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Research Paper

Olive oil tourism in Beira Interior Territory – the present offer

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the potential of olive oil tourism as a key driver of rural development in the Beira Interior (BI) region and to assess the impact of its Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) olive oil. The research began with the mapping of all municipalities located within the BI olive oil PDO, using data from the Portuguese Direção Geral de Agricultura e Desenvolvimento Rural. In a second phase, an online search was conducted to identify assets relevant to the development of the olive oil tourism sector. The results reveal that, in the BI region, olive oil fairs and events, producer visits, olive farm tours, museums that allow visitors to experience traditional olive oil production and connect with rural culture, as well as rural accommodations, all contribute significantly to enriching the overall visitor experience. However, the gathered information highlights that the development and promotion of the three olive oil routes available in the region remain unsatisfactory. As for research limitations, this study was based exclusively on online searches. Its originality lies in the fact that research on olive oil tourism in Portugal is still at an early stage, and this study is among the first to explore the topic — to the best of the authors' knowledge, it is also the only study focusing specifically on the Beira Interior region, one of the six PDO-designated areas for olive oil production.

Keywords: Olive oil tourism, Beira Interior PDO region, Endogenous Oil Resources, Portugal, Rural Development

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1. INTRODUCTION

Olive oil tourism, also known as olive tourism or oleotourism (Pato, 2024a), is an emerging form of rural tourism (Murgado-Armenteros et al., 2021) that has seen steady growth over the past decade. This particular type of tourism has experienced significant growth in Mediterranean countries and most notably in Spain (Pato, 2024a). Olive oil tourism is regarded as a form of rural tourism that intersects agriculture, tradition, popular culture, gastronomy, and wellness. Given the challenges faced by rural areas, particularly those located in interior and mountainous regions, and the need for economic diversification (Pato & Teixeira, 2016), olive oil tourism can contribute to: i) the sustainable development of olive grove rural areas (Campón-Cerro et al., 2014; Millán-Vazquez de la Torre et al., 2017) and their economic, social, and environmental sustainability, ii) the diversification of the tourism activity within a country, while adding value to endogenous resources (Bezerra & Correia, 2019), and iii) provide tourists with the opportunity to immerse themselves in unique and distinctive experiences within the olive grove terroir (Bezerra & Correia, 2019; Campón-Cerro et al., 2023).

Despite the growing recognition of olive oil tourism's potential, diverse challenges remain unaddressed. First and foremost, offering memorable and innovative experiences to visitors should be seen as a major concern. These offerings should not only provide visitors with knowledge about the traditional endogenous product (Murgado-Armenteros et al., 2021) but also enhance their overall experience. By combining agritourism with cultural, culinary, and (eventually) technological advancements, olive oil tourism can create unique and engaging opportunities for visitors. Additionally, by leveraging these resources, the product can appeal to a wider range of visitors—from culinary enthusiasts and wellness seekers to eco-conscious tourists and tech-savvy explorers—while promoting sustainable growth and preserving the cultural heritage of a region and/or a country.

Portugal is one of the world's leading olive oil producers (IOC, 2024) and the fourth-largest exporter (Almeida & Silveira, 2021). In addition, the high quality of Portuguese olive oil is further reinforced by the presence of several Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) regions. The

distinctive nature of the production, deeply rooted in the territory and its cultural heritage, adds value to the product and enhances its notoriety by connecting it to the region's cultural traditions (Pato & Duque, 2023).

The Beira interior Region (BIR) is one of the six olive oil PDO regions in Portugal. It is located in the Centro Region of the country and encompasses two PDO sub-regions: Beira Alta (BA) and Beira Baixa (BB). The existence of olive oil resources in the region suggests a vast potential for product development. Given the limited research on olive oil tourism in Portugal, particularly in the BIR region, this exploratory research seeks to outline the available resources and assess the potential of this product in the region. To this end, an online data search was conducted using information from the websites of all municipalities within the PDO region.

This paper is organised into six sections. Following the Introduction (Section 1), Section 2 provides a review of the potentialities of olive oil tourism as a tool for rural development. The methodological guidelines are detailed in Section 3, while Section 4 presents the study's findings. Section 5 offers a discussion of the results, and finally Section 6 summarises the study's main conclusions, addresses its limitations, and suggests possible directions for future research.

2. OLIVE OIL TOURISM AS AN ADDITIONAL TOOL FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Despite the relative novelty of olive oil tourism as a field of research (Pato, 2024), its development gained substantial momentum in 2005 with the certification of the 'Routes of the Olive Tree' as Cultural Routes by the Council of Europe (OTRoutes, 2024). These cultural itineraries were designed to stimulate olive production and related business in the Mediterranean regions and beyond. The annual programme of activities was collaboratively developed by an international scientific team, participants from the OTRoutes network, and partner organisations from Mediterranean countries (OTRoutes, 2024).

Olive oil tourism, when promoted in conjunction with other products and services, can serve as a valuable instrument for rural development (Campón-Cerro et al., 2014; Lopes et al., 2024; Millán-Vazquez de la Torre et al., 2017; Pato, 2024a). Building on this concept, Pulido-Fernández et al. (2019) classify olive oil tourism as a type of Special Interest Tourism (SIT) with strong connections to i) olive tree culture and rural space, ii) sustainability and environmental awareness, iii) unique and sensory experiences, and iv) an image of prestige and status (Parrilla-González et al., 2020). Ultimately, this activity offers a blend of agricultural, cultural and gastronomic

experiences that yield economic, socio-cultural, and environmental benefits for rural areas. This way, it can contribute to the diversification of rural economy, creating opportunities for people living in rural areas to expand their employment prospects by leveraging the growing market for culinary and agritourism experiences (Parrilla-González et al., 2020). Dancausa-Millan et al. (2022) conducted a survey to identify the profile and motivations of olive oil tourists in Andalusia, Spain, and found that this is an emerging tourist for which there still a limited demand. The authors further conclude that this potential demand could be instrumental in revitalizing the region's economy.

Additionally, the development of olive oil tourism infrastructure, such as olive grove tours, tasting experiences, and accommodations (e.g., olive farms, boutique hotels, eco-lodges, glamping), can generate employment in rural areas, albeit on a moderate scale. These employment opportunities can range from farm workers and tour guides to hospitality staff and artisanal food producers, and contribute to curbing rural depopulation by providing new economic opportunities. D'Auria et al. (2020) compared olive oil tourism initiatives in three Mediterranean countries (Spain, Italy, and Croatia). Their qualitative triangulation research identified several common elements, specially activities that prioritise immersive experiences within traditional local environments. The study further shows that local businesses, such as restaurants, shops, and rural accommodations, are integrated into the existing olive oil tourism routes in all three countries.

Furthermore, olive oil tourism can stimulate the production of value-added products, such as gourmet olive oils (Dancausa-Millan et al., 2022), flavoured oils, olive-based cosmetics, and culinary products. These products not only generate additional revenue for local producers but also attract visitors seeking unique souvenirs and gifts. For instance, a study conducted by Kouri (2024) in Messenia (Greece), a region with olive cultivation dating back to the Mycenaean era and renowned for actively promoting olive oil and olive oil tourism, concludes that visitors show strong interest in high-quality amenities and services, such as olive-based well-being treatments, outdoor activities, and gastronomic and sensory experiences.

For all the reasons mentioned above, olive oil tourism also promotes local and rural entrepreneurship (Ruiz Guerra et al., 2018) and fosters innovation and collaboration among other local businesses.

From a socio-cultural perspective, olive oil production is often deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of rural areas and traditions passed down through generations. Olive oil tourism can serve

a crucial role in preserving these traditions by showcasing the historical and cultural significance of olive cultivation and oil production (Millán et al., 2018). Through a qualitative analysis of olive oil tourism farms in Portugal, Pato (2024b) found that a focus on tradition and historical values is the primary factor in promoting olive oil tourism offerings. The author further asserts that olive oil tourism is not merely a journey into the past but a dynamic exploration of the future.

Additionally, olive oil tourism encourages community involvement and collaboration among local stakeholders, including restaurants (Millán-Vazquez de la Torre et al., 2017; Murgado-Armenteros, 2013) farmers, artisans, and tourism operators. The oleotourism routes (in Spain, Italy, and Croatia) mentioned by D’Auria et al. (2020) are fine examples of this collaborative approach. In these three countries, local businesses, particularly restaurants, shops, and rural accommodations, are integrated into the existing olive oil routes. By working together to promote the region's olive oil heritage, communities can strengthen social bonds and cultivate a sense of pride in their shared cultural identity (Campón-Cerro et al., 2017).

From an environmental perspective, many olive oil tourism initiatives promote sustainable agricultural practices, such as organic farming, water conservation, and biodiversity preservation (Millán et al., 2018). By highlighting the importance of environmental stewardship, these initiatives contribute to the long-term viability of rural landscapes and ecosystems. Moreover, the existence of PDO regions for olive oil production, as noted by Almeida & Silveira (2021), contributes to strengthening the connection between the product and its place of origin (Pato & Duque, 2023) and encouraging the use of traditional olive oil production processes. In Italy, for instance, local administrations are increasingly aware of the opportunities afforded by this specific sector. As a result, local stakeholders—both public and private—regard the olive oil tourism sector as a strategic asset for promoting the “Made in Italy” brand and enhancing local agriculture, territories, and products.

Figure 1 summarizes the economic, socio-cultural, and environmental benefits of olive oil tourism. In fact, through sustainable and integrated management practices (D’Auria et al., 2020), olive oil tourism can serve as a valuable tool for environmental preservation and protection, while also generating economic and socio-cultural benefits for local communities (Pato, 2024).

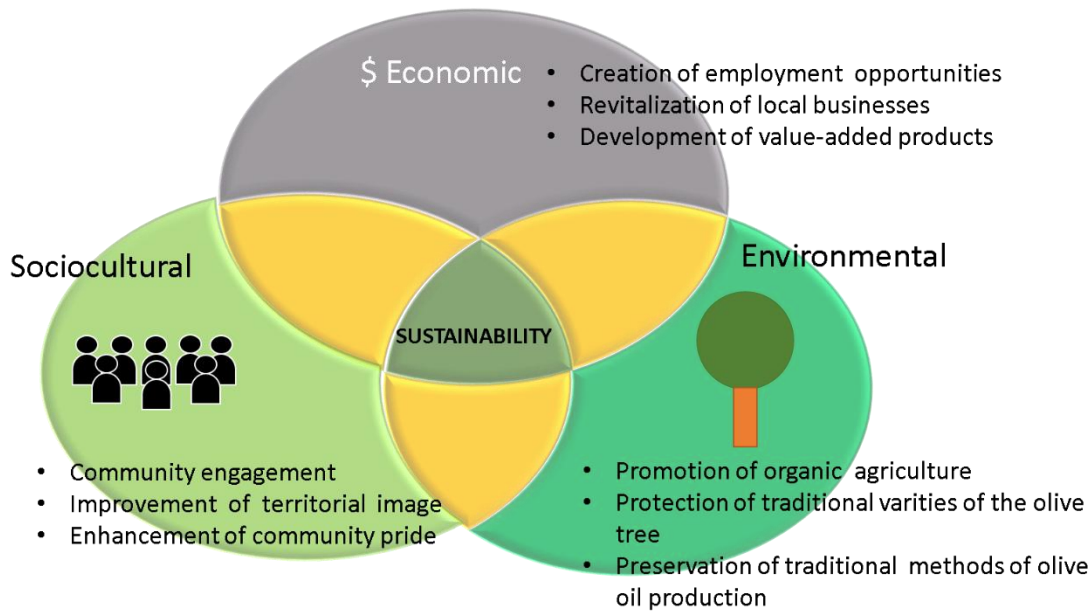


Figure 1. Potential benefits of olive oil tourism

Despite all the aforementioned potentialities, olive oil tourism remains an under-researched field (Almeida & Silveira, 2021; Pato, 2024a; Vázquez de la Torre et al., 2014). The bibliometric analysis conducted by Pato (2024a) revealed that: i) olive oil tourism is predominantly a Spanish phenomenon and that ii) in Portugal the offer-centric approach is still in its early stages, which hinders a comprehensive understanding of stakeholder strategies.

3. THE STUDY REGION AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Study Region

The Beira Interior Region (BIR), located in the Interior Centro region of Portugal, is renowned for its high-quality olive oil production, benefiting from a combination of favourable natural factors. It includes two PDO olive oil production sub-regions: Beira Alta (with 11 municipalities) and Beira Baixa (with 13 municipalities) (Figure 2). The region is characterized by the production of sweeter, slightly bitter, and spicier olive oils (DGADR, 2024).

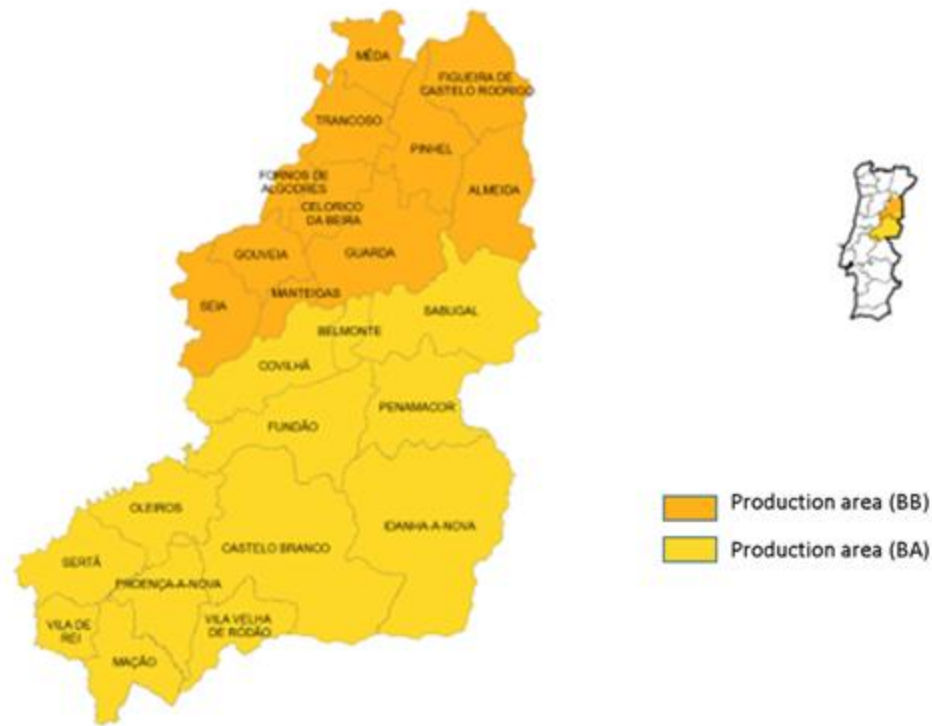


Figure 1. Sub-regions of PDO olive oil production

Source: Adapted from DGADR (2024)

The BIR region holds the third-largest olive grove area in Portugal, covering 49,373 hectares and accounting for 13 % of the the nation’s total olive grove surface (INE, 2021). According the same source (INE, 2021), the region also boasts the second-largest number of olive oil holdings in the country, totaling 25,685, which corresponds to 19,8% of the national total.

The region produces extra virgin and virgin olive oils, produced from the Galega, Verdeal Cobrançosa and Cordovil olive varieties (DGADR, 2024). According DGADR (2024), the richness of Beira Interior’s olive oil is highlighted in Vitorino Magalhães Godinho’s “Ensaaios: Sobre a história de Portugal”. In his book, the author also describes the destruction of a large number of olive groves during the War of Independence and their subsequent restoration through replanting in 1668. Olive oil was exported at considerable profits, mainly to Northern Europe, and accounted for approximately one-sixth of Portugal’s total export volume during the 17th century.

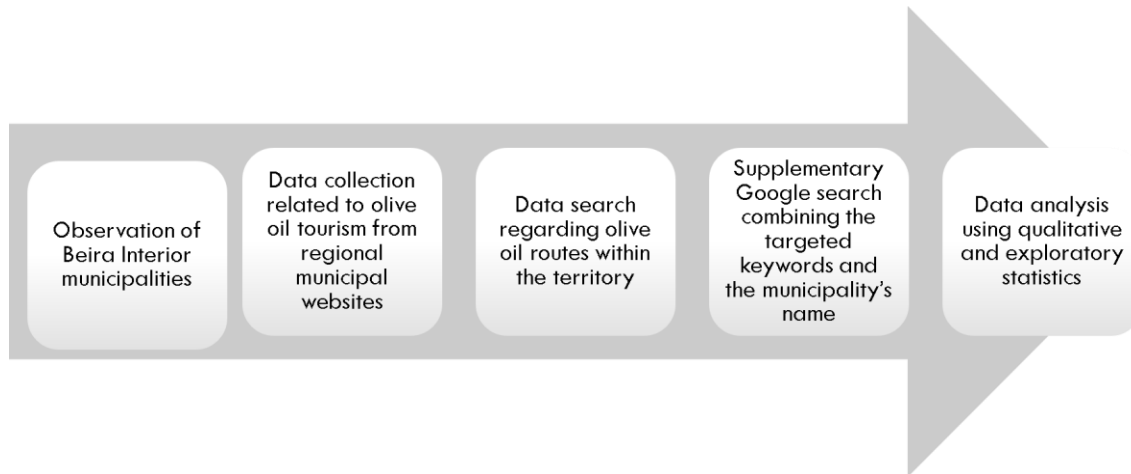
3.2 Methodological approach

The initial phase of the process identified the municipalities that constitute the Beira Interior territory and its sub-regions, Beira Alta and Beira Baixa, using data from the Portuguese *Direção Geral de Agricultura e Desenvolvimento Rural* of the *Ministério da Agricultura* (DGADR, 2024). In a second phase, a comprehensive data search was conducted across the official websites of the all municipalities within the designed territory and its respective PDO sub-regions. Information related to olive oil tourism was collected from the webpages of each municipality and included: i) olive or olive oil-related events, ii) olive oil production farms offering visitor tours, iii) oil mill or olive oil cooperatives open to visitors, iv) museums and other cultural spaces dedicated to olive oil, v) accommodations that offer olive oil-themed experiences (Almeida & Silveira, 2021). This information was organised into an excel database.

Recognising the pivotal contribution of olive oil routes to destination promotion and the fostering of regional olive production (OTRoutes, 2024), the third phase of the process involved an assessment of the presence of these routes in the aforementioned sub-regions. The research conducted also encompassed a thorough investigation of the available resources and experiences offered, using information available on the official *Portuguese Turismo Centro Portugal* website. To address potential data collection biases, a fourth phase included a supplementary Google search to complement the information previously collected on olive oil tourism activities in the aforementioned municipalities. To this end, the search employed a set of keywords, as suggested by Almeida & Silveira (2021): olive oil, olive tourism, olive oil routes, gastronomic routes, oil mill, factory, olive oil cooperative, events, and fairs. These keywords were cross-referenced with each municipality's name.

Finally, in a fifth stage, the data were analysed using qualitative and exploratory statistics.

The methodological process is depicted in figure 3.

**Figure 2.** Methodological approach

4. FINDINGS

In the Beira Alta (BA) sub-region, resources dedicated to promoting olive oil tourism are clearly identifiable. With the exception of two municipalities (Pinhel and Almeida) where no evidence was found (NA), all others municipalities in the sub-region showed evidence of product promotion (Table 1).

Table 1. Evidence of olive oil tourism in the BA Sub-Region

Municipalities	Fairs and events	Producers or olive farms offering visitors tours	Cooperatives or cooperative mills	Museums	Lodgings units that offer olive or olive oil-themed experiences
Meda	NA	NA	NA	NA	Quinta da Corga; Calcaterra Agroturismo
Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo	NA	NA	Escalhão Cooperative / Press Mill	NA	Casa dos Poços - turismo Rural; Quinta Pêro Martins
Guarda	Vale da Teixeira Olive oil Festival; Farta Fair; Pork Festival - Sausage, Wine and Olive Oil Fair	Ethos - Olive Company; Lagar de Herdeiros de Manuel Aleixo da Cruz	Ramos Lagar, Lda; Lagar de azeite da Ramela	Museum Lagar Varadas Estevão Martins da Rocha	Quinta do Pinheiro; Casa dos Poços; Casa de Campo-Quinta dos Sinçais
Celorico da Beira	Olive Oil Festival*	NA	Lagar Municipal de Celorico da Beira; Lagar de azeite Baracal	NA	NA
Seia	NA	NA	Varas mill	NA	Quinta do Vale Sanguinho
Gouveia	NA	NA	NA	NA	Casa Grande
Trancoso	NA	NA	NA	Olive Oil Museum Freches	NA
Manteigas	NA	Casa Agrícola Francisco Esteves	NA	NA	NA
Fornos de Algodres	NA	"Casa do Cabo" olive oil press	NA	NA	NA

Source: Own elaboration based on online search

The BA sub-region currently hosts three events and fairs: the Vale da Teixeira Olive Oil Festival; the Farta Fair; and the Pork Festival - Sausage, Wine and Olive Oil Fair. All three events are held in Guarda municipality, in September (Farta fair), November (Vale da Teixeira Olive Oil festival), and January (Pork Festival). The Vale da Teixeira Olive Oil Festival provides visitors with the opportunity to participate in olive picking activities, visit the olive oil press, community ovens, and village markets where they can purchase local products, particularly olive oil from local producers. In the BA sub-region, there are at least four farms or olive oil producers and six cooperatives that welcome visitors. This presents a unique opportunity to observe the olive oil production firsthand and purchase olive oil directly from producers. Yet, evidence supporting the development of the product extends beyond these examples. The sub-region features two museums (the Lagar Varadas Museum and the Freches Olive Oil Museum) dedicated to olive oil traditions where visitors can explore the traditional equipment and methods employed in olive oil production. Finally, the region hosts nine accommodations that offer olive oil-themed experiences.

Significant evidence of olive oil tourism promotion can also be found across the BB sub-region. However, five municipalities (Mação, Oleiros, Penamacor, Proença à Nova, Sabugal) show no clear sign of any concrete oil tourism-related offerings or experiences.

Four olive oil-related fairs and events (Table 2) have been identified: the Olive Oil and Olive Fair; the Gastronomic festival “Fundão Aqui Come-se Bem” – Festival da Tibórnica; the Cod and Olive Oil Festival; and the Almeirão Festival, New Olive Oil and Homemade Bread. These different events clearly contribute to promoting the excellence of the region’s olive oil and family farming. The sub-region also offers visits to at least three olive oil producers or farms and to four olive oil cooperatives. Museums dedicated to olive oil traditions and production are common in the BB region, which houses four institutions exclusively dedicated to this theme. As previously mentioned, these museums offer valuable opportunities to observe the traditional equipment and methods employed in olive oil production. Finally, the BB sub-region is home to three rural accommodations that provide olive oil-themed experiences.

Table 2. Evidence of olive oil tourism development in the BB Sub-Region

Municipalities	Fairs and events	Producers or olive farms offering visitors tours	Cooperatives or cooperative mills	Museums	Lodgings units that offer olive or olive oil-themed experiences
Belmonte	NA	Cadoço olive oil press; Mill of Maçainhas	NA	Olive Oil Museum	NA
Castelo Branco	Olive Oil Biennial**; Olive Oil and Olive Fair	Centro de Apoio Tecnológico Agroalimentar	NA	Lousa Ethnographic Center; Ethnographic museum of "Ninho do Açor"	NA
Covilhã	NA	Lagar 2000 - Commercialization and production of olive oil, Lda	NA	Varas da Erada Mill - Museum	NA
Fundão	Gastronomic festival "Fundão; Aqui Come-se Bem" – Festival da Tibórnia	NA	Agricultural Cooperative of Olive Growers of Fundão	NA	NA
Idanha-a-Nova	Festival of Olive Oil and Aromatic Herbs***	NA	Mill of Varas	Olive Oil Museum Center - Lagares Complex	NA
Sertão	NA	NA	NA	NA	Albergue do Bonjardim; O Ninho do Rei
Vila de Rei	NA	NA	Ferrugenta Mill	NA	NA
Vila Velha de Ródão	NA	NA	Varas Olive Oil Press	Sarnadas de Ródão Olive Oil Museum Space	Herdade da Urgueira

Source: Own elaboration

In addition to these assets, three olive oil route have been identified in the BIR region: i) the Beira Interior Olive Oil Route (BIOOR); ii) the Beira Baixa Olive Oil Route (BBOOR) and iii) the PR7 – Oil Mills Route. The Beira Interior Olive Oil Route encompasses fifteen municipalities (eleven from the BA sub-region and four from the BB sub-region).

The BIOOR, managed by the *Portuguese Comunidade Intermunicipal Beiras e Serra da Estrela* (CIMBSE), proposes a guided one-day tour, along with a printed guide that provides detailed information on the different varieties of olive oil produced in the Beira Interior. It highlights the region's PDO olive oil and includes a list of recommended points of interest. It also offers information on olive oil production and consumption activities, tasting and purchasing venues, and local producers (according CIMBSE, s.d.). However, the exact number of route participants and the specific geographic route available to visitors are not specified.

The BBOOR integrates six municipalities (one from the Beira Alta sub-region and five from the Beira Baixa sub-region). Managed by the *Portuguese Comunidade Intermunicipal da Beira Baixa* (CIMBB), the route proposes a three-day itinerary. In the guide provided by the managing entity, visitors can find information on the olive oil produced in the Beira Baixa and references to the region's PDO olive oil. It details the different experiences and activities scheduled for each of the three days, lists the olive-oil-themed experiences offered to tourists, and includes restaurant

recommendations and designated locations for olive oil purchases (according CIMBB, s.d.). However, once again, the precise number of route participants was not specified.

The PR7 – Oil Mills Route, is a circular route that offers tourists an opportunity to explore the historical oil mills, known locally as *Lagares de Varas*, located in the Alameda parish of Castelo Branco. This predominantly cultural tour allows visitors to observe ancient remains of olive oil mills and is managed by the Castelo Branco municipality.

5. SWOT ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Portugal ranks fourth in the European Union (EU) for olive grove area, accounting for approximately 7% of the European Union – 28's total (2017) (Eurostat, 2019). The international recognition and awards received by Portuguese olive oil in international quality competitions (OliStory, 2018) further contribute to solidify Portugal's image as a valuable rural production region. Tourist demand for rural spaces has been steadily increasing in recent years, driven by a desire for tranquillity, natural beauty, and authentic cultural experiences. Olive oil tourism, as a specific niche within rural tourism, offers a unique and enriching experience in rural areas, particularly in regions renowned for their olive cultivation. It immerses visitors in the history, culture, and production of olive oil, highlighting its pivotal role as a cornerstone of local heritage, culinary traditions, and healthy lifestyles. Simultaneously, the nutritional benefits of olive oil consumption, widely recognised as a natural and healthy product, have been increasingly emphasized by diverse entities, particularly health organisations. In terms of opportunities, Portugal is a member of the Mediterranean Diet group recognized by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, which regards olive oil as the primary fat source (Pato, 2024).

However, the observed increase in olive oil production in the Mediterranean basin and other countries with favourable edaphoclimatic conditions (California, Argentina, Chile, South Africa, Australia, Brazil, among others) (GPP, 2020) poses a significant threat. This expansion may negatively impact Portugal's competitive position and the public recognition of its olive oil production, potentially affecting sub-regions like the BI, known for its valuable terroir.

The BI region's olive oils are renowned for their quality, a result of its unique genetic and edaphoclimatic conditions that enable the production of olive oils with two PDO designations. The region's autochthonous and ancestral genetic heritage, adapted to extreme environmental conditions, contributes to the conservation of its resources (that includes not only its genetic

diversity but also the wide range of olive oil-related tourism experiences available at fairs and events, farms and olive oil producers, cooperatives/mill cooperatives, museums, and accommodations). Tourism offerings in the region result from close collaboration between private sector initiatives (farm, producers, and accommodations providing olive oil-themed experiences) and public sector entities (museums). The existence of three olive oil routes further demonstrates the dynamic involvement of stakeholders in the Beira Interior's olive oil production and related activities.

However, online searches reveal certain weaknesses, particularly in the case of the BI olive oil route, as they failed to provide clear information on the itinerary or the number of participants involved. Similarly, the information collected on the BB olive oil route was rather limited, as the number of participants was not specified. Evidence also shows that promotional efforts for these offerings are still insufficient and that the region currently lacks a dedicated entity (e.g., association) responsible for coordinating and promoting olive oil tourism activities.

The SWOT analysis is summarised in Table 3.

Table 3. Swot analysis of olive oil tourism in the BIR

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production of quality olive oils recognized with PDO certification • Presence of ancient olive oil varieties • Availability of olive oil-related resources: fairs and events; olive farms; cooperatives/mill cooperatives, museums, rural accommodations • Active involvement of public authorities, (CIMBB and CIMSE) in promoting olive oil tourism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of a coordinated strategy for the promotion of olive oil tourism in the region • Limited promotion of the region's olive oil tourism offerings • Novelty of the rural tourism product
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing demand for rural tourism experiences • Increasing promotion of the nutritional benefits of olive oil consumption, emphasising its natural and healthy properties • Portugal's inclusion in the Mediterranean Diet group, recognized by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, which highlights the benefits of olive as the primary fat source. • Portugal's fourth-largest olive grove area within the European Union, accounting for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased competition from other countries in both olive oil production and olive oil-related tourism • Absence of a national body responsible for promoting the country's offerings in a coordinated manner • Limited current demand for olive oil tourism due to its nascent stage of development • Beira Interior's geographical interiority

approximately 7% of the total EU olive grove area

- International recognition of Portuguese olive oil in international quality competitions, which contribute to improving the country's global image
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The growing visitor interest in authentic experiences within the region and desire to learn about local customs and practices call for improved planning and organization of existing tourism offerings. The successful integration of local industries and businesses (restaurants, shops, and rural accommodations) within the olive oil tourism routes in Spain, Italy and Croatia offer a compelling model for Portugal and the BIR to emulate.

In summary, the development of the region's olive oil tourism requires a concerted strategy that should include robust promotion, integrated resources and product development, along with active stakeholder engagement.

6. CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The benefits of olive oil tourism extend way beyond environmental protection and crop sustainability, significantly contributing to community cohesion, intercultural dialogue, the protection and revitalization of intangible cultural traditions associated with olive cultivation, and the stimulation of entrepreneurship and innovation within the rural economy (Kouri, 2024).

This paper presents an exploratory study focusing on the current olive oil tourism offerings in the BIR region— one of Portugal's six PDO olive oil regions. The online search conducted suggests ongoing efforts to develop this tourism sector and reveals a wide range of olive oil and olive grove-related assets and experiences in the Beira Alta and Beira Baixa sub-regions. Tourism offerings primarily consist of various olive oil and local products fairs and events, visits to production sites (olive mills), museums and accommodations, and guided tours along the established olive oil routes, among others. With the development of its three olive oil routes, the BIR region stands out as Portugal's most dynamic destination for olive oil tourism. Given the BIR unique terroir and its potential for developing olive oil tourism as a product that authentically reflects its rural identity, both public and private entities should fully acknowledge its strategic importance and potential to drive the development of the entire region.

Unlike Spain and other nations that have already made significant advances in establishing olive oil tourism (Pato, 2024a), Portugal and the BI region remain in an exploratory stage (Almeida & Silveira, 2021). Challenges related with the sector's novelty (Pato, 2024a) and the current lack of coordination between stakeholders and promotional strategies must urgently be addressed. In line with the recommendations of Almeida & Silveira (2021) regarding the practical implications surrounding the development of tourism products in Portugal, this study suggests the creation of an olive oil tourism association or hub (similar to the recently formed Wine Tourism Association) responsible for guiding the current and future state of this activity. This structure would provide leadership, coordination, and regulatory mechanisms to ensure the sustainable and profitable development of olive oil tourism. While the formal establishment of this entity is beyond the scope of this article, it would entail the collaborative engagement of multiple stakeholders, including government bodies, tourism boards, and private businesses (farmers, wineries, mill operators, accommodations, restaurants, shops, and craft companies, among others). This structure would be responsible for developing a website and a printed guide detailing the BIR's olive oil tourism offerings (including olive or olive oil-related events, olive oil production farms, oil mill cooperatives or olive oil cooperatives open to visitors, museums and cultural sites dedicated to olive oil, olive oil-themed accommodations, restaurants, and craft companies specialising in olive oil products, among others). Finally, the qualification of olive oil routes, museums and events is of the utmost importance in fostering connections between the BIR community, visitors, and other stakeholders, while also establishing the region as a *terroir* of excellence for both olive oil production and olive oil tourism.

The primary limitation of this study is its exclusive reliance on online searches. While this approach provides a useful overview of the existing offerings, online information may often contain inaccuracies, outdated content, or potential biases. Additionally, algorithm filtering may introduce biases and omit niche or less common information. Another limitation of the study is its inability to capture stakeholder perspectives, visitor experiences, or the operational challenges faced by tourism providers. Future research should adopt a more rigorous methodological framework to address the current limitations and explore alternative approaches, such as field research, stakeholder interviews, or surveys. Incorporating qualitative or mixed-method approaches could provide deeper insights into the development and promotion of olive oil tourism in the BI region. In-situ studies of both private entities (olive oil producers or olive oils farms) and

public institutions' (municipal chambers) attitudes and behaviours would offer valuable knowledge of local reality.

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