

## Article

# Port Wine and Wine Tourism: The Touristic Dimension of Douro's Landscape

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**Abstract:** Wine tourism is one of the most important products for developing tourism in Portugal. The aim of this paper is to assess the importance of Port Wine for the tourism development of the Douro landscape, using a case study approach based on interviews with several stakeholders, through qualitative research. For this purpose, we selected a sample of respondents composed of the sector stakeholders of Port vineyards. The results allow us to ponder and highlight the importance of the Port Wine culture for the region's development, as well as to identify the economic, social, and emotional values inherent to those who work in the sector based on an identity connected to the territory. This study focuses mainly on the approach taken to wine tourism, identifying the level of investment made in this area in terms of specialized training for employees, the creation of facilities and procedures suited to the practice of this type of tourism, as well as the values of the territory and wine that should guide the development of wine tourism activities in the Port Wine region. The impacts of COVID-19 on the sector are also analyzed, classifying them into different dimensions.

**Keywords:** Douro region; port wine; Douro vineyards; wine tourism; stakeholders; values



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## 1. Introduction

Wine tourism has been increasing worldwide, including a sum of different segments that look for a learning experience based not only on wine tasting. *The Carta Europea do Enoturismo* [1] defines wine tourism as a “system composed by the following subsystems: territory, tourism and wine making culture”. The “winescape”, or the “wine-growing landscape”, defined by the vineyards and their surrounding territories, provides a deep immersion in the rural environment, the culture, and the traditions of the local people, by way of the gastronomy and the heritage as the vernacular architecture [2–6]. Based on this statement, the wine routes are very important for the economic development of rural communities [7,8]. More and more, wine tourism should be considered as a composite tourist product based on experiences [9] and multifaced activities [10,11], where authenticity and the service quality of wine tourism [12] are key factors for the “winescape” experience [13].

Although, it is possible to identify the gap that currently exists in this area which focuses mainly on management and innovation, marketing, and consumer perspectives [14–19], where studies on the Douro region are included [20,21]. There is also the recognition of the importance of the link between wine and tourism for the economic competitiveness of the territory, as well as the importance of improving the living conditions for the settlement of the population. However, there is less focus on the connection between the territory and the sense of belonging or sense of place. Another important aspect that arises in this context is the fact that the wine and wine tourism industries are not always synonymous. According to the study by [22], there are experienced producers who do not always have a defined position regarding investment in this area. They are ambivalent about tourism. In

terms of the process framework, strong leaders, experience, and expertise are found to be positive factors for collaborative projects.

The unique characteristics of the region, mainly the landscape factors associated with the Port Wine product and the material and immaterial heritage, make the Douro region one of the most attractive currently in Portugal, even referring to this region as “fashionable”.

The decision to investigate the present case study is linked to the fact that in Portugal, wine production is an integral part of the national territory, from North to Southern regions and in the islands of Azores and Madeira. Portugal is a country with a strong wine tradition and stands out as an international reference country in the production of wines with prestige on a global scale.

Wine tourism offers are present throughout the national territory. It is a mark of the identity of destinations that should be preserved, highlighted, and valued. Wine tourism is considered a strategic product for the attractiveness of destinations in that it positions itself as a differentiating element. It also allows for highlighting a place’s cultural and traditional characteristics and functions as a tourist destination’s main or complementary attraction. In Portugal, wine tourism is considered a priority for the country’s development and one of the strategic tourist products [23].

In this context, Port Wine stands out as a privileged means of disseminating wine tourism due to its ancestry and particular characteristics. Port Wine is produced in the Alto Douro Wine Region, created in 1756. However, the origin of Port Wine dates back to 1675, the year in which the first documented mention of this fortified wine was made.

This paper results from an empirical study developed in this region, with a qualitative nature, based on interviews with stakeholders, specifically Port Wine-producers in Douro Vineyards (DV).

The main objectives of this study are to evaluate the strategic importance of wine tourism in the demarcated Douro region, to understand the importance of wine tourism in the economic base of the companies, and to identify the wine tourism potentialities in their vision.

This study allowed us to attain some theoretical and practical contributions, namely regarding the sense of belonging or sense of place, due to the familiar context of the companies present in the Port Wine region. The results prove that the unique characteristics of the region, mainly the landscape factors associated with the Port Wine product and the material and immaterial heritage, make the Douro region one of the most attractive currently in Portugal. It is also possible to verify that wine tourism is an important and emergent activity for these companies, contributing to the promotion and valorization of the region, namely through the worldwide projection of the Port Wine brand. From a theoretical point of view, it has verified that wine tourism should have specific attention regarding the cultural landscape, since its uniqueness is one of the most significant elements of this ecosystem.

The article is organized sequentially, beginning with a bibliographical review focused on the characterization of the wine-growing territory in Portugal, with a particular focus on the Douro region and landscape responsible for producing Port Wine; highlighting the importance of wine tourism as a strategic product for the development of tourism in the country and inland territories. The methodology section identifies the study objectives and the questions that guided the research, describing the method used in collecting primary data. This section describes the criteria that governed the sample selection, the structure of the interview script, and the procedures applied in developing the empirical study.

The results are discussed, and corresponding conclusions are provided. Following this, the overall conclusion is presented, highlighting the theoretical and practical contributions of the research. Finally, a reflection is made on the study limitations, and a sum of future research avenues is provided.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Cultural Landscape and Wine Tourism

Since the European Landscape Convention (2000) [24] and the ICOMOS-IFLA Principles Concerning Rural Landscape as Heritage [25], landscape studies and concerns with sustainability have increased. Cultural landscapes are defined by complex human interactions with the territory over time [26]. These landscapes contain an amalgam of dimensions, including nature and cultural diversity, material, immaterial, and biological heritage [27].

Cultural landscapes promote “non-material benefits” [28,29], as well as spiritual, religious, aesthetic, recreation, and cultural heritage values that are fundamental to human quality of life [30,31].

As landscapes are vital components of the heritage of humanity [25], it is crucial to understand the landscape as a process of territorial identity and cultural preservation stimulation. In this way, it is necessary to approach territorial planning and management concerns with a methodological process that involves territorial stakeholders’ reflections to guarantee that the landscape contributes to an integrated project in territorial development [32].

One of the rural landscape topologies is the wine landscapes that have adopted a model based on the traditional models but crossed with innovation to gain access to the international markets. Port Wine has a wide range of varieties and processes of cultivation that resulted from the historical land transformation associated with the ambient conditions to the vineyard growth and development. This has created a diverse wine culture(s) and a diverse wine landscape(s) in different regions, permitting huge variations of *terroir* characteristics to develop over time in a particular place.

As [33] argued, those wine landscapes arise in a concept of natural sustainability joined with rural and agriculture originality and based on singularity and differentiation. Traditional processes of cultivation are the result of the interaction between communities and the natural environment that creates specific and unique characteristics and sceneries in landscapes [34]. A wine landscape is more than wine, it is a cultural ecosystem, and various perspectives exist on the wine landscape depending on personal experience [35].

As [36] referred to the wine sector as one of the most essential supports to solid economic growth, the attention to its landscapes is one of the most significant elements of this economic ecosystem and is responsible for increasing numbers in tourism, but is still less explored. The vineyards’ historical landscapes became an interesting destination, and landscapes (natural or cultural) became a product of sustainable wine tourism. As the authors argued, the attention should focus on recognition and landscape classification, the cultural and natural preservation, and the attention to the above heritage classifications that produce a quality area.

### 2.2. Wine Tourism in Portugal

Tourism and leisure services have been considered complementary activities to traditional agricultural practices that contributes to halting the decline of more rural regions [36]. At the same time, tourism has been acting as an incentive for a higher investment, infrastructure development, employment generation, and territorial development in destinations [37,38].

In Portugal, rurality assumes a primary role in agriculture, and the wine sector has a considerable dimension. The growing economic market interest in wine landscapes materializes in activities that unite tourism and wine production and has increasingly drawn the attention of both the political and economic stakeholders of wine-producing territories and places, as well as the respective residents who perceive the reinforcement of opportunities in inland rural areas with low demographic dimensions [36].

Around 20% of the total area of permanent crops corresponds to vineyards, which is more significant in the agricultural regions of *Trás-os-Montes*, *Ribatejo e Oeste*, *Alentejo*, and *Entre Douro e Minho* (33.65%, 19%, 16.3%, and 13.4%, respectively) [39]. Furthermore, despite our country’s small size, the total wine production corresponds to around 7.4 mil-

lion hectares, placing Portugal as the 10th producer worldwide [40]. These figures are considered very relevant, contributing to the expansion of wine tourism as one of the best opportunities for rural development, increasing territorial cohesion, and mitigating depopulation in inland regions. Contributing to this are factors such as the high number of protected designations of origin (31) and Geographical Indication designations (14), as well as the more than 500 private agents in the wine tourism area [41]. It should be emphasized that tourism is essential for the development and recognition of Portuguese wine regions, as several studies have already proven [42,43].

In this context, the cultural landscapes of the vineyard and wine have gained dimension in the face of the intense demand of visitors and tourists who travel to the demarcated regions moved by the most diverse objectives [44,45].

Even in the last years of the COVID-19 pandemic, when the tourism sector experienced a significant decrease, these regions experienced a less severe impact on tourism demand, and domestic tourism was able to mitigate some adverse effects [46,47].

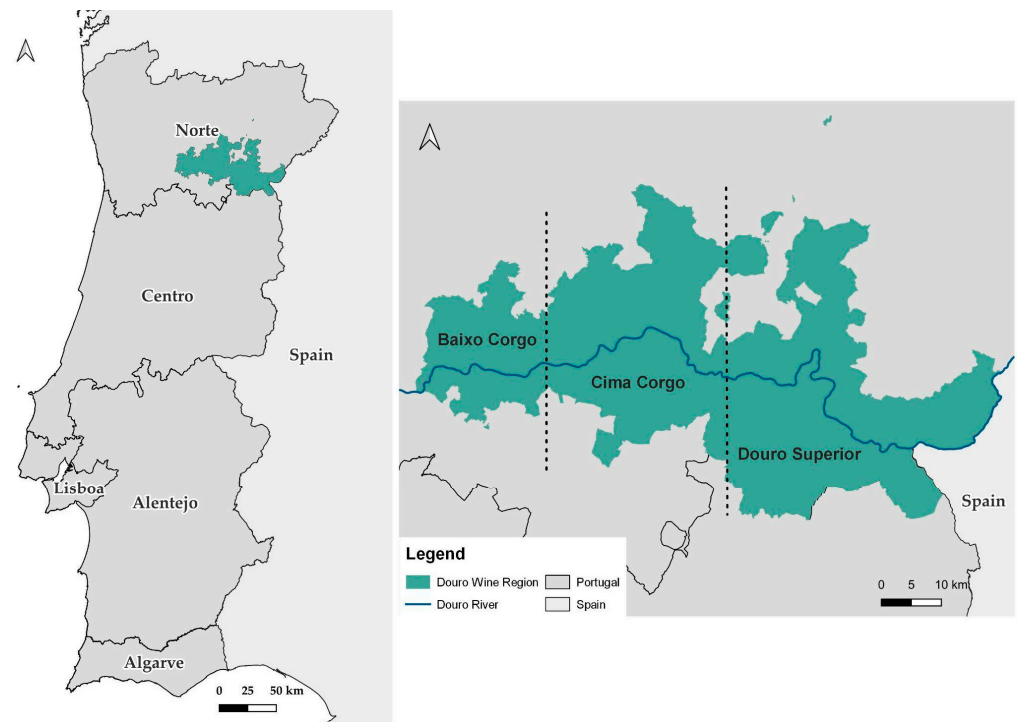
Due to all these features, the national wine sector and the directly related sectors are considered strategic within the Portuguese sectoral policies, integrating, since 2019 and in the context of the Tourism Strategy 2027 [23], an *Action Program for Wine Tourism 2019–2020*, where the aim is to place Portugal as the world reference of wine tourism. Fundamental to this process is the unique physical characteristics of wine associated with historical practices and cultural and heritage environments of great relevance and significance for their distinctiveness and uniqueness [41].

### 2.3. Douro Wine Region

The Douro Wine Region (DWR) is one of the most important tourist areas in Portugal, namely through the international recognition of Port Wine or “Vinho do Porto” as one of the icons of Portugal, and the importance of the Alto Douro Wine Region as a UNESCO World Heritage Centre. The ancestry of wine culture in this region dates back to the Roman occupation that cultivated vines and made wine in the Alto Douro valleys. This region also assumes a pioneering character and tradition in terms of quality, considering that it was the first demarcated and regulated region in the world when the Marquis of Pombal created the *Companhia Geral da Agricultura das Vinhas do Alto Douro* in 1756.

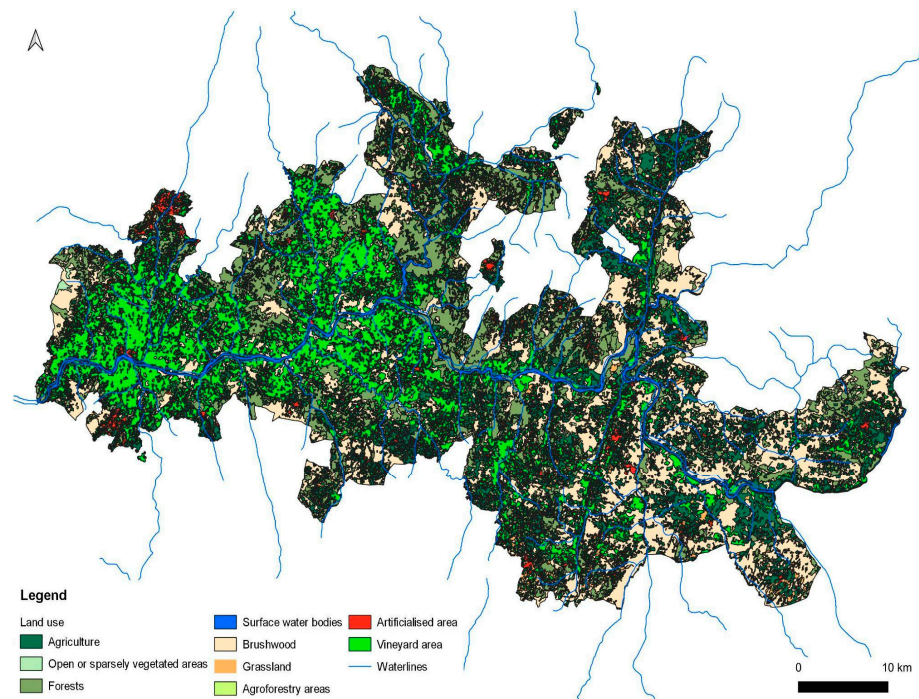
If we think that David Ricardo (1817) [48], the author of the classical theory of international trade, used Port Wine in his explanation of absolute and relative comparative advantages in bilateral trade, which analyzed Port Wine against British textiles, we conclude that Port Wine history has always been linked to exports. In this context, Port Wine represents an integration into the international markets, with about 90% of its production being exported [49]. Thus, its name is due not to the fact that it is produced with grapes from the Douro region—in fact, nowadays, *Pinhão* and *Régua* are the areas with the largest production of Port Wine—and stored in cellars in Vila Nova de Gaia, but is due to the city of Oporto, from where it was exported all over the world since the 17th century [50]. After World War II, Port Wine production went through several cycles that were economically beneficial to the producers, leading to the stabilization of market prices and representing an increase in the real prices paid to the producers [49]. In its long history, Port Wine is a crucial product for the national economy and, even more, a symbolic value representing Portugal in the world [50].

This region is subdivided into three sub-regions—*Baixo Corgo*, *Cima Corgo*, and *Douro Superior*, characterized by their microclimates, producing wines of different qualities in each, as described in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Douro Wine Region. Source: author's compilation based on CAOP (2021, Geographical information provided by the Directorate-General for Territory, Portugal), [51] and *Decreto-Lei, n.º 173/2009, de 3 de Agosto* [52].

Regarding the landscape, the Douro region stands out for its slopes, made up of terraced staircases, where the vines are planted right up to the banks of the river, as seen in Figure 2.



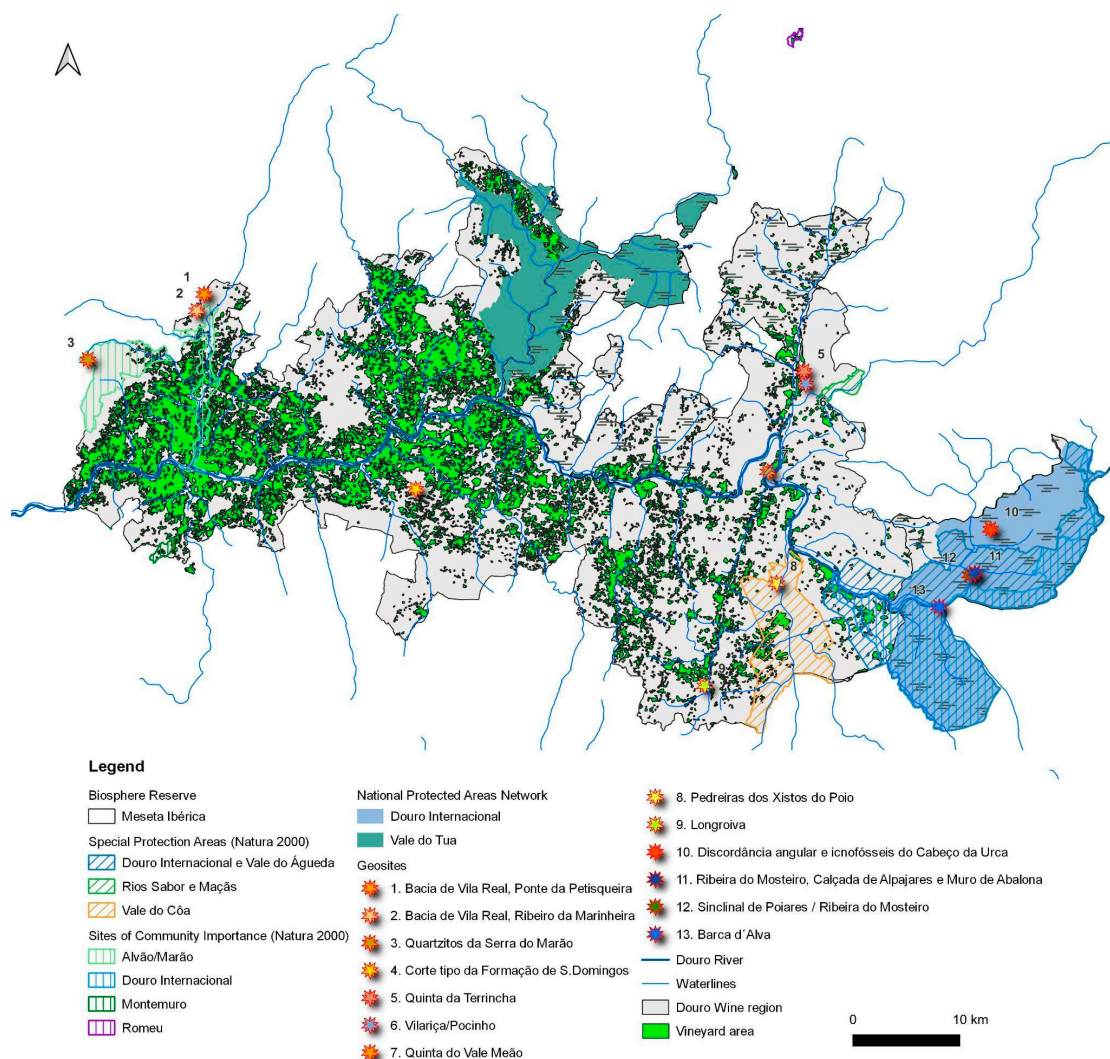
**Figure 2.** Land use in the DWR. Source: author's compilation based on COS (2018, Geographical information provided by the Directorate-General for Territory, Portugal) [53].



These terraces are a unique characteristic of this wine landscape, an ancestral human adaptation of the area for agriculture practices, allowing the vines to be cultivated in an area characterized by steep slopes and poor and rugged soils.

Vineyards occupy almost 44,000 ha of the DWR [54], corresponding to about 20% of the whole area. As can be seen, DWR is characterized by its rurality, where agriculture and forestry are still the dominant land use.

It is also possible to identify a set of natural protected areas, which can be assumed as the region's potential for the development of different types of tourist activities. The most important natural areas are identified in Figure 3.



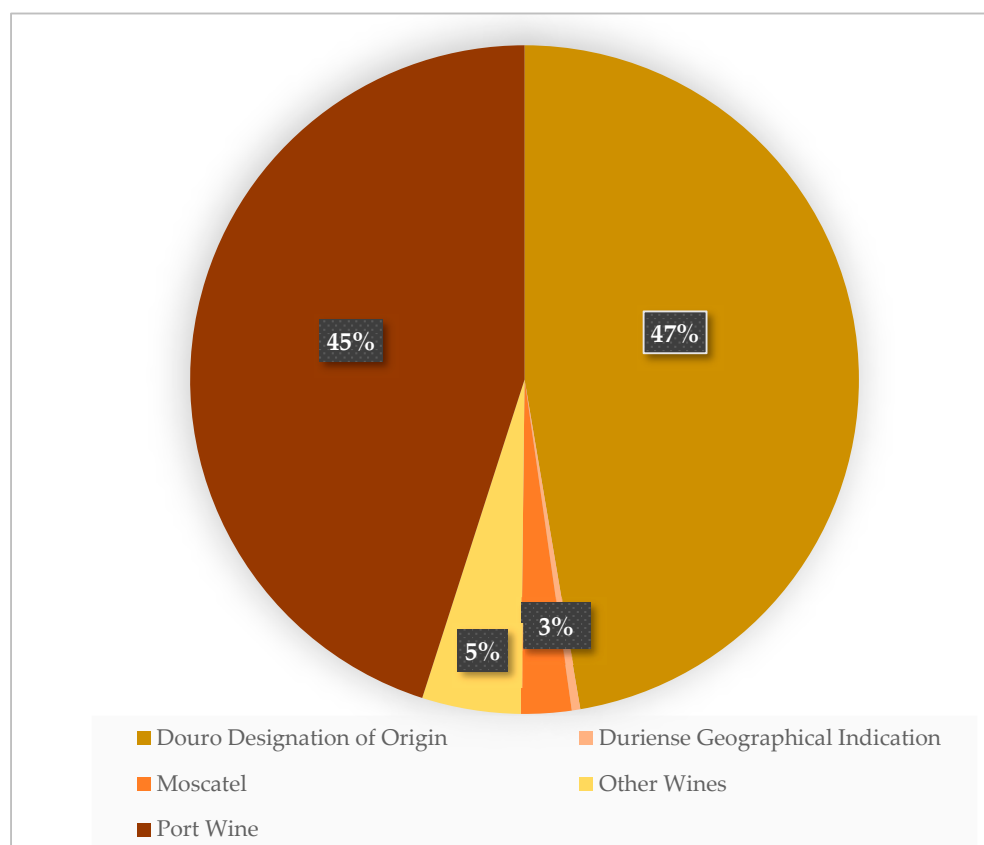
**Figure 3.** Natural Protected Areas in the DWR. Source: author’s compilation based on ICNF (2022) [55].

The presence of classified natural areas in the region is important for two main reasons: first, it ensures wildlife and landscape conservation, and second, it contributes to the promotion and marketing of sustainable tourism development and regional products. The *Douro Internacional* Natural Park is the most important natural area classified. Its classification is aimed at adopting measures to enhance its most relevant natural, landscape, socioeconomic, and cultural features. This site consists of deep valleys with unique geological and climatic characteristics which influence the ecosystem, namely birdlife and human activities. Besides the *Douro Internacional* Natural Park, it is also possible to find the *Vale do Tua* Natural Park, an area classified under the Biosphere Reserve of UNESCO—the

Meseta Ibérica Transboundary; three Special Protection Areas and four Sites of Community Importance under the Natura 2000, as well as thirteen geosites.

Port Wine is a fortified wine produced in the Douro demarcated region under peculiar conditions derived from natural and human factors. The manufacturing process, based on tradition, includes stopping the fermentation of the must by adding grape brandy, followed by blending the wines and ageing.

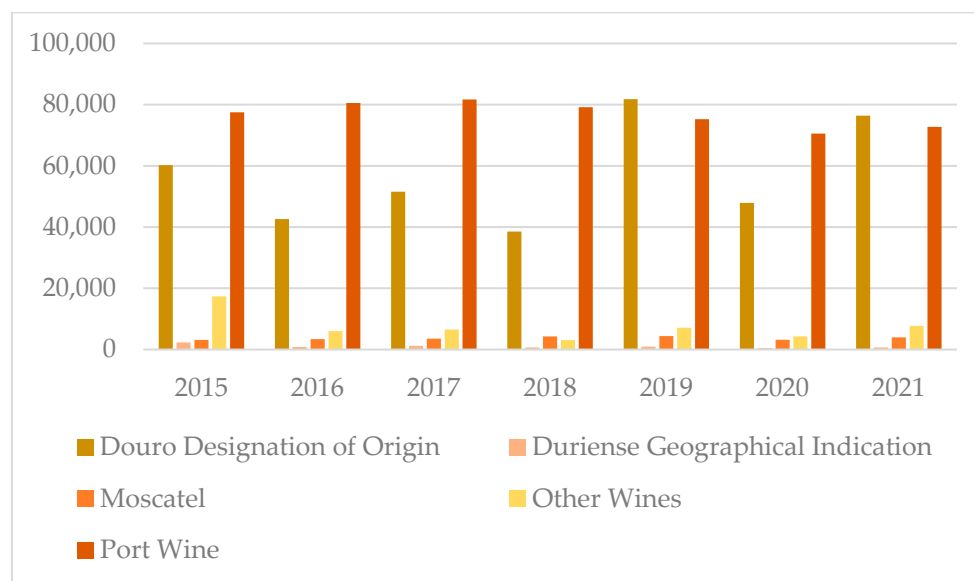
Concerning wine production, of the total volume of wine produced in the demarcated Douro region, around 45% is used for “Port Wine” production. In contrast, the remaining volume produces high-quality wines that use the denomination of the controlled origin, “Douro” or “Douro Wine” (Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** Wine Production in the DWR in 2021. Source: Data from IVDP, 2022 [54].

In terms of wine production evolution, it is possible to verify in Figure 5 that in some years, the production of Port Wine was higher than the production of Douro wine. Nevertheless, these are always similar and are the two most important wine denominations in the DWR.

In accordance with the legislation [56], all entities that are involved in the production or commercialization of wines and other vinicultural products classified under the Statute of Denomination of Origin and the Geographical Indication of the demarcated Douro region are obliged to be registered with the Instituto dos Vinhos do Douro e do Porto, I. P. (IVDP, IP), as well as their respective facilities in an appropriate register [54]. This obligation aims to protect this region’s appellations of origin and maintain these products, namely Port Wine, as unique products that may only be produced and commercialized in accordance with the rules established in the said legislation.



**Figure 5.** Evolution of Wine Production in the DWR, between 2015 and 2021. Source: Data from: IVDP, 2022 [54].

Regarding the Port Wine denomination, there are only three categories of economic agents that can produce and commercialize this product, with a total of 267 economic agents in 2021 (data from IVDP, 2022) [54]. Of those, 46% are bottler producers, 30% are fortified wine merchants, 14% are, at the same time, fortified wine merchants and Port Wine merchants, and the remaining 10% are Port Wine merchants.

Between 2015 and 2021, there was also a 30% growth in the number of agents dedicated to the production or commercialization of Port Wine.

However, this number can be considered relatively low when compared to the number of agents involved in the production or commercialization of wine in the D.O. Douro region, which exceeds 1000.

### 3. Materials and Methods

#### 3.1. Case Study Approach

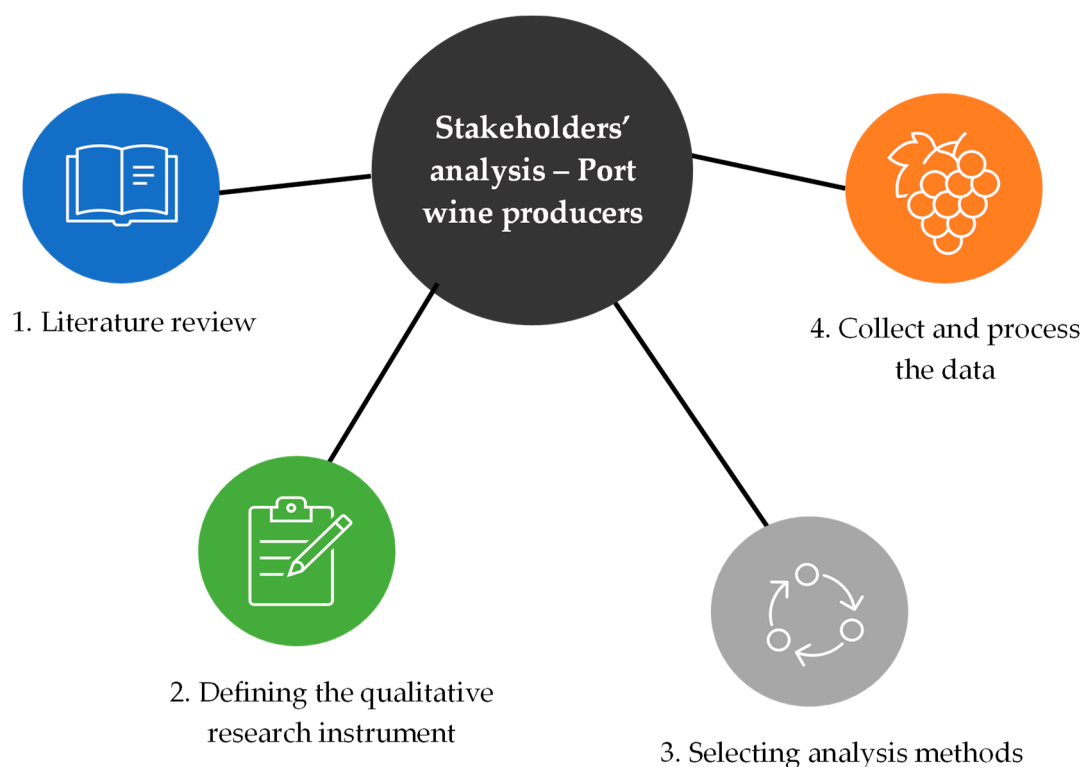
This study is based on a case study approach, applying the interview survey methodology on the stakeholders, namely the Port Wine producers, to develop qualitative research. The case study approach has been applied in several areas of knowledge as [57,58] have already been discussed. This method is important when it is applied to exploratory research, which is the case of our research work (Figure 6).

The development of the methodology followed a set of sequential steps, which included: (1) analyzing wine tourism topics and their relationship with the cultural landscape through the concepts in the literature review; (2) defining the qualitative research instrument; (3) selecting the analysis methods to be used; (4) collecting and processing the data.

Concerning step 1, a literature review of the main topics of the study is provided, including an explanation of the relationship between the Cultural landscape and wine tourism, the importance of wine tourism in Portugal, and the characterization of the Douro region.

Regarding step 2, the research instrument is designed according to the theoretical framework and aligns with the research goals mentioned above. Thus, a structured interview script has been designed considering that this research instrument allows “each individual to express their experiences and opinions while simultaneously satisfying the frames of reference previously set by the interviewer” [59]. The interview script is structured into three thematic groups: company characterization, wine tourism activities and their importance to the territory, and the relationship between Port Wine and the region.





**Figure 6.** Research design. *Source:* own elaboration.

Regarding step 3, content analysis is considered the most adequate method to analyze the empirical data. Finally, the data collection procedure (step 4) consists of the online distribution of the stakeholder interviews (Google Form).

Through the interviews, it is possible to collect a set of information that will allow us to make a more concrete reflection on the importance of tourism to the Douro region, and identify the main existing potential, as well as the perceptions of the stakeholders to the sector in the various dimensions.

The vineyards and Port Wine production companies are key players in the development of wine tourism, as they are the ones who best know the reality of the territory and its potential.

In this sense, a survey has been conducted of the vineyards of Port Wine production companies to know the reality regarding wine tourism activities carried out by these companies, as well as to analyze the level of connection of the stakeholders to the territory.

These surveys are made available online in the Google Forms platform during the year 2021 and listed the following as its main objectives:

- Evaluate the strategic importance of wine tourism in the demarcated Douro region.
- Understand the importance of wine tourism in the economic base of the companies.
- Identify the wine tourism potentialities in the vision of the companies.

Through this survey via interviews, it is possible to collect information that will allow us to make a more concrete reflection on the importance of wine tourism in the Douro demarcated region and to identify the primary existing potentialities.

The data collection took place between January and September 2021. The selection of the wineries and their respective producers follow two essential criteria: they must be producers of Port Wine in the *Região Demarcada do Douro* (RDD) with *Denominação de Origem Protegida* (DOP) (Figure 1), and they must promote wine tourism activities. The DOP corresponds to the geographical indications defined in European Union (EU) legislation to protect the names of the products linked to the regional cuisines to which Port Wine belongs. The DOP certification is granted to products that comply with traditional

production methods and areas. Wines with this certification have an undisputable origin and belong to a single location.

After this selection process, 60 vineyards and producers with the above-mentioned characteristics are included in the group of potential respondents. Considering that there is not a single database or an exhaustive list of all Port Wine producers, the sources used to collect information and the contact details of the set of respondents are the *Instituto dos Vinhos do Douro e do Porto* (IVDP-IP), the *Associação das Empresas de Vinho do Porto* (AEVP), and the *Instituto Português da Vinha e do Vinho* (IPVV). From the total number of emails sent describing the study objectives with the interview script attached, the respective answers were received in writing, guaranteeing the confidentiality and anonymity of the data. The interview script was sent through the link of the Google platform, allowing each interviewee to respond freely and without the pressure of face-to-face contact, especially in times of pandemic restrictions. A total of 12 responses were received, corresponding to a response rate of 20%.

The interview script is composed exclusively of open-ended questions and structured in three thematic groups: company characterization, wine tourism activities and their importance for the territory, and Port Wine's relationship with the region.

Through the interviews, it is possible to collect a set of information that will allow us to make a more concrete reflection on the importance of tourism for the Douro region, identify the main existing potential, as well as the perceptions of the stakeholders to the sector in the various dimensions.

### 3.2. Data Treatment

The processing of the data collected during the interview surveys is based on the content analysis (CA). The CA consists of a data analysis technique popularized by Laurence Bardin in 1977 [60], defined as an empirical method. CA is a standard research method in social sciences [61,62]. In the last decades, there has been an exponential increase in studies in the tourism field [63,64]. The content analysis is based on the explanation, systematization, and expression of the content of text messages. In this case, aiming to make logical and justified deductions regarding the origin of the messages. This process must obey a sequence of three stages: (1) pre-analysis, (2) exploration of the material, and (3) treatment of results, inference, and interpretation. In this study, this sequence is followed.

These three stages are followed in this study. The pre-analysis consists of the organization and systematization of the data collected during the administration of the interview surveys. Through a first and second reading and a set of notes, the guiding topics of analysis are identified, aligning them with the research objectives. The second stage consisted of exploring the primary data, selecting the excerpts and comments from the stakeholders, and highlighting those that illustrate what the study intends to discuss. Finally, in the third stage, the data is coded into categories or codes to structure and summarize the analysis, relating and organizing the findings according to the topics presented in the following section.

## 4. Results

To understand the importance of wine tourism in the demarcated Douro region, it is essential to know the agent perspectives on the territory.

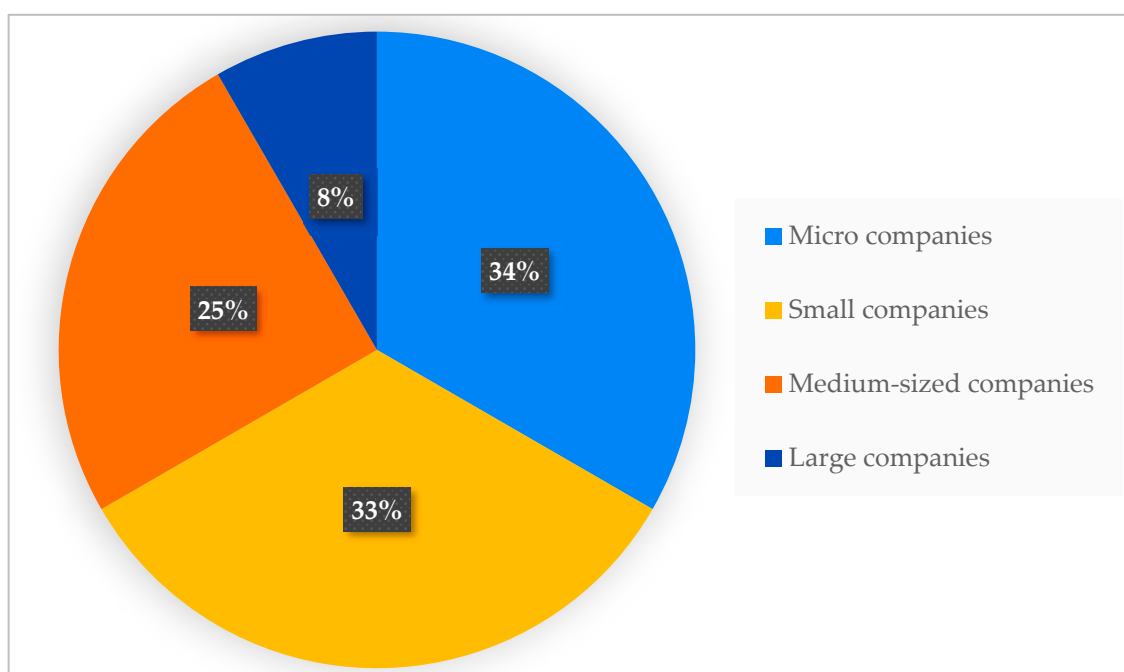
The first step of the survey analysis is the development of a matrix that allows for the content analysis in a structured way. In this matrix, the main themes are identified, and the answers of each respondent are entered to allow the comparison of the different answers. Subsequently, the answers are analyzed to establish a synthesis by grouping the closest answers and highlighting the positioning trends concerning the themes under analysis.

The research results are presented in three sections: the first section focuses on the sample characterization based on the socio-demographic data of the stakeholders. The second section analyses the importance of wine tourism activities for the territory. The third section describes the relationship between Port Wine and the region, identifying the economic, social, and emotional values that Port Wine bestows on the region.

#### 4.1. Sample Characterization

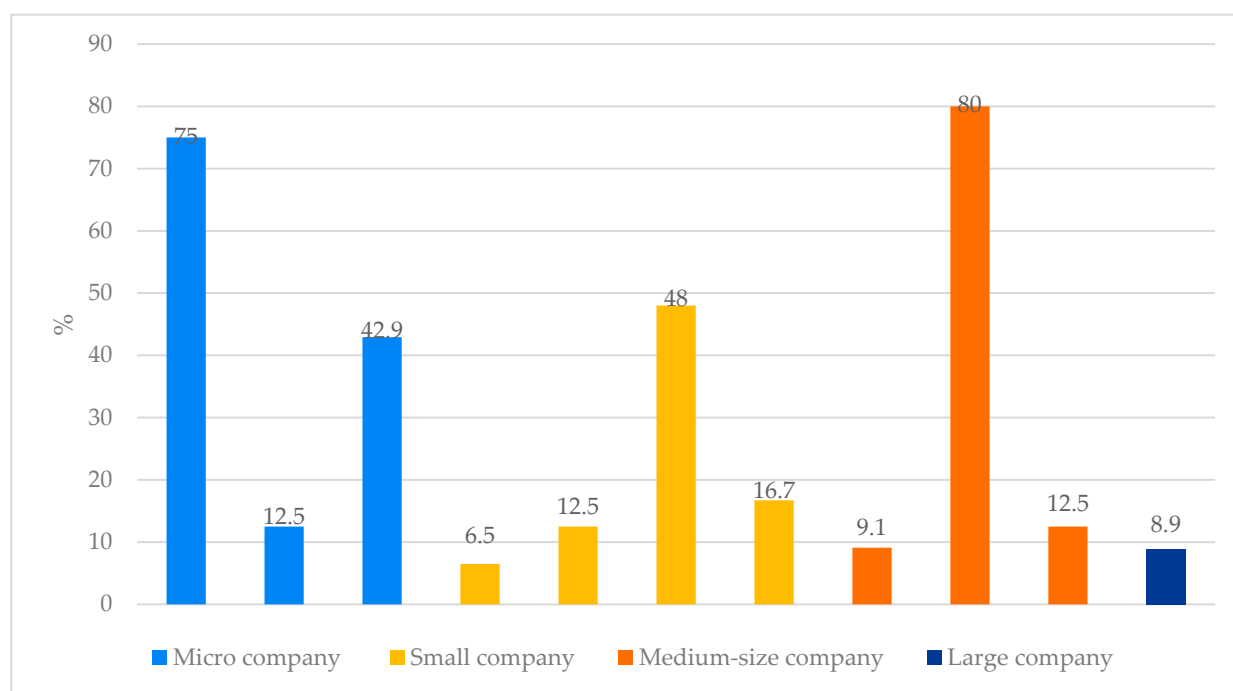
The questions related to the characterization of the sample are divided into two sectors: the company itself and the interviewee.

Regarding the companies, it is found that most companies are micro and small-sized, having between 7 and 31 workers (Figure 7). Only two companies have between 50 and 250 workers, and one is considered a large company with around 450 workers. Thus, the sample in its great majority is made up of micro companies (33%) and small companies (34%), where 25% are medium-sized companies, and only 8% are large companies.



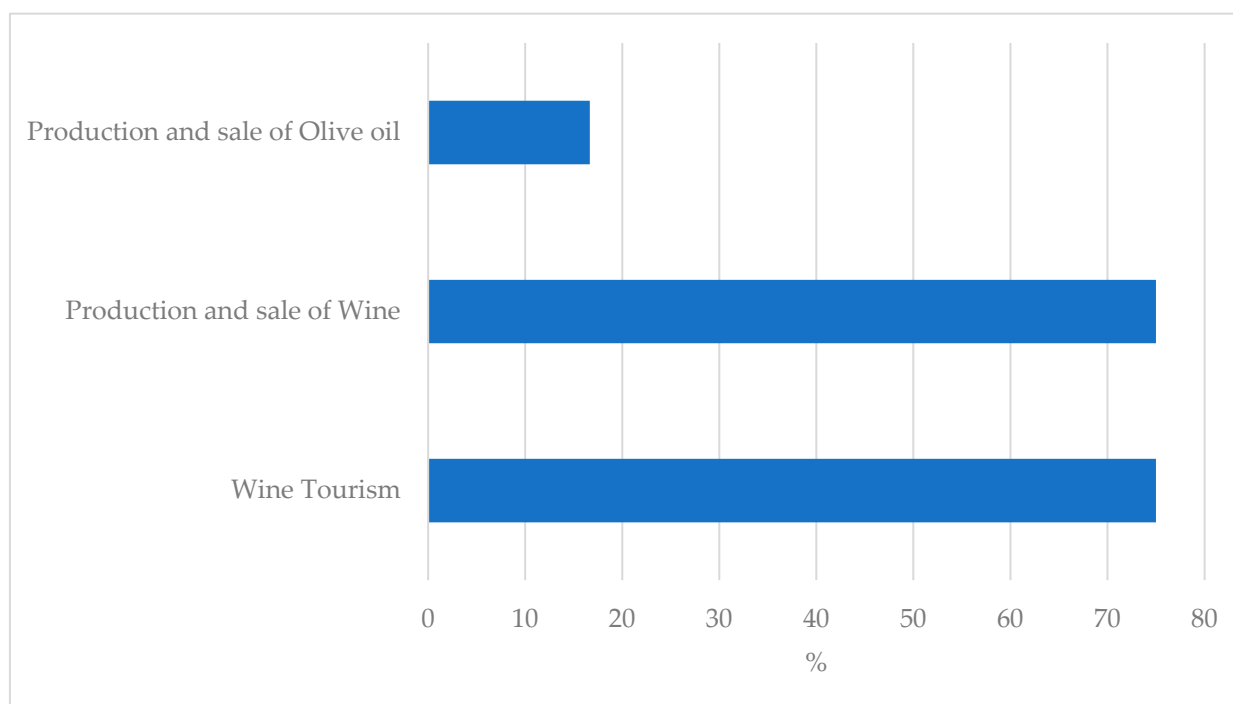
**Figure 7.** Companies dimension. Source: own elaboration, based on interview results.

When questioned about how many of these workers are involved in tourism-related activities, there is a wide variation among the sampled companies, with values between 6.5% and 80%. One of the companies mentions that it has no workers assigned to this area because it did not develop wine tourism activities during the time of the data collection. It should be noted that in the case of micro and small companies, many of their workers are multi-taskers so they develop several tasks, and for this reason, the values may be higher. In the large company, there are specific workers for each of the activities developed by the company, and for that reason, just 8% of the workers are assigned to wine tourism activities (Figure 8).



**Figure 8.** Wine tourism employees', by the size of the company. Source: own elaboration, based on interview results.

As for the business area and the fact that all the companies are linked to the wine sector, we wanted to understand which activities are developed and which are related to wine tourism. The answers show that most of these companies develop activities related to wine tourism (75%), this being the most crucial activity, along with the production and sale of wine. The other activities developed have less impact, as is the case of the production and sale of olive oil (Figure 9).

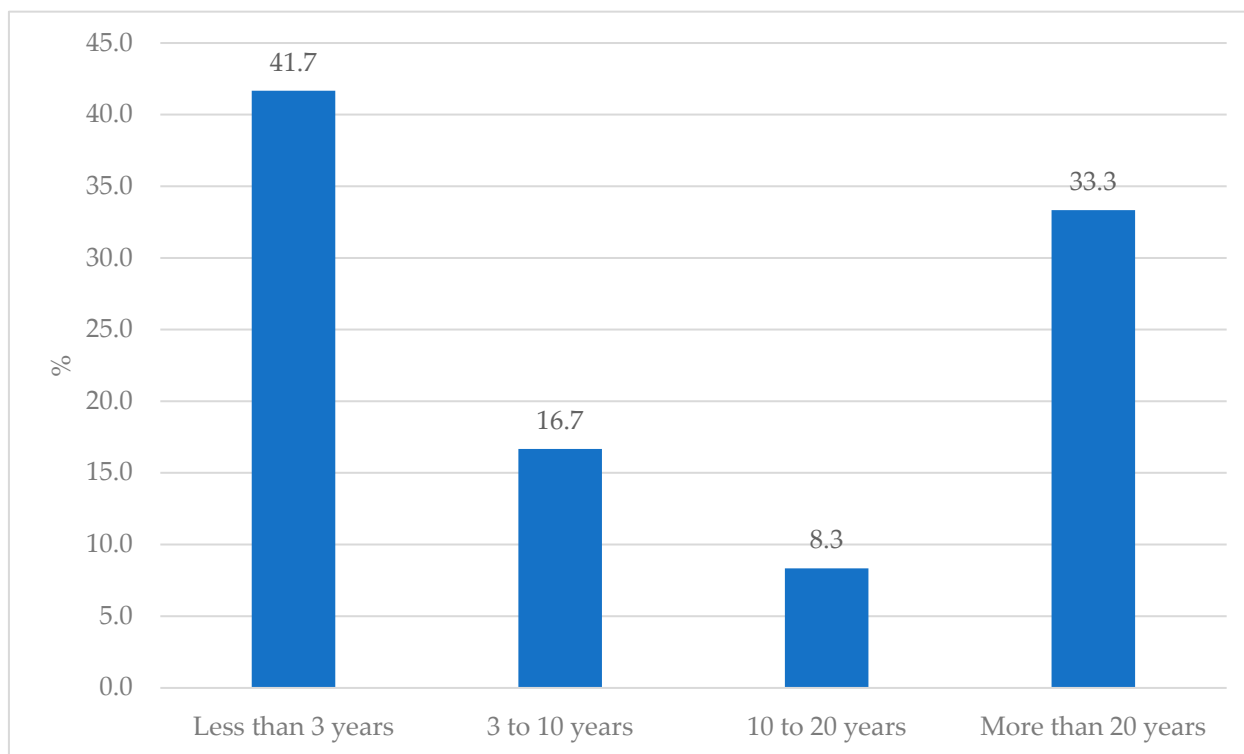


**Figure 9.** Stakeholders' business areas. Source: own elaboration, based on interview results.

A set of more directed questions is prepared with the interviewee to understand their connection to both the company and the territory.

In this sense, the questions consider the function of the interviewee, how long they have held these functions, if they have family ties to the company, and if they have any connection to the territory.

Regarding function, most interviewees are company directors and managing partners. Concerning the number of years the interviewees have been working in the company, 41.7% indicated that they have been working for less than 3 years; 16.7% between 3 and 10 years; 8.3% between 10 and 20 years; and 33.3% for more than 20 years (Figure 10).



**Figure 10.** The number of years working in the companies. Source: own elaboration, based on interview results.

The managing partners have worked with the company for the most extended period, and some of them even mentioned that they are founding partners. All these partners have been with the firm for more than 20 years (about 24.6 years on average).

On the other hand, regarding the administrative functions, the average number of years working in the wine companies is 4.25, and the Directors (excluding the founders) is 9 years (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Average number of years in the function.

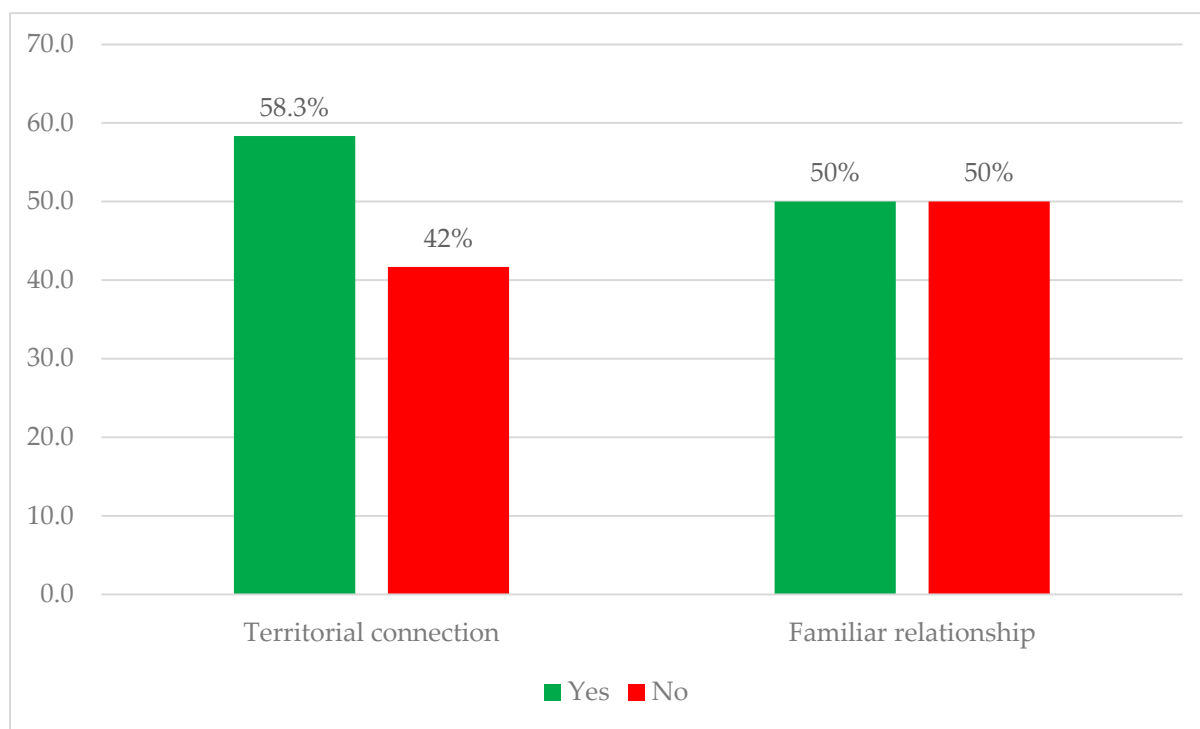
Function	Average Number of Years in the Company
Administrative functions (DV1, DV12)	4.25
Directors (DV2, DV3, DV5, DV7, DV9, DV10, DV11)	9
Managing Partners (DV4, DV6, DV8)	24.6

Source: own elaboration, based on interview results.

It is also perceptible that most of the interviewees refer to having a connection with the territory, either because they were born in the region, or because they went there to work and live. Regarding the link with the company, half of the interviewees refer to having a



family relationship (Figure 11). Compared to the case study of Giacomarra et al., 2021 [65], even the larger companies are based on family management.



**Figure 11.** Territorial connection and familiar relationship. Source: own elaboration, based on interview results.

#### 4.2. Importance of Wine Tourism Activities for the Territory

To understand the importance of wine tourism activities for the area under analysis, a set of open questions is prepared, allowing the interviewees to answer freely while also considering the company's experience where they work.

The first question is related to the importance of the tourism dimension in the enhancement and development of the Douro region. The interviewees identified a set of factors that highlight this importance, which is grouped by their characteristics, as verified in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Importance of wine tourism in adding value to the region.

Highlighted Factors	Interviewees
"Development of DOC wines, and Port Wine"	DV1, DV2, DV10, DV11
"Increased employment offer"	DV1, DV2, DV9, DV12
"Heritage rehabilitation and valorisation (abandoned houses, vineyards)"	DV1, DV2
"Population settlement"	DV1, DV8, DV3
"Regional development"	DV1, DV2, DV5, DV6, DV9
"Projection of the region, highlighting the characteristics of the Douro, Engagement"	DV7, DV9, DV11
"Assumption of activity growth"	DV3, DV4, DV5

Source: own elaboration, based on interview results.

In fact, many interviewees highlighted the issues of regional development, the valorization of wines, and the recovery and enhancement of heritage as factors driven by the tourism development of the Douro region. One of the interviewees mentions that

“The Douro since it was discovered by tourism, has started to grow in several ways”. Another identifies tourism activity as “increasingly important as a business complement and brand creation.”

In addition to these factors, the interviewees also consider that tourism has reinforced the increase in employment, and therefore, has allowed the population settlement.

Regarding the level of attractiveness of the Douro region in comparison with other regions of the country, respondents are of the opinion that this is indeed a very attractive region, due to its unique landscape characteristics (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Level of Tourist attractiveness.

Highlighted Factors	Interviewees
“Douro is fashionable”	DV1
“Unique landscape features that make the region attractive”	DV1, DV3, DV5, DV7, DV9, DV10
“Strong attractiveness”	DV3
“High future potential, not yet fully exploited”	DV4
“Increasing demand/growth”	DV2, DV6
“The pandemic led to demand for different regions”	DV2
“Need for a more skilled workforce”	DV8
“A good supply of tourist establishments, restaurants and cafes”	DV10
“Poor transport supply and interconnecting networks between POI”	DV10
“Above average/Medium”	DV11, DV12

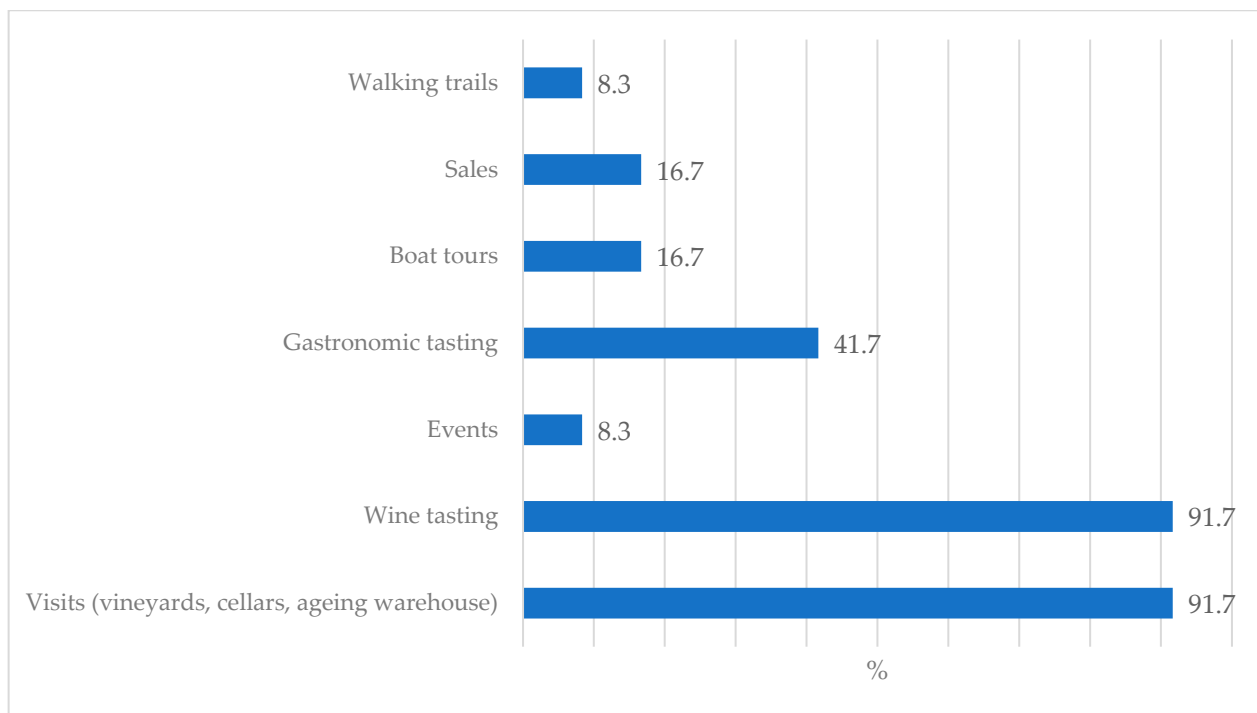
Source: own elaboration, based on interview results.

They cite that these characteristics make the region attractive and with a high potential, considering it a region with growth in wine tourism. It is interesting to verify that one of the interviewees revealed that the pandemic has led to a demand from different regions. For this reason, tourism in the Douro region also grew.

However, they consider that despite the high potential, this region is still under-exploited due to the lack of transport and associated infrastructures, as well as the need for more skilled labor in this sector.

When questioned as to whether their company carries out wine tourism activities, only one interviewee stated that they do not. All the others stated that they carry out some activities related to wine tourism, although the regularity varies significantly between the companies. Around 80% of the respondents stated that they receive visits throughout the year, even daily visits when they occur during the high season. The remaining 20% only reported receiving visits but did not specify whether they were throughout the year or during a specific season. In relation to the number of visits, not all respondents indicated how many; however, it is perceptible that there is a very large difference in the number of visits, varying between 1000 and 80,000 tourists per year.

Regarding wine tourism activities, most interviewees identified visits to the different spaces (vineyards, cellars, wineries, and ageing warehouses), as well as wine tasting (Figure 12). It should be noted that wine tasting and visits to vineyards, cellars, wineries, and warehouses are activities that are carried out in around 90% of the companies. Also noteworthy are the gastronomic tasting activities, with around 40% of the interviewees mentioning their realization, sales, and boat trips, which are carried out in around 17% of the companies.

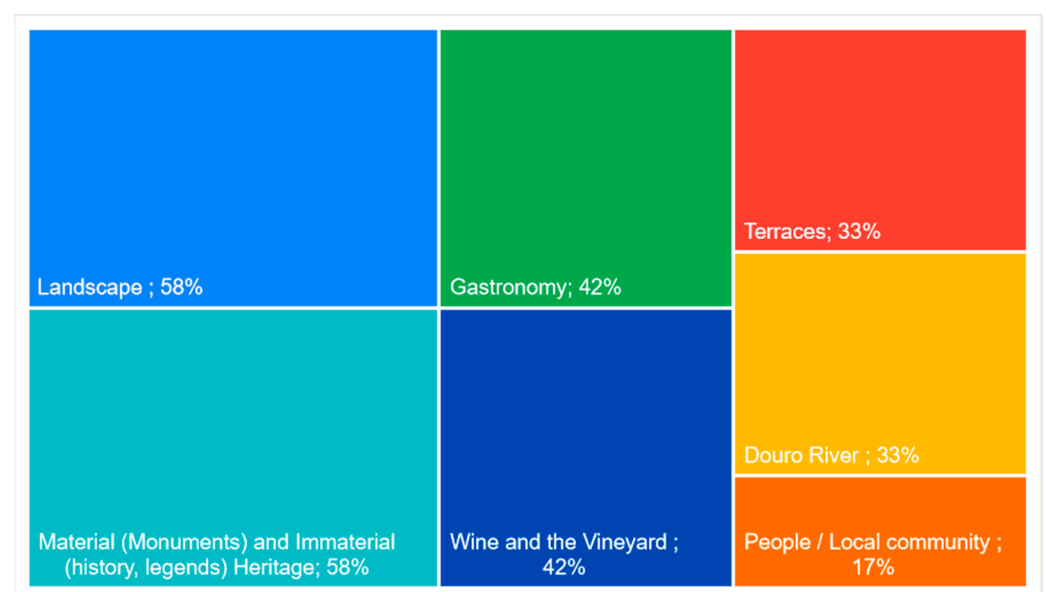


**Figure 12.** Tourism activities provided by stakeholders. Source: own elaboration, based on interview results.

#### 4.3. The Relationship between Port Wine and the Region

In the third group of the interview, the questions are related to the relationship between Port Wine and the Douro region, to understand how the cultural landscape factors and the economic, social, and emotional values of Port Wine contribute to the development of the Douro region.

The main factors of the cultural landscape that interviewees consider fundamental to give value to Port Wine are the landscape and the material and immaterial heritage (Figure 13).



**Figure 13.** Cultural landscape factors. Source: own elaboration, based on interview results.

Through the transcription of the answers, the interviewees highly value the landscape and morphology of the land where the terraces are distinctive of this entire region. As one of the interviewees refers, “it is the form of cultivation that tourists admire the most”.

Furthermore, all the heritage, both material and immaterial, namely the traditional buildings, the railway line, the “architecturally well frame” works, and the history and culture of the region, are factors described by the interviewees. In a previous study, [63] mentioned the importance of the landscape in wine quality perception. Other elements are also highlighted, such as monuments and other elements of intangible heritage, especially the stories and legends that point to local diversity. The “people” of the territory are not forgotten. They bring it to life and possess knowledge about the region. This factor also highlights the hospitality and friendliness of the people in their ability to receive. In the words of the interviewees, these characteristics stand out. DV1 mentions “The unequalled landscape of the vineyards in terraces during the four seasons of the year, its simple and knowledgeable people, the history of wine and of the Douro, its legends, monuments, gastronomy, and the internal Douro to be discovered now not so close to the Rive”, whilst DV8 highlights “the Douro region with all its history, culture and as the largest mountain wine-growing region in the world as well as the oldest demarcated and regulated region. To all this, we should add a singular gastronomy, its unique vineyards, and a terroir of choice”. Gastronomy, wine, and vineyards also hold a prominent place in this landscape, as seen in these transcriptions.

Regarding the values Port Wine grants to the region, we can divide them into economic, social, and emotional values (Figure 14).



**Figure 14.** Keyword frequencies regarding the values Port Wine bestows on the region. Source: authors' own elaboration based on *Wordclouds Generator*.

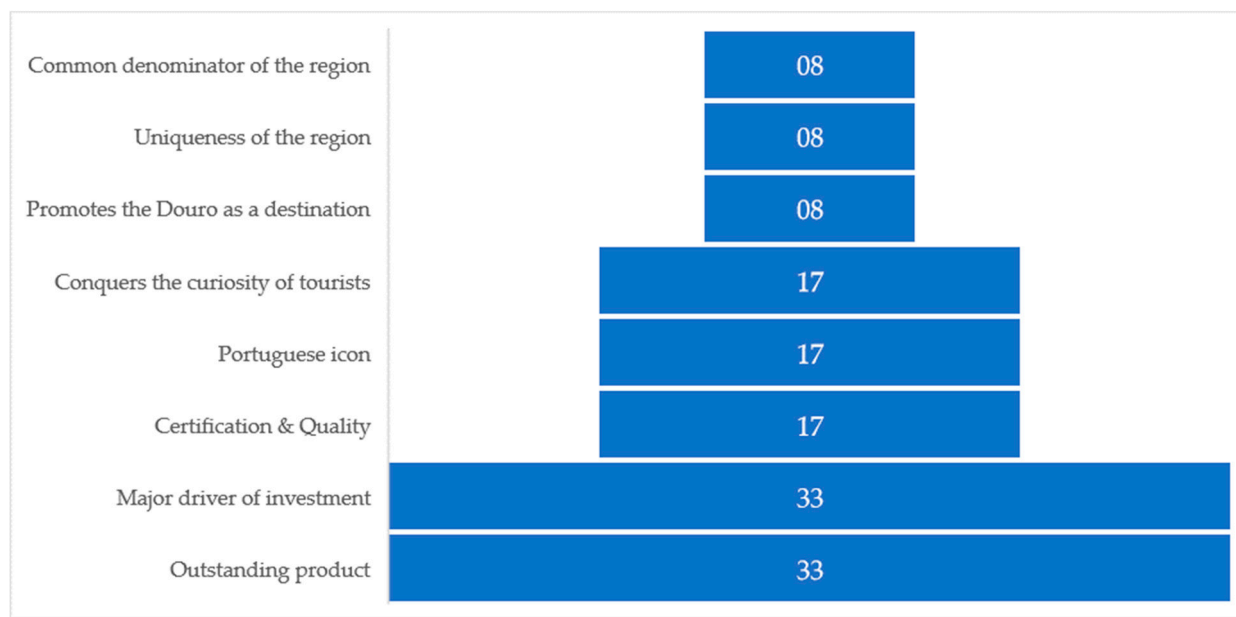
The interviewees evidenced a set of quite differentiated values. In socio-economic terms, they consider that Port Wine promotes the improvement of living conditions, being

considered “the region’s driving force and economic engine” that promotes employability and projects the region at a national and global level, namely through Douro tourism and wine tourism. They also consider that it can generate wealth and sustainability for the region’s inhabitants, allowing, in turn, the promotion of the products of the region.

In social terms, the interviewees consider that Port Wine allows the region to be recognized at a national and international level, giving it “identity, prestige, quality, and history”. As one of the interviewees states, “The people of the Douro identify themselves with the production and culture of Port Wine”, demonstrating a feeling of belonging, which promotes the appreciation of the unique character of the region.

In emotional terms, they refer to the longing (*saudades*) for those who “move away”, mainly for the landscape, the smells, and the flavors. They identify with the region and Port Wine, stating that it is “a pride to be from the Douro, to know its customs, the way of working and caring for the vineyard, the fruit, the wine which is unique in the world”. One of the interviewees considers Port Wine the “kind” of the region.

The interviewees are also asked about the role played by Port Wine in the dissemination and external recognition of our country and our culture, considering the importance it has for local communities in their relationship with the territory (on a personal and professional level). The results of this analysis are presented in Figure 15.



**Figure 15.** Role of Port Wine in the dissemination and external recognition of Portugal. Source: own elaboration, based on interview results.

The keyword “exclusivity” is highlighted, pointing to various unique products: the employability associated with the diverse economic dimensions linked to Port Wine production, the national and international potential of this product, and the importance it may have as an economic motor for the region.

According to the interviewees, Port Wine is considered a product of excellence that promotes and drives investments in the region. As stated by DV1 Port Wine is the great driving force behind the large investments made by private individuals and the Government in the demarcated Douro region. About 33% of the interviewees refer to these characteristics as the ones that can contribute the most to the dissemination and recognition of our country and culture. “It is one of the main Portuguese brands with recognition abroad. It is an ambassador of our country and of the Douro region, being also important for its economic and social dimension since it contributes to its development”, says one of the interviewees. Another assumes that Portugal is known not only for Port Wine. It is due to its exportation



that it was easier to conquer the first tourists. Consumers want to know the origin of the product they select and are more aware of the social and environmental issues [32,66]. Then the rest of the world followed suit, and so, little by little (because there is still a long way to go) we will make the Douro a destination. Aspects such as product certification and quality are also highlighted (16.7% of respondents), and the fact that Port Wine is considered one of Portugal's icons and one of Portugal's main brands. One of the interviewees even mentions that "Port Wine is like Amália and Eusébio (now maybe Cristiano Ronaldo), an icon of Portugal. It continues to be an "ambassador" of the country". Another states that "He is one of the main Portuguese brands with recognition abroad. It is an ambassador of our country and of the Douro region, being also important for its economic and social dimension in the region, as it contributes to its development".

Finally, and considering the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviewees are asked to indicate the impact it has caused on the company to date. According to the answers, these impacts are divided into different dimensions identified during the analysis of the interviews: wine trade, wine tourism, human resources, and medium-term repercussions. The main impacts are identified in Table 4.

**Table 4.** COVID-19 impacts, by dimensions.

Categories	Results
Wine trade (mainly in 2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impact on the external market demand</li> <li>• Sales decline also in the domestic market</li> <li>• Fall of 30% of the sales</li> </ul>
Wine Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decrease in the number of visitors, mainly international visitors</li> <li>• 60% to 90% decrease</li> </ul>
Human Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teams' discouragement</li> <li>• Lay off</li> </ul>
Medium-term Implications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unknown implications</li> <li>• Difficulty in maintaining jobs</li> <li>• Recovery in 2022</li> </ul>

Source: own elaboration, based on interview results.

The main impacts felt by these companies, at the level of wine commerce, refer to the decrease in sales, both in the internal and external markets. One of the interviewees reported that this decrease is about 30% of the average sales volume.

Concerning wine tourism, there was a decrease in the number of visitors, mainly international ones, with a drop between 60% to 90% in visits.

Impacts were also felt at the level of human resources, namely due to the need to put the companies on lay-off and, according to the interviewees, the demotivation of the teams due to the lack of opportunities to carry out their regular work routines.

Regarding the repercussions that this pandemic may have in the future, the respondents indicate three distinct impacts. On the one hand, considering the difficulty in keeping their jobs, they felt that the repercussions are of an unknown quantity since they feel that they have been strongly affected and do not know how they will recover. One of the interviewees cites that "We had an impact on sales as well as on wine tourism. We made a great effort to keep all the jobs". On the other hand, some are more optimistic and feel that this year they are already recovering. One of the interviewees mentioned that "this year we are already recovering", and another, "We hope to return to similar values in 2019". It should be noted that, despite noting a recovery in 2022, in the medium term, respondents still show uncertainty with the near future being "an unknown" and point out the concern about maintaining jobs.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

### 5.1. Main Findings

The results of this analysis allowed us to confirm some of the facts identified in the literature review.

Firstly, it is noticeable that a large part of the companies analysed are small and medium-sized, with a context still very familiar, but also, still with a solid connection to the territory. This highlights the sense of belonging or sense of place.

Concerning the importance of wine tourism activities for the territory, it is possible to verify that all interviewees considered these activities as an added value, promoting the valorization of the territory and the improvement of living conditions, as well as the settlement of the population. Some interviewees even mention that these wine tourism activities, linked to the worldwide projection of Port Wine, enhance the region and create a commitment to the territory, promoting regional development. The development of this business area, through the promotion of the brand, is also highlighted. These results align with previous studies that are identified in the literature review, namely concerning the importance of the Douro wine landscape for the development of wine tourism, and also the importance of this activity for territorial development.

It is also found that the interviewees consider that the unique characteristics of the region, mainly the landscape factors associated with the Port wine product and the material and immaterial heritage, make the Douro region one of the most attractive currently in Portugal, even referring to this region as “fashionable”. These results prove the importance that landscapes, both natural and cultural, have in the development of tourism activities.

It is also interesting to highlight the economic, social, and emotional values the interviewees pointed out regarding Port Wine and the Douro region and its landscape. The main factors to highlight are exclusiveness, pride, driving force, employability, identity, quality, and history.

Concerning the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts on the activities of these companies, it is possible to identify a set of dimensions related to the wine trade, wine tourism, human resources, and medium-term implications. Naturally, all interviewees have mentioned that the pandemic caused significant impacts on product sales and destination demand. There are also the impacts on human resources, primarily caused by the issue of demotivation of the teams and the difficulty of maintaining some jobs. However, most of the interviewees consider that although the medium-term implications are still unknown, they feel that already in 2022, there may be a recovery in terms of visits and sales. It is also interesting to note that one of the interviewees identified the COVID-19 pandemic as something that led to the search for fewer mass tourism destinations, which may have also contributed to a lower impact in terms of demand in the Douro region [41,47]. Also noted is that the more rural regions with lower demographic dimensions are among those destinations that experienced a lighter impact during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 5.2. Study Implications and Contributions

The purpose of the study is to provide an empirical insight into the potential of wine tourism in the Douro region, specifically within the scope of the Port Wine-producing vineyards. Consequently, it is also sought in this study to evaluate the importance of Port Wine for the development of the territory, identifying the economic, social, and emotional values that link people together, namely the human resources linked to wine production and the management of the Douro Vineyards. The impacts of COVID-19 on wine tourism activities are also highlighted.

The choice of the case of Port Wine is because it has been one of the main drivers of the development of this territory since the beginning of its commercialization, namely at the international level.

Moreover, as has already been mentioned, the study of wine tourism in Portugal is of extreme importance, considering that it is a strategic product for the development of tourism in Portugal and that it extends throughout the national territory. Besides that, the

practical contributions of this study report on the importance of developing this type of tourism considers it to be a strategy that can promote sustainability by reducing territorial imbalances, namely in rural areas.

### 5.3. Limitations and Future Research Directions

When it comes to the analysis of research results, it is possible to conclude that the aim goals were attained. Also, considering the study as an exploratory character, the sample can be considered representative regarding the number of interviews collected. Although, some limitations may be recognized. The application of other qualitative methodologies, such as focus groups or the application of the Delphi technique, can be considered to strengthen and deepen the conclusions presented in this study. Therefore, it is proposed that a future study be carried out, including all the winegrowing vineyards spread by the Douro region. In this context, some new directions can be designed considering the research trends on wine tourism [67,68]. In this context, it is proposed that the study should be developed from the perspective of the demand, identifying the visitors' perception of the values of the Port Wine landscape, as well as their perception regarding the quality of the services offered within the scope of wine tourism in this region.

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