olive groves, vineyards and in some cases accommodation. Two of these operators (O5, O6) also acknowledged current links with tourism bodies in their area:

- *"... we are members of the visitor centre. Our main reason is to attract customers and to see what others are doing."*
- *"We are associated with different local tourism associations. Mainly our marketing is through web-paging."*

In these situations, the proximity of the grove to a major road was fundamental. Such was also the case of one grower (O7) whose operation was located only feet away from a major state road, the only one traversing the region. This operator combined accommodation, food and the value added olive products: *"... our café is seasonal; it runs for seven months of the year and the cottage runs year round, and so we have tourists with schools come through. But we don't have real tours because I can't be everywhere ... If my husband is home from work he comes and takes a tour but it's not something we promote."*

The owner of a different olive grove (O2) had also embraced tourism as an alternative to sell olive products and create brand awareness: "*"We have five different varieties of olives here. A lot of people are following us, which is great ... They [visitors] have a picnic in the grove; they bring lots of Chianti, they have fun, they talk to their friends, they gossip, they bring their children, and if it's for oil we help them to get the olives to the mill ..."*

Others, such as a grower (O8) who had recently purchased an existing farm with accommodation, olive grove and vineyards had plans to become more involved in tourism. However, as with Operator 7 (O7), this respondent faced the challenge of lack of labour to run the operation: *"We've got a lot we could do. At this stage it's only my husband and myself so we've virtually got more than enough work to keep us going. Our next step will be to have a go at making the wine, press the olives, see how that goes and the tourists all seem to want farm animals; we have a lot of overseas tourists here. We are looking at making a barnyard with an Australian theme."*

A manager of one of a large family-owned grove (O9) explained how the olive grove was becoming a magnet for (tourism) groups with a thirst for learning about olives: *"We had schools ... and then my boss is involved with the Italian community in Perth, so we have had some tourists from the Italian Chamber of Commerce. And then we are working with the Midwest Development Corporation and Tourism WA as well."* The importance of the development of local initiatives for famers to market their produce appeared to be helping some growers: (O10) *"... we started our Sunday market [where] every week there is olive oil for sale."* This same grower was also rapidly becoming involved with the hospitality industry: *"At the moment we have twelve restaurants in Perth. Our goal is to get two restaurants a week."*

In fact, 16 respondents (65.2%) acknowledged being involved with the hospitality industry one way or another, for example, selling at local or state restaurants, as the following comments from different growers (O11, O12 and O13) demonstrate:

- *"We do this [sell to restaurants] to earn a living; it obviously gives us awareness as well, but the primary objective is to sell our product."*
- *"I do supply to a bakery and a café for just the retail product."*
- *"... the neighbouring restaurant uses our product in the kitchen..."*

In another case (O14), the hospitality industry provided much needed relief to the challenge of selling olive oil through other avenues: *"We originally set out to sell the bottles retail but that is too hard; to try and get a small grove onto a supermarket shell is really hard. So now we are concentrating on selling it to restaurants and chefs, which seem to be reasonably well at the moment."*

Existing threats affecting olive growers

Some respondents noted a number of challenges associated to production and marketing of olives, as well as impediments in the development of olive tourism. As would be expected, several respondents (O15 and O16) acknowledged the issue of isolation and distance to main roads as a motive for not being open to the public:

- *"…it's 22 kilometres of gravel road to get to our property."*
- *"... I don't think there is good enough scope there really to attract enough visitors per day because we just don't get that much traffic driving by our front gate. So until there are lot more things around like bed and breakfast or farm stays or whatever I don't think that has a good scope up here."*

In the same vein, others considered themselves fortunate to be located in areas of visitor or passer-by traffic as the following comment states (O17): *"For a lot of the olive groves that are not so close to Perth I think the biggest challenge is selling their product and making people aware. We are lucky in that regard because we are quite close to Perth so it's not such a big issue for us..."*

However, proximity to roads was not a synonym of successfully drawing attention to one's olive grove or cellar door. Instead, as the following comment illustrates (O2), there needs to be a stronger emphasis on the area's value as olive growing region. Moreover, helping create a local theme in the form of olive tourism development could be a drawcard for many travellers: "*... living on the main road it is easy to be found for people who want to find you. But even the locals say they have been driving by for years but don't have any time to call in.* In this regard, the same participant recognised that the involvement of local tourism bodies can provide vital assistance to disseminate information for the benefit of the local community: "*The biggest advantage is that the local tourist bureau sends tourists out because we are members of the group. I don't know if we get many passers-by. It's good that we are part of the tourist bureau."*

In addition, government's assistance was suggested as a means of supporting the local olive growing industry, a development that at the same would provide a much needed boost to the growth of olive tourism in the areas studied (O18): *"For growth in our industry it is just a matter the government trying to regulate the cheap and false imports from coming to the country."* The threat of competition of cheaper imported olive products was also a key challenge for another participant (O19):

> *"There is a fair amount of competition; there is a huge potential for exporting but it's tough ... The fact is that the small grower has to be able to service people all of the time whereas the major growers have supply chains, sell reps, and delivering vans and lots of stuff, so the bigger ones do it more easily, with more capital, more people and more structure to work with, whereas the small people need to have their own time and their own van to do it."*

The recent growth of olive growing can also be a factor stifling the development of the industry (O7): *"I think all of us around here are still really young, [that is] our trees. We haven't reached the point yet where we are going to be producing such a huge amount of oil ... that we are going to have to get our heads out of the sand and start working more cooperatively. Even though they are trying to get that off the ground there still seems to be some issues that are not solved."*

Generational and economic issues were also suggested as a potential threat to the continued growth and development of the industry (O2, O20, and O21):

- *"Well, my husband is 76 so soon we will have to sell this property because we need money and cannot continue with the hard work."*
- *"I am very concerned about the farmers that are leaving their land, like us, because we can't carry on because we are getting so little return for what we do."*
- *"The older generations are leaving the district. We look around and having lived here for over 30 years ... it's sad in a way because the history is gone and the fabric of the community is totally changing..."*

Despite these challenges, many growers also look positively into the future and acknowledge many business opportunities, particularly in regards to olive tourism (O22, O2, O23, O11, and O17):

- *"I think there is a lot of opportunities for development in ... the tourism area."*
- *"This is not a very old industry, and this is to me what makes it so exciting because I can see the potential. As I said, lot of the olive growers are just olive growers; they don't see the big picture... Being so close to Perth and with all the towns developing on the ocean and a whole new city being developed we've got the people and we've got the olives. So it's hugely exciting..."*
- *"I think there is certainly a need there, certainly in this region because it hasn't really developed as a tourist destination yet."*
- *"We've got a few things that we could do straightaway to increase business..."*
- *"We'd like to get more contact with tourist operators, so we are seen as a stop on a longer journey. If we could get regular tours, one or two in the week or in the month would be good. At the moment our tours are more social groups because they are not repetitive business."*

Conclusion, Implications and Future Research

Olive growing has been developing in several areas of Western Australia, and as a result a growing number of farm operators are becoming involved in olive tourism and hospitality. In areas close to main roads and with more traffic flow, this concept has taken in some cases the form of on-site cellar doors. These venues are often equipped with tasting rooms, where value added products developed from olives, or other rural products such as wine are sold. For these olive growers, olive tourism provides an alternative to market their products and maximize their revenues. For visitors, on the other hand, olive tourism offers a gourmet experience and an opportunity to gain insights about a product with Mediterranean roots that has been adopted in the Australian subcontinent. To date, research on olive tourism has been conducted to a very limited extent. The objective of the present study was to examine this emerging concept from the perspective of growers in Western Australia. In this region, as identified in the study, several growers have begun to align themselves with tourism growth in the region.

Respondents' comments to a great extent demonstrate that olive growing is in its developmental stages, and that some olive farmers are taking advantage of being close to tourist or passer-by traffic to market their olive oil and related value-added products. Some are also providing cafeteria/restaurant services, farm tours and accommodation to visitors, or developing and promoting olive trails. However, geographic isolation, the relatively young age of the industry, with resulting issues such as lack of cooperation among growers, competition, generational renewal and the need of support against competition and development are some of the constraints respondents recognized.

As more growers enter the field, the importance of collaboration among growers in developing olive tourism, as well as that of support from local authorities (council, tourism organizations) becomes critical. According to Kastenholz et al. (1999), "it may take a long lead-time to create a distinct image of a new tourism form/product" (p. 353). This scenario might be true in the case of olive growers in Western Australia as they currently try to develop an image and a destination via olive related products. However, antecedents in other rural based industries, particularly wine trail development in Western Australia, provide evidence that joining forces and promoting an area, while a long-term project with numerous hurdles, might be a way towards progress and development.

Thus, of paramount importance is ensuring that those olive growers that are currently seeking to develop a local olive tourism industry are assisted with marketing promotion by visitor centres, accommodation providers, hotels and other tourism operators located along the main routes and within the region. Such promotion could also be carried out through web-based marketing strategies. The Shire of Gingin (www.gingin.wa.gov.au/), for example, promotes a two-day self-drive tour of the surrounding area on its website, but only makes reference to "fruit orchards" that can be seen on the side of the road (Shire of Gingin, n.d.). In this regard, there is considerable potential to more heavily promote olive farms in regional marketing, highlighting them as a complement to other tourism activities and attractions.

By jointly promoting their region and its attractions, such partnerships could increase the marketing reach of individual businesses (and hence are a cost-effective means for promotion). These collaborative relationships could also provide visitors with a sense of an integrated tourism experience, that is, by means of catering to a range of interests and activities that benefits the regional tourism industry as a whole. The more options that are on offer in a particular region, the more viable a region becomes as a competitive tourism destination. Ideally, areas like Gingin should strive to be more than merely stop-off areas for passing tourists, but destinations in themselves that visitors might like to spend a day exploring – a result that would benefit a greater number of operators located away from the main route.

While the low number of participating businesses is a clear limitation that is acknowledged in this study, this was a first investigation in an area that has been largely overlooked from researchers in different fields. This said, this study also identifies several areas for future research. For example, studying the extent to which collaboration, or lack thereof, exists between olive growers, local authorities and tourism bodies with regards to their involvement in further developing olive tourism could provide very important information for the entire industry. In addition, while the consumer side - that is, the olive grove visitor or 'olive tourist' – was not part of the scope of the study, this dimension could be investigated in future studies to understand the 'demand' side of the industry. Resulting information from the consumer side would be invaluable, for instance, in assisting in the segmentation of visitors, as well as in assessing their level of involvement in olive tourism, including their consumption at the cellar door, likelihood of return, or brand awareness. Moreover, further insights on the visitor dimension, including whether these visitors may have other interests and goals while they travel to olive groves, may identify activities or destinations that could be developed as a package or bundle of activities. Such a development would add value to visitors' experience while keeping them in the area for a longer period of time.

References

Alexander, N., and McKenna, A. (1998), "Rural tourism in the Heart of England", *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 10 No. 5, pp. 203-207.

Arfini, F., Bertoli, E., and Donati, M. (2002), "The wine routes: analysis of a rural development tool", Atti del Convegno SYAL Système Agroalimentaire Localisés, Montpellier, France. Retrieved 10 August 2007 from http://www.gis-syal.agropolis.fr/Syal2002/FR/Atelier%204/DONATI%20ARFINI.pdf

Armesto-López X.A., and Gómez-Martín, B. (2006), "Tourism and quality agro-food products: an opportunity for the Spanish countryside", *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, Vol. 97, 166-177.

Ateljevic, J. (2007), "Small tourism firms and management practices in New Zealand: The centre stage macro region", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 28 No. 1, pp. 307-316.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2008), "Agricultural Commodities, 2006-07", Retrieved 7 August 2008 from http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/BC368442A5431DDECA2574560014CA50/$File/71210_2006-07.pdf

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2002), "Small businesses in Australia, 2001", Retrieved March 27 2008 from http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/97452F3932F44031CA256C5B00027F19?Open

Australian Olive Association Ltd. (2008), "Production Statistics 2008", Retrieved 30 July 2008 from

http://www.australianolives.com.au/web/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=36&Itemid=290
Bainger, F. (2004), “New Norcia olive oil”, *ABC Rural*, Retrieved 17 December 2007 from http://www.abc.net.au/rural/reporter/stories/s1112123.htm
Barbieri, C., and Mahoney, E. (2009), “Why is diversification an attractive farm adjustment strategy? Insights from Texas farmers and ranchers”, *Journal of Rural Studies,* Vol. 25, pp. 58-66.
Beames, G. (2003), “The rock, the reef and the grape: The challenges of developing wine tourism in regional Australia”, *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, Vol. 9 No. 3, pp. 205-212.
Bessière, J. (1998), “Local development and heritage: Traditional food and cuisine as tourist attractions in rural areas”, *Sociologia Ruralis*, Vol. 38 No. 1, pp. 21-34.
Briedenhann, J., and Wickens, E. (2004), “Tourism routes as a tool for the economic development of rural areas – vibrant hope or impossible dream?” *Tourism Management*, Vol. 25 No. 1, pp. 71-79.
Busby, G., and Rendle, S. (2000), “The transition from tourism on farms to farm tourism”, *Tourism Management*, Vol. 21 No. 6, pp. 635-642.
Butler, R., Hall, C.M., and Jenkins, J.M. (1998), “Introduction”, In R. Butler and C.M. Hall (eds.), *Tourism and recreation in rural areas* (pp. 3-16), Chichester, U.K.: John Wiley and Sons Ltd.
Cambourne, B. (1998), “Wine tourism in the Canberra District’, In J. Carlsen and R. Dowling (eds.), *Wine tourism: Perfect partners*. Proceedings of the First Australian Wine Tourism Conference, Margaret River, 1998.
Cánoves, G., Villarino, M., Priestley, G.K., and Blanco, A. (2004), “Rural tourism in Spain: an analysis of recent evolution”, *Geoforum*, Vol. 35 No. 6, pp. 755-769.
Clarke, J. (1996), “Farm accommodation and the communication mix”, *Tourism Management*, Vol. 17 No. 8, pp. 611-620.
Clarke, J. (2005), “Effective marketing for rural tourism”, In D. Hall, I. Kirkpatrick and M. Mitchell (eds.), *Rural tourism and sustainable business* (pp. 87-102). Clevedon, U.K.: Channel View Publications.
Dodd, T. H. (1998), “Influences on search behavior of industrial tourists”, *Journal of Hospitality and Leisure Marketing*, Vol. 5 No. 2/3, pp. 77 - 94.
Experience Perth (2007), “Gingin coast to country”, Retrieved 30 July 2008 from http://www.experienceperth.com/en/Coast/Sunset+Coast/Gingin+Coast+to+Country/default.htm
Ferguson, L., Krueger, W.H., Reyes, H., and Metheney, P. (2002), “Effect of mechanical pruning on California black ripe (Olea Europea L.) CV. ‘Manzanillo’ table olive yield”, ISHS Acta Horticulturae 586: IV International Symposium on Olive Growing, Valenzano, Italy. 16 December 2007. http://www.actahort.org/books/586/586_54.htm
Fleischer, A., and Tchetchik, A. (2005), “Does rural tourism benefit from agriculture?” *Tourism Management*, Vol. 26, pp. 493-501.
Hall, C.M, Sharples, L., Cambourne, B., Macionis, N., Mitchell, R., and Johnson, G. (2000), “Wine tourism around the world: Development, management and markets” (pp. 1-23), Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann.
Hall, D.R. (1998), “Tourism development and sustainability issues in Central and South- eastern Europe”, *Tourism Management*, Vol. 19 No. 5, pp. 423-431.
Hanson, J., and Bell, M. (2007), “Harvest trails in Australia: Patterns of seasonal migration in the fruit and vegetable industry”, *Journal of Rural Studies*, Vol. 23, pp. 101-117.
Hashimoto, A., and Telfer, D. (2003), “Positioning an emerging wine route in the

Niagara region: Understanding the wine tourism market and its implications for marketing", *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, Vol. 14 No. 3/4, pp. 61-76.

Huang, L. (2006), "Rural tourism revitalization of the leisure farm industry by implementing an e-commerce strategy", *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, Vol. 13 No. 3, pp. 232-245.

Kailis, S.G., and Harris, D. (2004), "Establish protocols and guidelines for table olive processing in Australia", *Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation*, pp. 1-117. Retrieved 2 January 2008 from http://www.rirdc.gov.au/reports/NPP/04-136.pdf

Kailis, S.G., and Sweeney, S. (2002), "Olives in Australia", ISHS Acta Horticulturae 586: IV International Symposium on Olive Growing, Valenzano, Italy. 16 December 2007, available at http://www.actahort.org/books/586/586_77.htm

Kao, M.C., Patterson, I., Scott, N., and Li, C. (2008), "Motivations and satisfactions of Taiwanese tourists who visit Australia: An exploratory study", *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, Vol. 24 No. 1, pp. 17-33.

Kastenholz, E., Davis, D., and Paul, G. (1999), "Segmenting tourism in rural areas: The case of North and Central Portugal", *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 37, 353-363.

Leiper, N. (2004), "The framework of tourism – Towards a definition of tourism, tourist and the tourist industry", In S. Williams, *Tourism: Critical Concepts in the Social Sciences* (pp. 25-44). London: Routledge.

MAF (2001), "Information barriers to the development of emerging industries", *MAF Technical Paper No.: 02/08*, pp. 1-93, Retrieved 23 January 2007 from http://www.maf.govt.nz/mafnet/rural-nz/profitability-and-economics/emerging-industries/information-barriers/technical-paper-02-08.pdf

Markey, S., Halseth, G., & Manson, D. (2008), "Challenging the inevitability of rural decline: Advancing the policy of place in northern British Columbia", *Journal of Rural Studies*, Vol. 24, pp. 409-421.

Michels, T. (2006), "The 'Good Oil': The role olive oil plays in the lives of Western Australian Consumers", Unpublished master's thesis. Edith Cowan University, Perth, Australia.

Mili, S. (2006), "Market dynamics and policy reforms in the EU olive oil industry: An exploratory assessment", Proceedings of the 98th EAAE Seminar "Marketing dynamics within the global trading system: New perspectives," 29 June – 2 July, 2006, Chania, Crete, Greece.

Moore River Olive Association Inc. (2008), "Olive Information Map", Retrieved March 16 2010 from http://www.mooreriverolive.asn.au/

O'Neill, M., Palmer, A., and Charters, S. (2002), "Wine production as a service experience – The effects of service quality on wine sales", *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 16 No. 4, pp. 342-362.

O'Neill, M., Palmer, A., Charters, S., and Fitz, F. (2001), "Service quality and consumer behavioural intention: An exploratory study from the Australian wine tourism sector", Conference Proceedings. Australian and New Zealand Marketing Academy Conference. 1st - 5th December 2001, Massey University.

Page, S.J., Brunt, P., Busby, G., and Connell, J. (2004), *Tourism: a modern synthesis*, London: Thomson.

Ravetti, L.M., Matías, A.C., Patumi, M., Rocchi, P., and Fontanazza, G. (2002), "Characterization of virgin oils from Catamarca and La Rioja, Argentina, General Characteristics", ISHS Acta Horticulturae 586: IV International Symposium on Olive Growing, Valenzano, Italy, Retrieved 16 December 2007 from http://www.actahort.org/books/586/586_127.htm

Reichelt, K., and Burr, M. (1997), *Extra virgin: An Australian companion to olives and olive oil*, Kent Town, South Australia: Wakefield Press.
Roberts, L., and Hall, D. (2004), "Consuming the countryside: Marketing for 'rural Tourism", *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, Vol. 10 No. 3, pp. 253-263.
Roberts, L., and Hall, D. (2001), *Rural Tourism and Recreation: Principles to practice*, Wallingford, U.K.: CABI Publishing.
Sharpley, R., and Vass, A. (2006), "Tourism, farming and diversification: An attitudinal study", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 27 No. 5, pp. 1040-1052.
Shire of Gingin (2008), "Gingin Shire general information", Retrieved 29 July 2008 from http://www.gingin.wa.gov.au/general-info.htm
Shire of Gingin (n.d.), "Shire of Gingin Self-Guided Tour", Retrieved 7 August 2008 from http://www.gingin.wa.gov.au/assets/docs/web%20tourist%20info.pdf
Sorensen, A.D. (1990), "Virtuous cycles of growth and vicious cycles of decline: regional economic change in northern and western New South Wales", In Walmsley, D.J. (ed.), *Change and adjustment in northern New South Wales*, Department of Geography and Planning, University of New England, pp. 41-59.
Taylor, R., and Burt, J. (2007), "Growing olives in Western Australia", Department of Agriculture and Food. Government of Western Australia, Retrieved 18 November 2007 from http://www.agric.wa.gov.au/content/HORT/FN/CP/OLIVES/0807_GrowOlivesWA.pdf
Torres, R. (2002), "Towards a better understanding of tourism and agriculture linkages in the Yucatan: Tourists Food consumption and Preferences", *Tourism Geographies*, Vol. 4, pp. 282-306.
Tregear, A., Arfini, F., Belletti, G., and Marescotti, A. (2007), "Regional foods and rural development: The role of product qualification", *Journal of Rural Studies*, Vol. 23, pp. 12-22.
Walmsley, D.J. (2003), "Rural tourism: a case of lifestyle-led opportunities", *Australian Geographer*, Vol. 34 No. 1, pp. 61-72.
Williams, S. (2003), *Tourism and recreation*, Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited.
Wilson, S., Fesenmaier, D.R., Fesenmaier, J., and van Es, J.C. (2001), "Factors for success in rural tourism development", *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 40, pp. 132-138.