

Article

# Oleotourism: Local Actors for Local Tourism Development

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**Abstract:** Olive oil consumption has grown substantially in recent years, due in part to the fact that olive oil is healthy. Much of the global olive oil production comes from the rural areas of Jaén in southern Spain. Surrounding this industry, services such as oleotourism are increasing. This paper aims to identify the key elements supporting the development of oleotourism. After a preliminary exploratory analysis of the existing data, a qualitative analysis was performed with actors directly involved in the industry in Jaén. The results helped us define the level of the stakeholders' involvement and the sustainability, the opportunities, and the constraints affecting oleotourism in this area. The practical implications of this investigation can be useful for governing agencies, local firms, and the tourism industry in support of oleotourism development.

**Keywords:** oleotourism; olive oil tourism; rural development; Spain; sustainability; Andalusia; agritourism

## 1. Introduction

Sustainability is a concept that drives actions due to a desire to counteract the impact of human activities and to adopt a proactive approach towards the improvement of environmental and human conditions. All industries are involved in this challenge to achieve these improvements. Among these industries, tourism has been regarded from sustainability-based perspectives, as it concerns both traditional and new forms of tourism. The strict link between tourism and the physical environment where tourism-oriented activities take place underlines the need for the sustainability of tourism. This viewpoint has been expressed worldwide, as it is in the universal 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The United Nations [1] has identified the challenge involved in deploying sustainability in tourism, and 2017 was designated as the Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. Tourism is embedded in goal number 8 of the 2030 Agenda, since it is thought of as one of the key forces in achieving global economic growth; parallel to this, the call for action focuses on implementing new policies that promote sustainable tourism and favor job creation. These interventions should align with the objectives of creating new jobs and promoting local areas' cultures and products. In summary, tourism can be developed in a sustainable way if people experience a context "through visiting and tourism" as stated by the Programme Officer of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) [2].

Sustainability and tourism are intertwined in empirical contexts thanks to the intervention of other global institutions: UNESCO [3] had already stressed the role of culture and natural elements in favoring the achievement of a higher sustainability; similarly, the World Farmers' Organization [4] took this opportunity into account and considered sustainability as an overall perspective and to be the path

towards supporting the development of farmers still fighting for economic sustainability. Due to this, tourism-oriented activities in a rural context relate to such issues as sustainable experience, the impact on the natural context, and barriers to development. Therefore, even environmental sustainability is taken into account, as proposed by the World Tourism Organization [5], when proposing customized measures for sustainable tourism. Additionally, social sustainability was considered [6] as tourism places local populations under risk, or in some cases tourism could favor the achievement of more viable conditions for local inhabitants.

Aside from the interest of international institutions in the links between tourism and sustainability, scholars have focused on these issues in recent years by highlighting the need to further define the role stakeholders play in contributing to the sustainable development of tourism. Cawley and Gillmor [7] proposed a model to obtain insights from key stakeholders. Similarly, McComb et al. [8] stressed the need to define the degree to which stakeholders should be involved to make their participation as effective as possible. Furthermore, in the main domain of agritourism, sustainability was proposed as one of the new challenges, since social, environmental, and economic spheres can benefit from the development of the different forms of agritourism (e.g., [9,10]); one of the recent contributions proposed the sustainable elements and the improvements yet to be achieved in one of the forms of agritourism, namely oleotourism [11,12]; moreover, the expected development of this form of tourism is highlighted since its definition is imbedded in several issues related to sustainability. Indeed, oleotourism has been defined as “a form of domestic tourism (especially in rural areas) related to gastronomy, which allows for the essence of the culture encompassing the world of the olive to be captured while deepening knowledge about everything connected to olive oil” ([13], p. 180) and it “may be a complementary means of income for the rural population” ([12], p. 116). However, parallel to this, scholars [11,13] have stressed the problems involved in achieving concrete development. In summary, oleotourism has great potential—even related to sustainability, mainly social and economic—but appropriate measures are lacking in order to make it grow. Consequently, the economic factors shaping the oleotourism industry have managed to achieve only one-third of the expected increase. Thus, further research is needed to verify the economic, social, and environmental variables related to tourism as ways to further develop oleotourism [11].

Additionally, the attention that this paper pays to oleotourism is due to the recent considerations by IUCN [2] that olive groves are part of a complex ecosystem hosting several activities, from farming to olive collection and production. These activities have led to the establishment of services and impacts, namely those related to manufacturing, the sequestration of carbon, the creation of biomass, and the offering of cultural services.

Based upon the prior research, we chose to focus our investigation upon the stakeholders' role in achieving the sustainable development of tourism; the aim of this research is to depict the impacts of oleotourism on sustainability and the contribution stakeholders have on promoting the development of oleotourism. Therefore, this paper is structured as follows: a review of the ties already highlighted by scholars between sustainability and territory when dealing with the tourism industry; a focus will be proposed on agritourism, due to its tight relations with the resources of a territory. Agritourism will be analyzed to frame the main area of research of this paper, namely oleotourism; the review highlights the key elements and the gaps emerging from previous research, leading us to our research aim. Therefore, the open issues in literature are at the core of our analysis in the research context we selected, namely the olive oil capital of the world: Jaén, Spain. We then present research conducted with stakeholders to get a better understanding of their knowledge in oleotourism and their involvement in the local territory. The evidence from interviews leads us to a discussion that proposes the policies and interventions aimed at the achievement of two main goals: (a) the advances to be achieved in making oleotourism more sustainable in relation to all three spheres of sustainability; and (b) the efforts to be deployed by local stakeholders in supporting further development of this new form of tourism. The paper closes with a conclusion and suggestions for further research, stressing the basic elements emerging from the empirical context and the advances we achieved.

## 2. Theoretical Background

### 2.1. Sustainability and Territory

Sustainable development, local resource evaluation and sustainable management of a territory are some of the most discussed topics today in the field of local development [14]. Most scholars state that sustainable development is based on the evaluation—and especially on the correct use—of local resources [15,16] considered to constitute the territory's heritage.

It is important to distinguish between land heritage (that is, a potential value) and resources for the territory (competitive advantage) [17,18], as the resource does not have to be something static but, instead, a potential value that is constantly evolving—namely, the result of a social process aimed at sustainable development [19]. Varied employment of the resources and their different origins have led to the assignment of different levels of value based on the purpose. Indeed, it is important to attribute the correct value to those factors that can potentially become an effective local resource [14,19].

Awareness of environmental emergencies and the spread of theories about sustainability and local development have focused attention on the concept of territory. Such a concept is hard to define because it integrates the concepts of environment, space, and geographic position [15,20].

The continued undervaluation of territory led to the inability to identify and configure the concept itself, distorting the relationship between the human being and the environment and, consequently, leading to the devaluation of the territorial capital; this issue is reinforced when considering the linkages between a territory and value creation, which has been stressed in recent contributions (e.g., [21,22]): the dynamics leading to value creation are based on knowledge-based actions involving local stakeholders.

After the birth of urban strategic planning, aiming to improve the quality of life of citizens living in that territory, the concept acquired new semantic connotations that can assume different meanings [23].

The word “territory” is difficult to define and implement in terms of local development and urban strategies; indeed, territorial marketing strategies are often extraneous to the territory on which they should act. Consequently, strategies aiming at local development appear disconnected from the context of interest; namely, single initiatives are not really effective and incisive. Furthermore, concerning the implementation of tourism strategies, the massification of tourism has led to the uncontrolled development of activities that damage the environment [24,25].

In recent years, the entire community has paid attention to the environmental emergency; tourism activities started to be considered as potentially damaging to the environment.

The adoption of a new approach is needed, starting at the juncture between the concept of sustainability and the tourism initiatives as a unique way to develop an eco-compatible form of tourism [26].

### 2.2. Agritourism

Local resources are increasingly considered a basis upon which to define territorial marketing strategies by using a valuable specific local product as a lever to plan and implement new actions.

Some scholars consider the product-oriented approach as a way to create an image of a destination, or even a territory's “brand”, thanks to some particular products [27–29].

Armesto López and Martín [30] focused on the relationship between tourism and local agricultural production, considering agri-food products to be useful tools in increasing local economic development through mutual enhancement and territorial promotion.

In accordance with the aim of the present research, a scan of the literature's contributions to forms of tourism reveals that attention has been paid to categories based on the evaluation and exploitation of local products with special reference to agriculture-based tourism [31,32]. Different approaches emerged, with this variety of perspectives leading to the attribution of different denominations, namely, agritourism, agro-tourism and agricultural tourism [31,33]. According to Gil Arroyo, Barbieri and Rich [34], four main elements lead to the identification of tourism initiatives based on agricultural activities: the type of setting

linked to agricultural production; the authenticity of the agricultural facility or experience (as agri-tourists will consider agricultural activities to be not a job but, rather, a way to spend free time and receive benefits derived from the authentic side of nature and healthy food) [35,36]; the types of activities in which the tourist is involved as a member of the family farm; and the need for “travel”, more strictly related to the essence of tourism as “traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes” [37].

Hence, local resources can represent a relevant tool for achieving or improving tourism flows, with special reference to food and drink [38,39]. In this context, olive oil tourism can, of course, be recognized as an example of tourism based on local resource evaluation through a systemic approach [39], as described in the next paragraph.

### 2.3. Oleotourism

According to the research highlighted above, the literature on agritourism considers most contributions with respect to the connection between olive oil production and the tourism industry [12,39].

Some recent contributions to the theme provide evidence about the links between the olive oil sector and other industries such as tourism [40,41]. Different opportunities emerge along with the increasing trend in tourism-based initiatives in relation to olive oil [42].

Indeed, when a food-based product is linked to specific geographical areas, the area can become more recognizable in a wider context. Thus, the product can be regarded as a tool for marketing tourism. Richards [43] empirically verified such a relationship when examining tourists' behavior in Crete. In any event, not all relationships should be considered, as farming and production are not always related to gastronomy [44,45] and some other ties should be empirically verified.

When discussing the use of natural resources as a lever for improving economic development, it is impossible to avoid sustainability issues [46]. Many scholars have debated the issue of the compatibility of tourism activities and olive oil production, focusing on risks with respect to the integrity of the trees and the surrounding areas [32], in some cases leading to the incompatibility of these two activities. Other scholars stressed the opportunities that can come from the merging of these two activities, stating that tourism-oriented activities can be performed parallel to farming and can even create new benefits for the local area [12,47,48]. As concerns this second perspective, Millán Vázquez de la Torre et al. [32] proposed a set of activities to be designed and implemented for oleotourism development. Specifically, they identified six actions: the coordination of local actors, the integration of tourism and gastronomy, the development of ties between the tourism industry and education actors, the improvement of the image of oleotourism through the media, the support from the local community [29], and the extension of a seasonal demand for a positive trend throughout the year.

On the basis of these six dimensions, authors also analyzed consumers' behavior and choices during visits to mills and farms that produce olive oil [49], outlining the features of tourists' decision-making processes, as well as their motivations, satisfaction, and reasons for recommending a destination, such as the firms' approach [32], to observe how firms belonging to the olive oil industry are involved in promoting activities for tourism initiatives based on olive oil.

The evidence underlined how seasonality can negatively affect both farming and tourism by recalling the above-mentioned issue of compatibility [47,50]. Hence, tourism and farming can be mutually beneficial, as the hospitality industry can promote the development of the olive oil industry [51–53]. However, local conditions, the life cycle of the tourist destination, the development of the olive oil industry, and other contextual features can strongly affect such a connection.

With regards to this, Karray [51] depicted tourism as the key tool in further developing the olive oil industry, as the integration of the activities can promote a huge increase in exports, even from a long-term perspective. Similarly, Vlontzos and Duquenne [54] provided evidence of the positive outcome tourism created with respect to olive oil in Greece. In addition, Duarte Alonso and Northcote [52] said that farmers who performed activities beyond those related to the core business benefitted from oleotourism, underlining the relevance of private–public relationships to attract new business. Finally, a more recent

contribution observed how farms are increasingly considered to be types of accommodation which have developed parallel to traditional options such as hotels or bed and breakfasts [55,56].

As concerns the opportunities derived from the relationship between tourism and olive oil production, a key issue is the role of stakeholders from the tourism and agricultural industries. More specifically, scholars described different approaches that farmers can adopt. Some of them state that olive oil producers prefer to create new relationships only in fairs or that they already know how to expand their activities [42,57]. Similarly, other operators are not interested in diversifying their businesses, as they prefer to focus on the competition.

Finally, some scholars reported about farmers stressing the negative effects of missing links with other actors [58,59] thoroughly; the farmers complained about the need for external support to manage the plethora of actors and challenges in an increasingly competitive context.

With reference to the role of consumers, during a scan of contributions, it emerged that the positive outcomes of partnerships among operators from various industries [12,60] can greatly improve customers' satisfaction and the quality of services for tourists, such as with respect to the oleotourist's experience [61,62]. Furthermore, Tudisca et al. [63] debated about the participation of tourists and other actors in the activities that farmers carried out; consequently, the roles cannot be considered static as they change along with the proposal of new activities.

In conclusion, tourists participating in the harvest, public entities supporting farmers' marketing and the proposal of innovative activities by farmers' associations are some examples of ways in which roles are changing.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Context: Current Situation in Jaén

According to the International Olive Council, world olive oil production between 2017 and 2018 will increase approximately 12%, with a total of 2,854,000 tons. Worldwide production is driven by countries belonging to the European Union. Indeed, the International Olive Council estimated an output of 1,896,000 tons for European countries, followed by countries in the Mediterranean area, such as Tunisia, Turkey and Morocco.

As concerns the production of European countries, since 2000, Spain has been the top producer, followed by Italy, Greece and Portugal. Even if its total production were expected to be 10% lower than in previous years, Spain would lead the rankings (see Table 1) with a total production of 1,150,000 tons (almost fulfilled with 1,050,000 tons at the end of January 2018). Italy would follow with 320,000 tons (an increase of 75%), and then Greece with 300,000 tons (an increase of 54%) and Portugal with 110,000 tons (an increase of 58%). This would considerably increase their production of olive oil, but they would still be far from producing the same quantity as Spain (Data from Junta de Andalucía and International Olive Council IOC). The way the production trend varies depends mainly on natural issues and, when looking at the average amount of olive oil production, the results are quite similar in the last 10 years, apart from the peak achieved in 2013/14.

The production growth in Spain in recent years is due mainly to the growth of the area devoted to olive cultivation and the incorporation of technological improvements in the field [64–66].

Data related to countries not belonging to the European Community are particularly interesting because they represent a picture of the transformation of the global olive oil market.

Tunisia is expected to increase its production by 120%, with a total amount of 220,000 tons of olive oil, while Argentina is expected to increase its production by 74%, with a total amount of 37,500 tons.

In general, countries in the Mediterranean are the main producers, with a special reference to Tunisia, Turkey (with an expected amount of 180,000 and an increase of 2%), Morocco (with an expected amount of 120,000 and an increase of 9%), Algeria (with an expected amount of 80,000 and an increase of 27%) and Egypt (with an expected amount of 25,000 and an increase of 25%) (data from International Olive Council IOC).

In line with the aim of this paper, attention has been paid to Spanish olive oil production, with a special reference to the Andalusia region and to the province of Jaén as the largest producer in the world, as emerges from the following tables (see Tables 1 and 2):

**Table 1.** Total olive oil production—Source: Junta de Andalucía (Andalusian Government), Consejería de Agricultura, Pesca y Desarrollo and International Olive Council IOC.

| Estimation of Olive Oil Production 2017/2018 | (tons)    |
|--|-----------|
| World  | 2,854,000 |
| Spain  | 1,150,000 |
| Andalusia                                    | 884,900   |

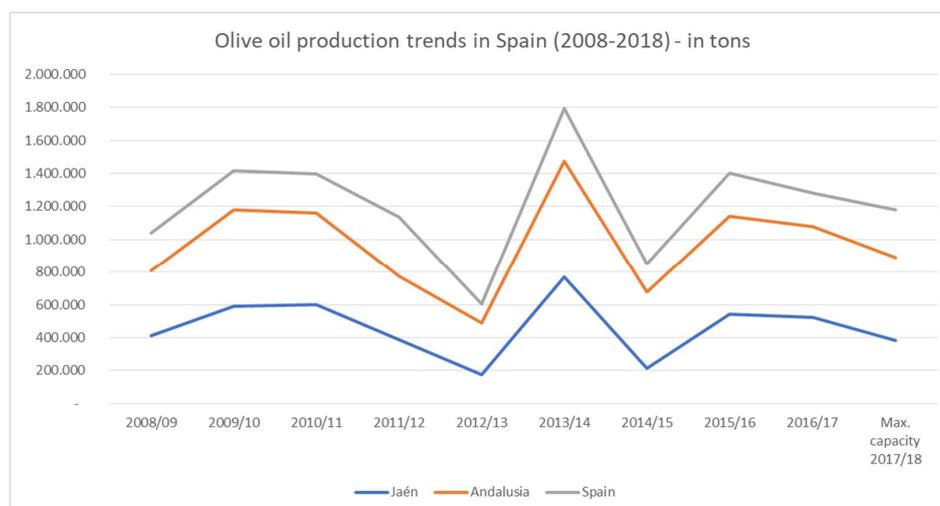
**Table 2.** Total olive oil production in Andalusia in 2017/18—Source: Junta de Andalucía, Consejería de Agricultura, Pesca y Desarrollo and International Olive Council IOC.

| Province  | Olive Production (.000 tons) | Olive oil Production (.000 tons) | Olive Oil, Comparison with the Last 5 Years (%) | Olive Oil, Comparison with Previous Year (%) |
|-----------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|--|
| Almeria   | 62.8                         | 12.5                             | 15.8  | 12.2   |
| Cádiz     | 46.9                         | 8.7                              | −3.3  | −15.8  |
| Cordoba   | 1,244.2                      | 243.7                            | 1.4   | −8.9   |
| Granada   | 400                          | 91.4                             | −13.1   | −15.8  |
| Huelva    | 37.7                         | 7.2                              | 23.2  | −1   |
| Jaén      | 1,651                        | 360                              | −16.5   | −28.5  |
| Malaga    | 295.6                        | 57.7                             | −4.9  | 23.2   |
| Sevilla   | 564.3                        | 103.7                            | 8.6   | 7.7  |
| Andalusia | 4,302.5                      | 884.9                            | −7.7  | −15.8  |

Source: Junta de Andalucía, Consejería de Agricultura, Pesca y Desarrollo and International Olive Council IOC.

Jaén is the district with the largest area of olive groves in the world. Across 1.2 million hectares, it gathers 70 million olive trees that occupy half its total area. This represents the largest concentration of trees in Europe (Junta de Andalucía), forming a unique landscape. For this reason, in 2017, the olive grove landscape of Andalusia was proposed for evaluation as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Apart from its unique landscape, the province of Jaén is a main olive oil producer. However, as the following figure indicates (Figure 1), in the last two years, production in the province of Jaén, as with the production in Andalusia and Spain, is decreasing.



**Figure 1.** Olive oil production trends—Source: Junta de Andalucía, Consejería de Agricultura, Pesca y Desarrollo.

Apart from the production trends, the quality of the olive oil is improving, with special reference to table olive oil. In some cases, scholars believe that olive oil producers are solely product-oriented, and do not effectively consider the relevance of commercialization [64,65]. On the other hand, producers of high-quality olive oil have trouble reaching the final market, as these industries are very dispersed compared to the concentration of large-scale distribution [66,67].

The lack of marketing professionalization makes the exportation process difficult, especially in regard to the recognizability of the product origin and the loss of the opportunity to create a wider market around a product that could represent an element of differentiation for the entire region.

Therefore, it would be necessary to develop intangible assets linked to olive oil (such as tourism or oleotourism) that would improve the sector's profit and favor local sustainable development.

In the last few years, more researchers and public administrators have been paying attention to tourism development as a lever for the development of the area surrounding Jaén.

Data provided by the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE) and Junta de Andalucía highlight the fact that Jaén is the Andalusian province that attracts the lowest number of tourists, as indicated in the following table (Table 3).

Most tourists visiting Andalusia are concentrated in the province of Malaga, followed by Seville, Granada and Cádiz.

Furthermore, tourists visit Andalusia primarily during the summer (July and August, as pointed out by the INE), spending an average of four or five days in Malaga, more than three days in Cádiz and more than four days in Huelva and Almeria, while even in the most visited cities, such as Seville or Granada, tourists spent an average of two or three nights.

**Table 3.** Tourist arrival and presence in Andalusia in 2017—Source: INE—Instituto Nacional de Estadística (Spanish Statistical Office).

| Province  | Arrivals   | % var | %     | Nights Spent | % var | %     |
|-----------|------------|-------|-------|--------------|-------|-------|
| Almeria   | 1,715,058  | 4.1   | 7.8   | 7,039,661    | 2.5   | 10.3  |
| Cadiz     | 3,045,976  | 5.5   | 13.8  | 9,369,993    | 5.4   | 13.7  |
| Cordoba   | 1,364,170  | 47    | 6.2   | 2,304,153    | 4.1   | 3.4   |
| Granada   | 3,140,759  | −1.9  | 14.2  | 6,859,161    | 0.2   | 10.05 |
| Huelva    | 1,292,807  | 0.8   | 5.9   | 5,113,960    | 3.8   | 7.5   |
| Jaén      | 683,172    | 4.1   | 3.1   | 1,342,091    | 5.8   | 2.0   |
| Malaga    | 6,978,447  | 5.3   | 31.6  | 28,631,295   | 2.9   | 42.0  |
| Sevilla   | 3,837,536  | 7.2   | 17.4  | 7,541,063    | 7.0   | 11.05 |
| Andalusia | 22,057,925 | 4.1   | 100.0 | 68,201,377   | 3.5   | 100.0 |

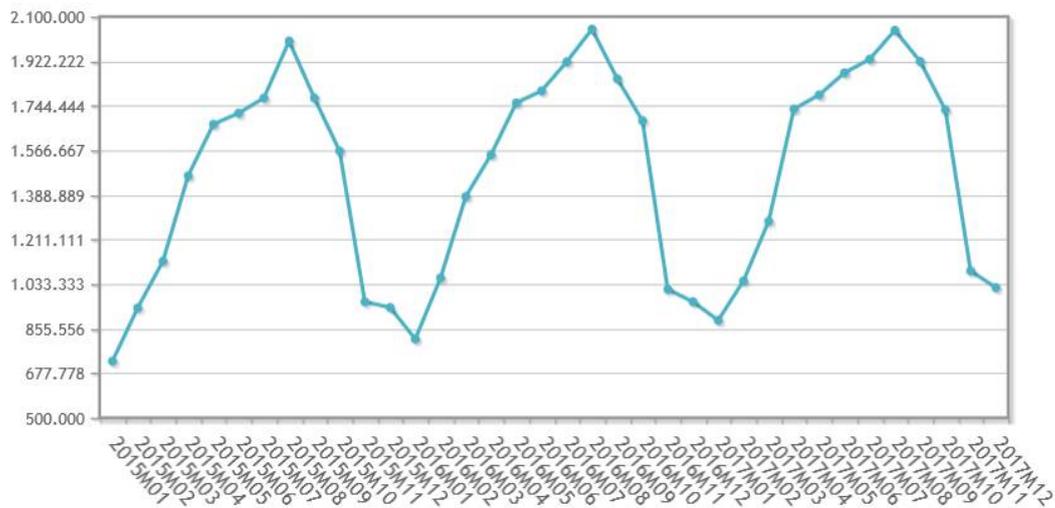
In general, data provided by the INE confirms that Andalusia has a seasonal tourism vocation (see Figure 2) and that the provinces are considered less by tourists, who are more attracted to the coast. This is especially true for tourists from other countries.

It is interesting to note that Jaén is visited primarily during the autumn (October) and the spring (April), as it is evidently beyond the region's main touristic circuits (see Figure 3).

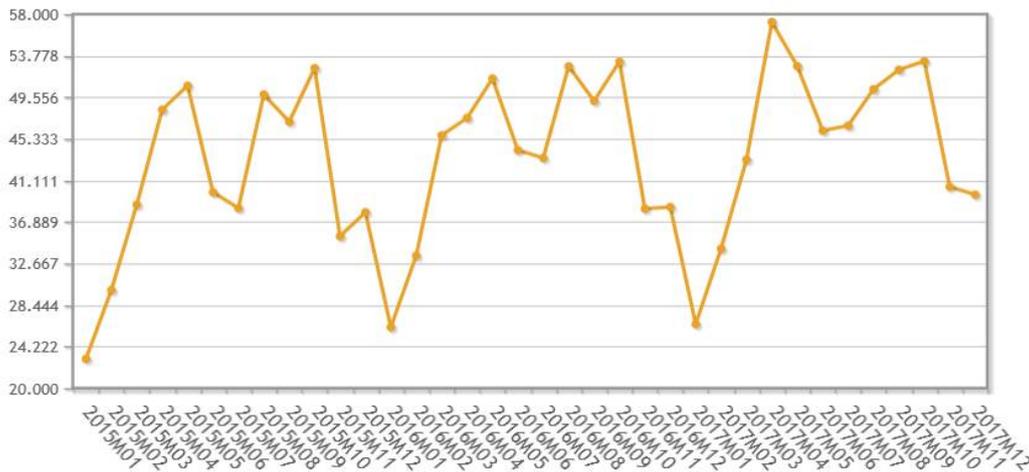
To observe the province's potential from a tourist perspective and to analyze the reason why the tourism industry cannot easily be developed, previous research [68,69] compared Cordoba (the province with the most similar tourism offerings) and Seville, the region's capital city.

For Seville, the higher number of visitors can be justified considering the city's central position and its status as the capital of Andalusia. For Cordoba, it is difficult to understand why the city receives more visitors than Jaén.

Based on the literature, one can deduce that the economic conjuncture, distance from the coast and seasonality of the tourism, as well as the low professionalization of the industry and the lack of cooperation among tourism operators and local entrepreneurs, represent a weakness for the territory and present a barrier for tourism development [68,70].



**Figure 2.** Tourist arrival trends in Andalusia (2015–2017)—Source: INE—Instituto Nacional de Estadística (Spanish Statistical Office).



**Figure 3.** Tourist arrival trends in Jaén (2015–2017)—Source: INE—Instituto Nacional de Estadística (Spanish Statistical Office).

To achieve real, long-lasting tourism development, local stakeholders, both private and public, must improve their offerings by enhancing local resources (i.e., those connected to the olive oil industry) to contain the problem of seasonality and create a concrete alternative to coastal attractions.

Currently, among the region's and province's economic resources deriving from the agricultural sector (Junta de Andalucía), it is quite difficult to consider the tourism industry as a viable alternative for local economic development, even considering that Jaén is the least visited of the Andalusian provinces.

### 3.2. Aim and Research Process

As highlighted above, we focused on oleotourism for two main reasons: (a) this form of tourism is strictly related to the environment, and its deployment has been thought of as contrasting with farming [71]; and (b) recent investigation has called for additional examination to better depict the reasons why this form of tourism has not yet developed as expected [12]. To get a better grasp on additional meanings related to the two focuses proposed above, we decided to investigate the world capital of olive oil—namely, the Spanish city of Jaén, in Andalusia. The reasons behind naming this

city the most important in terms of the production of olive oil stem from its level of production, as indicated previously.

We opted for a qualitative study because it is the most suitable way to deal with inductive exploratory analyses and to investigate the phenomenon in depth and understand certain issues [72]. We considered face-to-face and in-depth interviews as the most useful ways to apply this qualitative perspective, as this has been the case in previous research (e.g., [73]). The authors selected the interviewees based on prior knowledge of oleotourism and the local area. Direct contact with experienced stakeholders is the best way to track the main factors featuring oleotourism and depicting the potential path for further deploying it. In this way, the insights that every actor provided will be complemented by the others, favoring the achievement of a complete and fair overview.

From this overview, we aim to describe the main elements shaping a model that describes oleotourism as a multi-stakeholder phenomenon instead of attaining the perspective of a single actor. Merging and comparing interviewees' ideas are the main tasks to be accomplished to achieve a better understanding of this phenomenon.

The set of stakeholders we selected consisted of actors with a relevant role in firms and institutions dealing with tourism in Jaén and its province. To make the selection, we did previous exploratory research where we compiled several documents about oleotourism in the province of Jaén. One of the most important was the *Oleotur Program* held by the local Government of the province of Jaén (Diputación de Jaén). That program contains a list of stakeholders carrying out oleotourism activities; thus, we considered the methodological suggestion by Haven-Tang et al. [74] about selecting key stakeholders. We also used the 'snowball effect' technique [75] during the interviews, as it gives the advantage of benefiting from the authentic interpretation of local actors and avoiding biases. From the exploratory research, we selected 15 actors from restaurants, hotels, non-profit organizations and local government. Finally, after much contact, we received responses from nine interviewees. Nevertheless, at a certain point, the results started to repeat (saturation) and we decided to stop collecting data. Data collection continued until no new substantive information was obtained, as is usually done in qualitative research through key stakeholders [76]. The details of these interviews are proposed in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Profiles of interviewees.

| Interviewee | Industry/Main Activity                       | PROFILE/ROLE                       |
|-------------|--|------------------------------------|
| 1           | Local governmental agency                    | Chief of the tourism services area |
| 2           | Olive oil museum                             | Director                           |
| 3           | Tourism and travel agency                    | Manager                            |
| 4           | Restaurant                                   | Owner                              |
| 5           | Education                                    | Academic/researcher                |
| 6           | Hotel  | Guest relation manager             |
| 7           | Mill   | Responsible for oleotourism        |
| 8           | Mill   | Responsible for oleotourism        |
| 9           | Non-profit organization to promote olive oil | Manager                            |

All the interviews were performed in the offices where these professionals usually carried out their activities. The length of the interviews was from one to two hours. In performing these interviews, we previously created a semi-structured path; we opted for a flexible and adjustable tool to favor the emergence of other relevant topics based on the interviewees' perspectives. The main elements shaping each interview depended on the results of our literature review, namely compatibility, ties among actors, reciprocal support, the need to invest in infrastructure, active participation of tourists and conditions emerging [77] from the market. Some more evidence about the main issues shaping our semi-structured interview path and the references to literature inspiring these questions is proposed in the following table (Table 5).

**Table 5.** Summary of the main issues considered in the interviews and ties to the literature—Source: own compilation.

| Main Issues   | Tied Literature   |
|---|---|
| Compatibility:<br>Can oleotourism and farming co-exist and take place at the same time in the same place? Are there environmental sustainability issues?                          | - Loumou and Giourga (2003): the activities take place in different parts of the year<br>- Millán Vázquez de la Torre et al. (2014): trees and surrounding areas can be damaged   |
| Relationships among actors:<br>How do relationships between farmers and operators from other industries affect oleotourism? Should the extant relationships be further empowered? | - Duarte Alonso (2010): relationships are expected only in fairs and operators know how to expand their core business<br>- Kizos and Vakoufaris (2011): farmers are willing to further develop linkages with other actors   |
| Mutual support:<br>Can the linkages between olive oil industry and tourism companies be mutually supportive?  | - Karray (2008): hospitality can favor the olive oil industry<br>- Duarte Alonso and Northcote (2010): tourism can benefit from the olive oil industry<br>- Millán Vázquez de la Torre et al. (2014): safety standards, new structures to host visitors and personnel to be hired |
| Further investments to be done in infrastructures:<br>Are farmers worried about the need to further invest money to achieve suitable conditions to offer touristic activities?    | - Trono et al. (2017): investments are needed to create a good reputation and acquire a multidisciplinary approach<br>- Leco et al. (2013): rural life is something attracting tourists' attention and leading them to live it as a personal experience                           |
| Tourists' involvement and participation:<br>Are there activities tourists are already doing or willing to do in olive groves landscape?   | - Tudisca et al. (2015): tourists are willing to participate in harvesting<br>- Mili (2006): trends are positive and can be further developed   |
| Conditions emerging from the market:<br>Is there an increasing trend in oleotourism? How is this development taking place?  | - Cañero Morales et al. (2015) highlighted the need to further investigate and develop a new and appealing typology of tourism, as oleotourism is   |

During the interviews and their analysis, we avoided technical issues related to every single activity and tried to focus only on the key elements of oleotourism from an overall perspective, though we were aware of the differences related to every industry tied to oleotourism. This approach—like the flexibility of semi-structured interviews—favored the integration of ideas and the emergence of the main issues related to oleotourism and its development.

The interviews were registered and transcribed, and the analysis of information was based on the identification of the most common factors and paths shaping the interviews and the ideas of every interviewee in a cause-and-effect approach. The issues spontaneously proposed by the interviewees had great relevance to the understanding of the current conditions affecting oleotourism in Jaén and of its potential development. Similarly, relationships among the factors were highlighted by the interviewees and deduced by the authors when they were obvious.

Apart from the interviews, additional documents were used to foster a more complete understanding of oleotourism and the factors affecting it. The authors collected some of these documents while preparing the content of the semi-structured interview, while others were suggested or directly given to the authors by the interviewees.

#### 4. Results

The results of the interviews are proposed in four categories. The information shaping these four blocks is related to the key points emerging from the literature and leading to the semi-structured interviews. These categories lead to new information that supports the understanding of a potential path towards proposing actions aimed at developing oleotourism. In summary, the categories are

based on previous analysis of the literature but have been significantly complemented by the insights that the interviewees proposed.

#### 4.1. Involvement in Oleotourism

Actors perceive that they are related to one another when dealing with oleotourism activities, as they are mostly aware of the role that olive oil plays in their culture. Hotels sell olive oil and propose oleotourism activities through brochures, but they direct tourists interested in oleotourism to the tourist office to choose from among the several offerings.

*“There are tourists who come here and ask if you can do a tasting or if you can visit an oil mill; we have some flyers and brochures and we also answer that the tourism office in the old town has a lot of information about oil tourism.” (Interviewee n.6)*

As seen in the previous quote, olive oil tasting is one of the most demanded activities. A lack of coordination emerged between the oil mills and hotels of the provincial area when directing the tourists to the tourist office and not having specific agreements with mills that carry out this type of activities.

One more relationship is described by interviewees who manage activities in mills and restaurants, as they say that, to get a complete experience, tourists should visit mills and try food; however, despite signing these agreements, they are not achieving the expected results. The owners of mills signed other agreements, namely with cheese producers, spas and museums, to offer new experiences and to benefit from existing activities. In all these cases, the results have been positive and more successful than the example presented before, both in terms of direct sales and as regards the number of tourists participating in these bundled offerings. However, some of the interviewees complained about a lack of coordination in the activities (as we stated before). In some cases, interviewees stated that they did not have sufficient time to plan and provide the service. Interviewee n.4 said:

*“Some tourists arrive at the restaurant and ask for an olive oil tasting session, but I am forced to state that I can’t because I need to plan it and fit it in with the guests we have at the restaurant. Mills should deliver the inquiry before; I can’t stop serving guests for a tasting session.”*

Furthermore, actors stated that they deploy activities on their own: cooking experiences, tasting sessions, guided tours and the self-production of olive oil are just some of the services already offered to and experienced by tourists. The variety and completeness of these activities depend on the size of the firm managing the mill. Many actors joined the program offered by the local government, but some of them were not properly selected; the missing results mirror this problem. More promotion is offered during specialized events, such as fairs for professionals or events related to tourism promotion, while the online channel is not developed enough to attract tourists. Nevertheless, the local governmental agency observes a growing interest on the part of many entities due to the number of requests they receive to participate in the olive oil tourism program developed by this entity. However, because this program requires compliance with a series of requirements, many of them end up not formalizing their participation, as interviewee n.1 from the local governmental agency stated:

*“We have many requests to belong to the ‘Oleotour Program’, but when we tell them the requirements for example of mill, spa, singular accommodations, restaurants ... the people back out, but there are requests.”*

Tourists come primarily from neighboring cities or stop by when returning to their hometowns in Spain. The main flow of oleotourists from abroad comes from France, the United Kingdom, Germany and, especially, Asia. The latter sign deals in the area and are hugely interested in oleotourism.

#### 4.2. Sustainability

All the interviewees stated that there were no issues involved in performing tourism-oriented activities on the farm, not even during those months of the year when olives are collected.

*“I made visits to the field because people wanted to see the olive harvest, you go, but without bothering the workers explaining what they are doing . . . ”* (Interviewee n.7).

Based on the experience of local actors, the problem is on the other side: namely, how to engage in tourism when the olives are not flourishing. For several months, it is necessary to use frozen olives or to propose experiences out-of-the-field, even if observing or joining the olive harvest is considered appealing.

*“ . . . the real problem is sightseeing when there are no olives during the year. In these cases, frozen olives are used to make tourism activities.”* (Interviewee n.5)

*“When it is time to harvest, lots of people are attracted and come to the field to observe. They are attracted by the beauty of the field, with a unique view consisting of millions of olive trees. They enjoy experiencing both the activities and the physical context.”* (Interviewee n.3)

Furthermore, oleotourism is sustainable because the quantity of tourists is currently easy to manage. The interviewees did not perceive higher risks in terms of safeguarding the local environment. There would be problems with huge groups, but currently this is not happening. The opposite could occur in some conditions, i.e., when the manufacturing is ongoing, tourists should expect noises or to get dirty while visiting the mills. In some cases, relevant investments are needed to adapt plants for visits; this leads to economic sustainability, as the interviewees stressed, as this form of tourism is still in its infancy and earning the proper revenue is difficult.

*“What is most requested is the visit to the mill and of course there is a relationship between the quality of the olive oil and the activities of oleotourism. For example, one of the parts of the quality of the oil is that the mill is clean, if it is not clean it has no quality.”* (Interviewee n.1)

Oleotourism embeds environmental sustainability due to the safeguard of centennial trees that affect the skyline consisting of olive groves, as in the quote above.

Finally, from a practical perspective, sustainability is supported by the hiring of new and specialized workers to perform the new activities. Some interviewees stressed this choice because they had experienced the benefits derived from hiring specialized workers to perform the activities classified as oleotourism.

*“The sustainability of these oleotourism activities is also guaranteed by new hired employees, as Picualia [an olive oil mill] has done in recent months.”* (Interviewee n.5).

#### 4.3. Opportunities

Interviewees stressed that there has recently been growing interest in oleotourism, especially from Asian visitors, as they perceive relevant differences about the landscape and the culture; consequently, they are interested in experiencing something new. Continuous improvements in the product's quality also support the growing interest in oleotourism; the fact that local olive oils have won international prizes boosts the image of the area and its products, leading to more interest. The link between oleotourism and cooking can be further exploited for several reasons: (a) olive oil can be combined with any type of food; (b) olive oil is used in traditional cooking and for healthy food; (c) olive oil is a basic food that is rich in positive elements; and (d) gourmet oils can be found mostly in mills. As some interviewees stated:

*“Olive oil is a healthy product that suits all kinds of products, almost like water, with sweet and salty . . .”* (Interviewee n.2)

*“Foreign tourists are increasingly aware of the healthful properties of this product.” (Interviewee n.9)*

Parallel to this, tourists are looking for new experiences; tasting, direct involvement in farming, the customization of products, and guided tours to manufacturing plants all represent something new and, thus, attractive.

Most of the firms that manage mills are mature; this management experience should be exploited. Firms that manage mills benefit from contributions from one of the local governmental agencies (Diputación de Jaén): education programs, joint programs promoting tourism, exploratory travels, economic and financial support for investments in infrastructure, and so on. The investment in infrastructures is indicated by the interviewees who manage olive oil mills as a basic requirement for the development of oil tourism activities.

*“The facilities are new; the Diputación de Jaén financed the work. We have also adapted the area of the office with a section of exhibition and sale or for example we have enabled the upper part to make the tastings.” (Interviewee n.8)*

This institution is very involved in oleotourism activities and is gradually developing actions that allow progress in the olive oil tourism sector and grant more autonomy to local entities, as interviewee n.1 from local governmental agency stated:

*“From 2013 until today, we want to end this stage with the formalization of a product club; a product club is, in rough outlines, to leave the subject at the hands of the entrepreneurs, create a kind of partnership and that among all they commercialize. We are in this stage right now.”*

Finally, the interviewees stressed the role of Jaén as a destination. It would be easy to link the city—through the highway—to the two main routes in Andalusia: the first one centered in Seville, and the other one linking Granada and Cordoba. Moreover, the relevance of local historical monuments in Jaén—namely, the Cathedral, the Arab Baths, the nearby towns of Ubeda and Baeza (which are part of the UNESCO Heritage Program), and so on—creates the chance to combine touristic offerings. Interviewee n.3 confirmed the opportunities yet to be fully deployed in combining destinations:

*“Tourists visiting the Southern Coast—the Costa del Sol—move to Ubeda and Baeza due to their being part of the World Heritage List, while olive oil is just a possible complement; my outlook is that of an interesting market.”*

#### 4.4. Constraints

First, most of the interviewees considered oleotourism to be a small sector of the tourism industry, one not properly identified and distinguishable from other forms of tourism. Furthermore, some actors were worried about the fact that guided tours may seem repetitive among different mills. Consequently, tourists cannot be easily profiled, and the number of interested tourists is still too low. In most cases, tourists do not know what oleotourism is. Some tourists happen to be oleotourists by chance; in other cases, reaching the mills is difficult, and so the tourists give up.

In line with the previous condition, communication is a relevant issue, as actors complained about the lack of support from institutional actors. As already noticed, the only public institution making real efforts to support entities for the development of oleotourism activities is the Diputación de Jaén, but most of the interviewees highlighted the need for more support from other public institutions such as, for example, the Andalusian Government (Junta de Andalucía) or the Central Government.

*“Politics should encourage a little more; here, for example, the Diputación de Jaén is quite active, but the Junta de Andalucía and the City Council do almost nothing and Jaén does not have such an important position in the thoughts of the Junta de Andalucía. This cannot stand because the city has many attractions, the Cathedral, the Arab Baths, and then it would be quite simple to attract tourists here.” (Interviewee n.6)*

Improvements achieved in terms of product quality are not properly communicated; a similar problem applies to the main benefits of olive oil usage. Moreover, some mills are more oriented towards production volume than to product quality. A similar behavior can emerge when dealing with investments, as some mills are not interested in this form of tourism, and they are not well prepared, as interviewee n.1 stated:

*“For example, you go to an oil mill and only have accident insurance during the harvesting season, and to do oleotourism actions you need to have insurance throughout the year. Or, for example, the law of data protection, the access for the disabled, or the information about the activities related to oleotourism, besides being open both summer and weekends.”*

Others joined the program but lack resources, especially money and knowledge. Only a few invested in oleotourism. The latter are negatively affected by the image and negative perceptions of mills merely aping oleotourism, as interviewee n.7 stated:

*“There are mills making the decision to perform activities to introduce oleotourism, but they did not invest a single euro. This negatively affected the efforts performed by the other mills that opted to hire professionals and implement new services. When tourists visit mills with old machines, dirty areas, and without a guided tour in their own language, nor with the basic services needed, tourists have and spread a negative perception of oleotourism.”*

Additionally, high-skilled professionals would be needed; firms should switch towards a market-oriented approach instead of focusing only on sales. Orientation towards the product instead of the market causes a limitation to the development of activities such as oleotourism, and it is cited by all the interviewees. Another consequence of this is the lack of personnel with language skills and adequate signage in languages other than Spanish. Interviewee n.9 emphasized the importance and benefits of tourism training and language knowledge:

*“In these years, we have verified that those olive oil mills that have hired a tourism technician are the ones that are working properly. And those olive oil mills in which the staff is prepared with languages and that know how to make a visit are working better. I believe that the training of workers is fundamental. “*

## 5. Discussion and Implications

Through the insights obtained from the interviews, it is possible to complement and advance the understanding emerging from the existing literature. Our first focus is on the ties between oleotourism and the local area, to understand how to achieve a sustainable business—namely, how to make oleotourism positively affect the three spheres of sustainability and favor development.

Indeed, as observed in the literature overview [14–16,19], sustainable local development is strictly connected with the evaluation and the appropriate employment of local resources, both natural and cultural. Specifically, different resources, as well as diverse use of them, lead to different consequences.

When dealing with economic sustainability, the most relevant evidence is the need for cooperation among actors; only the proper definition and development of agreements can support an increase in potential tourists’ knowledge about oleotourism and ways to stimulate their interest. The evidence we acquired showed that the actors shaping this industry benefit from fairs and events, and even from the creation of relationships [42], but many agreements emerged due to the efforts of local actors. In any event, it is necessary to empower these efforts through a steering role performed to ensure that all local actors have the same aim. Moreover, ties among actors in oleotourism are useful for competition [58], but they have also been stressed as a way to channel common efforts towards the development of oleotourism.

Additionally, communication should be enforced to make both local inhabitants and potential tourists aware of the existence of oleotourism; consequently, local stakeholders are confirmed as

providers of key insights, as already stated by other scholars (e.g., [7]) and as evident in this paper. Local actors can even act as part-time marketers of their own territory, as the interviewees stressed. To achieve such an aim, a local brand, one strictly linked to the territory, can be proposed to strengthen the ties between oleotourism and the territory.

The further development of oleotourism would support and benefit from the positive results that the tourism industry is experiencing in the same area. Armesto López and Martín [30] highlighted the positive correlation between tourism and local production. Karray [51] did the same concerning oleotourism. However, it is important to avoid splintering tourism development into separate categories: “cultural heritage”-based tourism, natural tourism and event tourism are developing, while oleotourism is stuck, and mutual advantages can be achieved. Links between oleotourism and already-active flows of tourism should be exploited to achieve cooperation leading to mutual advantages.

Concerning the environmental sphere of tourism, the evidence does not show particularly relevant issues, and the benefits that olive groves create for both people and the local territories should be stressed. The proper use of local resources is compatible with the development of oleotourism, so the risks previously perceived by scholars (e.g., [32]) can be overcome; the implementation of local resources in a business activity can favor a better use of natural resources [15], encouraging the further care of the territory. Consequently, oleotourism can be framed as a tool to further enhance environmental sustainability instead of representing a threat to the caring of the natural resources. Another improvement to the economic conditions of mills can be achieved because oleotourism can favor activities held from March to October—the months when olives are not harvestable. In this way, a new source of profitability can be achieved, and the overall economic conditions of mills can be enhanced; therefore it would be possible to enhance the economic sustainability of agri-food firms, since tourism would provide revenue when harvesting is not possible.

In terms of social sustainability, the evidence stresses the need for common efforts, as oleotourism can benefit from the intervention of local actors, while local actors can experience improvements in their context if a new activity occurs. Tourism based on local and natural resources can benefit the local context [34], but knowledge diffusion is necessary, and all local actors should engage in efforts that spread awareness of oleotourism and the cultural and natural elements featuring it. Moreover, Senise Barrio et al. [78] proposed additional involvement as a way to improve satisfaction; similarly, involving local actors in new processes sustaining oleotourism is a chance to improve local wellbeing, and social sustainability would be achieved. The evidence is expanding this tie to all actors, not just to tourists. Firms should support this process on their own through the use of their media, both online and offline. Websites should be updated to introduce oleotourism globally and traditional shops should spread the news about this new form of tourism, as they are in touch with some of the most suitable customers.

In terms of our second focus, the need for further analysis of the reasons why oleotourism is not yet properly developed [12] and the constraints emerging from the analysis deal with some new insights we propose in the following three points. First, the inner nature of this form of tourism makes it—at least currently—niche tourism, so the range of potential tourists is not wide; this is linked to the above-mentioned issue of a lack of understanding and knowledge of what oleotourism is. Second, a ‘team effort’ is needed to improve oleotourism, as setting a new form of tourism with ties to the territory, the firms and other typologies of tourism is a complicated task, which means small firms cannot act alone; citizens, institutions and other stakeholders should support such a process. Third, the weak professionalization of some workers, the missing availability of services offered in the languages that tourists speak, and the need for investment limit the development of oleotourism; the investments that some actors have already made are threatened by the “mimicking” in which some firms have engaged.

## 6. Conclusions

Due to the prior evidence, the authors highlight the need to plan interventions supporting the development of oleotourism through the participation of local actors; the knowledge local inhabitants have, the ties they keep with the local environment, and the expected results of the integration performed by farmers, olive oil producers, and tourism industry can drive towards further deploying oleotourism. Moreover, a shared perspective and a steering entity favoring the interactions among the above-mentioned actors in proposing, launching, providing, and monitoring oleotourism are needed, since most stakeholders are facing hard times in implementing actions based on the novelty of this form of tourism and the constraints emerging from the context. Synergic efforts by all actors are needed since they are in touch with tourists and all of them can represent marketers of the oleotourism. Furthermore, tourism cannot be considered as an activity isolated from the territory, and thus it is necessary to involve local actors—as citizens, farmers, producers, local governmental agencies, and tourism-based firms—since they both impact and are impacted by tourism. Local institutions play a crucial role, since they are supporting the development of this new form of tourism, but it is evident that the economic support is not the only action needed: interventions to empower the image—even through a specific brand—as well as a steering role to convey all the efforts and monitoring of the ongoing projects are three key activities to avoid the misalignment of some actors.

Either way, the three spheres of sustainability are not affected in the same way by oleotourism; specifically, we can state that the economic sphere is the most complicated, as there are investments to be made, consumers to be conquered, infrastructure to be created, and skilled workers to be identified. The environmental sphere, in terms of the sustainability issue, faces fewer problems with the development of oleotourism, as all actors stated that they had not identified issues; tourism-oriented activities had not negatively affected farming or manufacturing. Additionally, the social sphere of a sustainable approach through oleotourism is a two-way issue, as oleotourism can benefit the local area, while the contribution of the local area is necessary to favor the development of oleotourism. Finally, the development of oleotourism as a new form of tourism should be achieved by involving more actors, creating a common sense of participation to spread knowledge about oleotourism, and making local actors aware of the relevance this business has with respect to the local context.

## 7. Limitation and Further Research

This investigation focuses on a topic and an industry still in its infancy, and so the literature to be recalled and the evidence to be observed are quite limited. Some studies have been published recently, and we referenced some of them as a means of adding new insights and complementing the existing insights with suggestions emerging from the context to further develop oleotourism. Local actors provided relevant insights as well; in further research, it would be possible to add insights and to compare the available contributions and ongoing changes. The variety of actors affecting this industry creates the need to continuously monitor the advances depending on their actions, both as single entities and as it relates to one another.

Finally, some data will be available in the following months to check on the expected increase in the number of oleotourists; thus, it would be possible to plan a further analysis and to understand the effect of the interventions currently taking place. Consequently, the chance to observe oleotourists and the gap emerging in the literature when dealing with the main features of such a typology of tourist can lead to new elements complementing this research and open new research avenues in tourism studies.

From a long-term perspective, it would be interesting to determine whether a huge increase in tourists would harm the agricultural context or whether new solutions would indicate a compatibility between oleotourism and olive tree farming.

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