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**Perceived Territorial Sustainability
and Willingness to Pay: A Dual-Path
Model in the Conegliano
Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore
DOCG**

An Empirical Study on Italian Wine Consumers

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ABSTRACT

Marketing literature has extensively addressed the relationship between sustainability and consumers' willingness to pay a premium. However, this relationship has been approached by considering a single mechanism, failing to adequately distinguish the cognitive and territorial-emotional pathways through which the perception of sustainability generates economic value. This study aims to fill this gap by introducing an original theoretical construct, perceived territorial sustainability (PTS). This new construct measures the degree to which consumers perceive the sustainability of a wine region as authentic, rooted in its identity, and capable of generating value. The distinctive feature of PTS is that it integrates environmental, territorial, identity, and emotional-symbolic dimensions.

The study proposes and empirically tests a dual-path model: on the one hand, a cognitive path (Awareness $\rightarrow$ Trust $\rightarrow$ Willingness to Pay), and on the other, a territorial-emotional path (Awareness $\rightarrow$ PTS $\rightarrow$ Willingness to Pay). Five hypotheses are tested using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), and the sample consists of 139 Italian wine consumers. The empirical context on which this study is based is Prosecco Superiore D.O.C.G. Conegliano Valdobbiadene, a region particularly suited to this analysis, combining a consolidated sustainability governance trajectory with its UNESCO World Heritage status.

"Consumer awareness yields statistically significant path coefficients toward both Trust and PTS (H1: $\beta = 0.468$, $p < 0.001$; H2: $\beta = 0.339$, $p = 0.014$), though these results are provisional given the insufficient psychometric properties of the Awareness construct (CR = 0.594, AVE = 0.424). The two pathways diverge in their downstream effects: trust does not significantly influence willingness to pay (H3: $\beta = 0.221$, $p = 0.313$), while PTS shows a positive but non-significant directional effect (H4: $\beta = 0.431$, $p = 0.070$). The central hypothesis comparing the two pathways (H5) is not formally supported, as the bootstrapped difference test does not reach conventional significance levels. Despite the mixed hypothesis support, the model explains 40.0% of the variance in willingness to pay ($R^2 = 0.400$).

These findings contribute to the theoretical understanding of how sustainability generates value in terroir-related product categories and offer preliminary guidance for wine regions seeking to translate sustainability investments into premium price acceptance, with particular attention to the role of identity-based and emotionally resonant communication strategies.

I INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Context

Today, sustainability represents a significant opportunity but also a major challenge. Issues such as environmental responsibility and social impact have become increasingly central to the way consumers evaluate and choose products, across all sectors and markets. Companies must adapt to this shift and demonstrate a genuine and credible commitment to sustainable practices, especially in the agri-food sector, where this transformation has been particularly marked. Sustainability has become a central priority in corporate strategy, radically transforming production practices, communication strategies, certification systems, and consumer expectations.

The wine sector in particular must pay close attention to this issue. Wine is not simply a product, but a cultural artifact, an essential part of a specific heritage and the identity of a specific territory, since it is the soil, climate, human traditions, and collective memory that give it a unique and distinctive character and meaning. This territorial dimension of wine's value, represented by the concept of *terroir*, indicates that sustainability in this sector is not simply about reducing environmental impact, but is a matter of preserving and enhancing the cultural, landscape, and identity heritage of a specific place.

This study seeks to address precisely this point: at the intersection of sustainability and territorial identity. The central premise of this thesis is that sustainability, when perceived by consumers as an authentic expression rooted in the identity of a winemaking region, may generate a qualitatively different form of value for consumers than the value generated solely by cognitive trust in sustainability communications, a premise that this study investigates empirically, with exploratory and directionally consistent results. The primary objective of this research is to understand this form of value and the mechanisms through which it translates into a willingness to pay a premium.

The Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore D.O.C.G., one of the most historically important Italian wine appellations, represents the empirical context

for this study. In the region, which spans 15 municipalities in the province of Treviso, the sustainability process is consolidated and institutionally regulated, including the Viticultural Protocol, the SQNPI certification system, and the ban on glyphosate. In 2019, the area was recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, elevating the region to World Heritage Site status. The combination of institutional sustainability governance and UNESCO-recognized cultural identity makes this territory a particularly rich and meaningful context for studying the relationship between sustainability perception and consumer value.

1.2 Research Problem and Gap

Numerous studies have been conducted on sustainability and consumer behavior in this sector, yet a significant theoretical gap appears to persist. Studies identify two mediating mechanisms in the process of understanding how sustainability influences mediating behavior: cognitive mechanisms and affective mechanisms. The former operate through awareness and trust in sustainability communications, while the latter operate through emotions and place attachment. However, these two lines of research have primarily developed in parallel, without systematically integrating the two mechanisms and without a theoretical construct capable of capturing all dimensions of sustainability perception.

Specifically, the existing literature has not addressed how consumers evaluate sustainability in a wine region, whether their assessments are based on cognitive thinking, thus evaluating the credibility and reliability of institutional statements on the subject, or whether they perceive sustainability as an authentic and emotionally significant expression of the region's heritage and collective identity. And which of these two forms of perception is more effective in generating a willingness to pay a premium?

This gap has direct implications for how wine regions communicate their sustainability. If the cognitive approach prevails, communication should focus on aspects such as certifications, protocols, and institutional credibility. Conversely, if the emotional approach prevails, communication should focus on narrative and the emotional resonance of this topic as a form of cultural preservation. For producers

and territorial management bodies to adapt their strategies, it is essential to understand which of the two approaches is more effective.

This study introduces an original theoretical construct to fill this gap. The construct is Perceived Territorial Sustainability (PTS), which is defined as the degree to which consumers perceive a wine region's sustainability as authentic, rooted in its identity, and capable of generating value. It is an expression of the region's cultural heritage and collective identity, rather than a simple set of technical practices or institutional certifications. The PTS integrates four interrelated dimensions (environmental, territorial, identity and emotional-symbolic) into a unified reflective construct that captures the perception of sustainability in its most comprehensive and economically relevant sense. The empirical results provide preliminary support for the construct's validity and offer directional evidence for its role in the sustainability-WTP relationship, while also identifying important boundary conditions and directions for future research.

1.3 Research Objectives

This study pursues three main research objectives.

The first objective is theoretical: to define and operationalize the construct of Perceived Territorial Sustainability, placing it within the existing literature on sustainability perception. This way, it is possible to fill the conceptual gap discussed in the previous section by providing a theoretically grounded and empirically verifiable definition of what it means for a consumer to perceive a territory's sustainability as authentic, meaningful, and value-generating.

The second objective is empirical: it is necessary to test a dual-pathway model in which awareness of sustainability activates two parallel mechanisms, both leading to a willingness to pay a premium. The first, cognitive, through Trust, and the second, territorial and emotional, through Perceived Territorial Sustainability. This objective addresses the methodological gap in the existing literature by providing a research design that allows the two mechanisms to be tested simultaneously, rather than studied in isolation, even if the present sample does not provide sufficient statistical power to detect significant differences between them.

The third objective is to generate preliminary insights into the relative effectiveness of cognitive versus territorial-emotional communication regarding sustainability, in order to create value for consumers and to derive management implications for wine regions, particularly the DOCG Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore, which aim to translate their sustainable investments into measurable economic value.

1.4 Research Question and Hypotheses

The central research question of this study is: To what extent do emotional and territorial perceptions of sustainability influence consumers' willingness to pay for wine, compared to traditional cognitive drivers such as trust?

To address this question, the study proposes and tests five hypotheses within the dual-path structural model:

- H1: Consumer awareness of territorial sustainability initiatives positively influences trust in the credibility of those initiatives.
- H2: Consumer awareness of territorial sustainability initiatives positively influences Perceived Territorial Sustainability.
- H3: Trust in territorial sustainability communication positively influences willingness to pay a price premium.
- H4: Perceived Territorial Sustainability positively influences willingness to pay a price premium.
- H5: The positive effect of Perceived Territorial Sustainability on willingness to pay is significantly stronger than the positive effect of Trust on willingness to pay.

H5 represents the central and most original hypothesis of the study: it does not merely test whether sustainability generates value, but interrogates the hierarchy of the mechanisms through which it does so, directly addressing the core research question. While the empirical results do not formally support H5, the hypothesis retains its theoretical relevance and motivates future research with larger samples.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is organized into eight chapters.

Chapter 2 presents a thematic review of the literature on sustainability in the wine sector, consumer awareness and trust, territorial identity and terroir, emotions and sustainable consumption, and the sustainability-WTP relationship, identifying the theoretical gap that motivates the introduction of the PTS construct.

Chapter 3 provides a contextual analysis of the Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore DOCG territory, examining its sustainability governance trajectory, UNESCO recognition, and communication infrastructure.

Chapter 4 develops the theoretical framework and five research hypotheses, presenting the dual-path model introduced by this study and the four constructs considered.

Chapter 5 describes the research methodology, including the questionnaire design, the sampling strategy, the measurement scales and their adaptation to the specific case of this thesis, and the data analysis approach.

Chapter 6 presents the empirical results, including the evaluation of the measurement model and the verification of the structural model.

Chapter 7 discusses the findings in relation to the theoretical framework and derives theoretical and managerial implications.

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis with a summary of findings, an acknowledgment of limitations, and directions for future research.

II LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review draws on a systematic selection of 33 peer-reviewed papers, all published in journals indexed in the ABS Academic Journal Guide 2024. The complete literature review tables can be found in Appendix A, which lists the authors, journals, focus of the studies, key variables, mechanism and main results.

2.1 Sustainability in the wine sector

Over the past two decades, the controversial concept of sustainability has been the subject of considerable debate in the wine industry. Despite the topic's growing relevance, both academically and in industry practice, its definition remains ambiguous. A study by Flores (2018), comparing several sustainability models in the wine industry, demonstrates that there is no single, universally shared concept of sustainability in the wine world. The definition is multifaceted and highly context-dependent, so it can vary based on the region's terroir, regulatory systems, and cultural traditions. Furthermore, sustainability is comprised of multiple dimensions simultaneously, as it simultaneously represents a production philosophy, a communication strategy, a regulatory framework, and consumer expectations, and these dimensions do not always coincide.

Initially, the literature focused primarily on the environmental dimension, which includes all practices aimed at reducing the ecological footprint of wine production, such as reducing pesticide use, organic and biodynamic transitions, conserving soil biodiversity, managing water resources, and mitigating the impacts of climate change. Galbreath (2011) addresses this dimension in his study, demonstrating that sustainability in the wine sector goes far beyond simply reducing greenhouse gas emissions. His analysis establishes that sustainability, when truly integrated into corporate strategy, represents a response to systemic environmental pressures rather than a form of regulatory compliance, and this distinction has significant implications for how sustainability is perceived and communicated to consumers.

The adoption of sustainable practices in the wine sector, however, is far from uniform. De Steur et al. (2020), in a study based on a survey of 64 Italian wine SMEs, identified significant heterogeneity in the adoption of sustainable practices among producers and demonstrated that this differentiation is due to the interaction of internal and external factors. The study shows that internal factors (such as managerial values or long-term strategic orientation) consistently prevail over external factors (such as regulatory pressure or market demand). In particular, cultural heritage can be both a driver and an obstacle to the adoption of sustainability. On the one hand, it provides a cultural foundation for sustainable practices tied to the territory, but on the other, it can be a source of resistance to change among producers who feel threatened by their traditional production methods. This aspect is even more pronounced in the context of appellations, as they possess a strong territorial identity that can lead to tensions between tradition and innovation.

Another complexity lies in the fact that sustainability must be considered throughout the entire value chain, and not just at the company level. The wine production process is composed of various phases, each with its own environmental, social, and economic implications. Flores (2018) argues that a truly sustainable approach to wine must be a priority for the entire production and value chain, and not limited to individual corporate practices. This systemic perspective aligns perfectly with the triple bottom line model, which encompasses environmental, social, and economic sustainability, which has become the primary conceptual framework in the academic literature on corporate sustainability (Galbreath, 2011; De Steur et al., 2020).

More recently, a fourth dimension has begun to emerge in the literature: the cultural and territorial dimension of sustainability. Flores (2018) explicitly recognizes that sustainability in the wine sector includes cultural and territorial dimensions that go beyond environmental practices, dimensions rooted in the history, identity, and collective heritage of a specific place. This territorial dimension is particularly relevant in wine regions with strong geographical indications and UNESCO-recognized landscapes, where the sustainability of

production practices is inseparable from the preservation of the territory's cultural identity.

Overall, three important conclusions can be drawn from this literature. First, the multidimensionality of the concept of sustainability in the wine sector emerges, which prevents it from being reduced to environmental practices alone. Second, producers adopt sustainability practices differently, and these practices are influenced by both strategic factors and corporate identity factors. Finally, the focus of the existing literature has been the supply side of sustainability, i.e., producers' actions and their motivations. Consumer perception and evaluation of these practices, and especially the mechanisms through which these perceptions can translate into economic value, have not been adequately addressed. It is precisely this gap that motivates the consumer-side perspective adopted in this study, and which the Perceived Territorial Sustainability construct aims to fill.

2.2 Consumer Awareness and Trust in Sustainability

As previously noted, the supply-side literature has focused on wine producers' sustainability efforts. On the consumer side, the literature has documented a different but equally important question: how does sustainability information reach consumers, and under what conditions does it generate behavioral responses? Studies have identified two central constructs to answering this question: awareness and trust. Together, they constitute the cognitive pathway through which sustainability translates from producer practice to consumer perception.

2.2.1 Awareness as a Precondition

Consumer awareness of sustainability initiatives is recognized in the literature as a necessary condition for any consumer response to sustainability, whether cognitive, attitudinal, or behavioral. The basic concept of this logic is that if a consumer is not aware of the commitments of a company or a territory regarding sustainability, he cannot evaluate or trust these commitments. Awareness therefore does not in itself represent a determining factor in consumer behavior, but is a necessary condition for all subsequent evaluation processes to begin.

The most influential demonstration of this principle comes from the study by Pomeroy and Dolnicar (2009). Their study shows that consumer knowledge about CSR initiatives is significantly lower than managers believe, and that this gap may threaten the effectiveness of sustainability communications. Specifically, the study demonstrates that without the right consumer knowledge, even the best-designed and truly effective sustainability programs are unable to address consumer attitudes and behaviors. Applied to the wine sector, this concept implies that if sustainable practices remain unknown to consumers, the simple adoption of such practices by territories is not sufficient to generate value.

The study by Mastroberardino et al. (2020) refers specifically to the Italian wine context. This study shows that consumer awareness of sustainability initiatives adopted in this sector remains limited. Despite this, their study demonstrates that even partial knowledge of these practices can positively influence the perception of sustainability and propensity to purchase. It therefore emerges that awareness operates in a non-linear way, since small increments can produce significant changes in consumer perception, even if full knowledge of all practices is not achieved. It turns out that it is necessary to reach at least a basic level of awareness to have a significant impact on wine-growing territories, if the latter want to generate value for consumers through investments in sustainability.

Gorton et al. (2021) extend this concept by stating how consumer knowledge can have an important impact not only on evaluation processes but also on their effects, demonstrating that consumers' knowledge of eco-labels reduces their uncertainty and increases their ability to evaluate the credibility of sustainability declarations, thus strengthening the effect of trust regarding the adoption of eco-labels. This interaction between awareness and trust is theoretically important: it suggests that the two constructs do not operate independently, but in a sequential and mutually reinforcing relationship, a relationship that is explicitly modeled in the dual-path framework proposed in this thesis.

2.2.2 Trust as a Cognitive Mediator

Trust mediates the cognitive pathway from sustainability awareness to consumer behavior. In the green marketing literature, trust is conceptualized as a consumer's

confidence in the credibility and reliability of a brand or entity's sustainability claims, which Chen (2010) formally defines as green trust. Chen's study demonstrates that green trust is shaped by green brand image and green satisfaction, and that it in turn influences green loyalty and purchase intention. The causal chain established by Chen (2010), from sustainability perception to trust to behavioral outcomes, provides the theoretical foundation for the cognitive pathway in the dual-path model of this study.

The role of trust is particularly critical in the context of sustainability communications, where the risk of greenwashing, the strategic exaggeration or misrepresentation of environmental commitments, is well documented and widely recognized by consumers (Gorton et al., 2021). In a communication context where sustainability claims are numerous but difficult to verify, trust serves as a cognitive shortcut that allows consumers to assess the credibility of sustainability information without requiring in-depth technical knowledge. In practice, trusting sustainability communications means delegating the assessment to a deemed credible institution, such as a Consortium or a certification body.

The study by Bonn et al. (2015), specifically focused on the wine sector, demonstrates that consumer trust in the sustainability practices of organic wine suppliers significantly moderates the relationship between perceived sustainability and behavioral intentions. It emerges that, when trust is high, behavioral outcomes, such as repurchase intentions and the propensity to recommend the product, are strong and consistent.

When trust is absent or weak, even sustainability efforts, however extensive and sincere, fail to generate a response from consumers. This result allows us to understand that trust is not only a mediating role, but a necessary condition for sustainability to produce behavioral effects in the wine market.

Regarding the certification literature, Gorton et al. (2021) identify institutional trust, i.e., trust in the organization issuing the certification mark, as the strongest predictor of eco-label adoption, surpassing both personal values and environmental attitudes. From this result, it can be deduced that the credibility of the certifying body is particularly important, as much as, if not more than, the content of the sustainability claim itself. Applying this concept to the specific

context of the Conegliano Valdobbiadene DOCG, this means that the role of the Consortium is crucial for consumer trust, and as a governance body, it must build and maintain its credibility.

Sreen and Bandyopadhyay (2025) introduce an important element into this reasoning. They use an experimental design to manipulate the certification source, demonstrating that trust in sustainability communications certainly influences consumer perceptions, but that another element is the most direct determinant of willingness to pay: the perceived quality of the product. This finding suggests that trust is a necessary but not sufficient condition for generating a premium price. Trust therefore triggers consumer attention and a positive evaluation, but translating trust into economic value requires a further perceptual step.

2.2.3 The Limits of the Cognitive Pathway

Overall, studies on awareness and trust are crucial for delineating the cognitive pathway through which sustainability information is processed and evaluated by consumers. However, the existing literature presents two major limitations that this study aims to overcome.

The first limitation is empirical. Awareness and trust have been widely demonstrated to positively influence sustainability attitudes, yet their effect on consumers' actual willingness to pay remains modest. As Schäufele and Hamm (2017) demonstrate, there continues to be a large gap between positive attitudes toward sustainable wine and actual consumer behavior. This suggests that cognitive mechanisms alone are not sufficient to bridge the gap between intention and behavior.

The second limitation is theoretical. In the existing literature, sustainability perception is predominantly considered a rational process based on the information consumers receive. They evaluate the information, judge its credibility, and adjust their behavior accordingly. This cognitive approach, however, ignores an important aspect: emotional and identity dimensions, especially in the context of a product strongly tied to the territory like wine, also generate value. It is precisely these dimensions that the most recent literature on territorial and emotional

aspects has begun to explore, and which the PTS construct aims to integrate into a unified theoretical framework.

2.3 Territorial Identity, Terroir and Place-Based Value

A body of literature explores a process of value creation in wine that is profoundly different from the cognitive process examined in the previous section. This stream of research examines the emotional and symbolic value generated by consumers' perceptions of a product's territorial origin. The topics analyzed in this literature include terroir, territorial branding, and research on geographical indications. These studies demonstrate that wine is not simply a product, but it is rooted in the culture of its place of origin, and its value cannot be separated from this. To fully grasp the objective of this thesis, it is essential to understand this territorial dimension of wine value, as it represents the theoretical framework underlying the construct of Perceived Territorial Sustainability.

2.3.1 Terroir as a Multidimensional Value Proposition

The concept of terroir originated as a purely theoretical notion, but it has rapidly evolved in marketing literature, becoming a concept encompassing physical, cultural, and symbolic dimensions. Thanks to Charters et al. (2017), who conducted one of the most comprehensive theoretical treatments of terroir in marketing literature, we can define terroir as a place-based value proposition that is environmentally irreproducible, culturally rooted, and commercially distinctive. According to their analysis, terroir can generate a significant competitive advantage because it offers consumers identity, authenticity, and cultural rootedness.

In particular, Charters et al. (2017) are keen to emphasize the multidimensionality of the concept of terroir, distinguishing it from simple statements such as "produced in" labels or regional identifiers. Indeed, terroir is not merely a marker of geographical origin, but much more. Terroir connects the product to the land, community, history, and values of a specific place. It is precisely this multidimensionality of the concept that enables terroir to generate strong emotional and identity-based connections between consumers and the place.

This concept is theoretically central to this thesis, as the connections terroir creates cannot be replicated by a purely informational or cognitive signal. This study aims to highlight that the territorial and emotional pathways in the dual-path model operate through a qualitatively different mechanism than the cognitive pathway, and that this distinction can have significant implications for willingness to pay.

Spielmann and Charters (2013) research is directly related to this study, as it addresses the concept of terroir. Their analysis demonstrates that the latter is a construct composed of three components: product authenticity, institutional authenticity, and internalized authenticity. The first refers to the intrinsic quality of the product, deriving from its physical origin; the second indicates the legitimacy provided by regulatory frameworks or collective recognition, such as geographical indications; the third refers to the personal meaning that consumers attribute to their relationship with the territory. These dimensions independently and positively predict perceived quality, satisfaction, and purchase intention. According to their study, of the three dimensions, internalized authenticity is the strongest predictor. This suggests that the most economically relevant form of terroir perception is subjective and identity-based, rather than objective or institutional.

2.3.2 Territorial Brand Management and Collective Identity

The literature on territorial branding has also developed its own perspective on how territorial origins can generate value. This literature, unlike terroir-based studies, does not focus on the emotional and cultural properties of place, but rather on the strategic management of territorial identity as a collective marketing resource.

Spielmann and Williams (2016) introduce a new concept: community leverage. According to their thinking, territorial identity represents a shared marketing resource that producers from the same territory can leverage together to generate a higher perceived value for consumers than any single producer could achieve alone. Their study seeks to demonstrate precisely this concept: producers who are able to more effectively exploit shared territorial resources are able to generate significantly greater value. This collective dimension takes on even greater importance in contexts involving geographical indications, as in the case of this

study, since the designation itself acts as a primary channel of territorial identity, enabling the generation of greater collective value than any individual producer could generate alone.

Charters and Spielmann (2014), with their study on Champagne, extend this perspective, identifying the structural characteristics that make a strong territorial brand. According to their analysis, strong brands combine internal company resources with external collective resources tied to the place, creating value that would not be generated individually. The geographical designation of origin acts as an external resource, therefore as a collective brand capable of generating value thanks to its uniqueness and territorial identity, while at the same time, each producer has its own value strategy within the same appellation. This conclusion is also directly applicable to the context of Conegliano Valdobbiadene, where the appellation functions as a collective territorial brand.

Further empirical support is provided by Melewar and Skinner (2020), who study the relationship between territorial brand management and consumers' willingness to pay. Their study demonstrates that place brands that convey authenticity linked to a specific place can increase consumers' willingness to pay a premium price, because they perceive the products as connected to a specific region. This study also considers how place narratives can generate different perceptions based on consumers' varying levels of familiarity with the place, thus highlighting the importance of managing place-related elements based on consumer segmentation.

Spielmann, Williams, and Kohli (2024) extend the perspective of place branding to a global level, examining how place brands manage the tensions between local identity and global market expansion. They demonstrate that place brands generate value through their collective place-related identity, but that global expansion risks undermining this value. Geographical indications act as very strong collective barriers to market entry, but at the same time, active territorial governance is necessary to ensure their meaning remains unchanged for consumers. In the case of the Conegliano Valdobbiadene denomination, this governance is identified with the Protection Consortium.

2.3.3 Terroir Perception, Authenticity, and Economic Value

A particularly relevant line of research for this study focuses on the psychological mechanisms through which consumers experience terroir and translate it into economic value.

Reitsamer and Becker's (2024) study makes a direct contribution, demonstrating that the perception of terroir improves the quality of the relationship with the brand through two distinct mechanisms: perceived authenticity and psychological distance from the place. According to their analysis, when consumers perceive a product as authentically linked to a specific territory, much stronger emotional bonds develop within them, and these bonds consequently translate into relational and economic value. The study also shows that psychological distance (the sense of connection with a culturally and emotionally significant place, regardless of geographical distance) is also a significant factor, as it influences the perception of terroir. In the specific case of Conegliano Valdobbiadene, this shows that the territorial and emotional value of the denomination is not limited to local consumers but can also be perceived by any other consumer who has developed a significant sense of belonging to this territorial meaning.

The notion of "wine/place experience" was first introduced by Warman and Lewis (2019) to understand how place-related value is generated in the wine industry, particularly at the high end. This notion is linked to the concept of terroir and requires four conditions for value to be generated: physical terroir, human expertise, narrative coherence, and consumer engagement. Value is generated through the interaction of these four factors, and not by any single factor in isolation. Specifically, the value creation process begins with the material basis provided by the physical terroir; human expertise transforms it into a distinctive product; narrative coherence serves to connect the product to its territorial significance; and finally, consumer engagement activates the emotional and symbolic dimensions of this significance.

Capitello et al. (2021) also explore this topic in the specific context of wine tourism and territorial engagement, introducing a new construct: introducing a new construct: Wine Terroir Commitment (WTC). This construct measures the multidimensionality of the depth of consumers' attachment to a territorial region.

This construct identifies five determining factors: local identification, loyalty, experience, prestige, and resident commitment. The former are those that emerge as the strongest factors in generating value. This reflects the fact that the most powerful form of local value is based on identity. This result provides a strong basis for the PTS construct and offers an empirical basis for one of this study's hypotheses, namely that identity-based local perception generates stronger economic effects than cognitive trust alone.

2.3.4 The Missing Link: Sustainability as Territorial Value

The literature on territorial identity and terroir shows that, in the case of wine, the value generated is strongly tied to place. However, a significantly important gap can be identified. In most cases, sustainability is simply considered a peripheral dimension or implicitly included in territorial value. Its role in making a region's identity meaningful and authentic for consumers is almost never recognized. The issue of sustainability as a factor impacting the perception of a region has not been systematically addressed in the existing literature. Consequently, the mechanism that leads to the creation of emotional and identity-building value from consumer perception is still unclear.

This study aims to fill precisely this gap, positioning sustainability not as a simple addition to territorial value, but as a key pillar of it, with a power as significant as, if not more so than, the cognitive trust mechanisms documented in the green marketing literature. The next section examines the emotional and symbolic literature that provides the theoretical foundation for this argument.

2.4 Emotions, Meaning and Sustainable Consumption

The literature reviewed in the previous two sections has focused on analyzing two distinct mechanisms through which sustainability generates value for consumers. The first mechanism is cognitive: value is generated through awareness and trust. The second mechanism is territorial, operating through place-based identity and authenticity. It is now necessary to analyze a further line of research to understand exactly how sustainability translates into economic value. This line focuses on emotions, moral satisfaction, and symbolic meaning in sustainable consumption,

demonstrating that emotions drive the relationship between sustainability and consumer behavior. Emotions play a central and independent role, mediating the effect of perceived sustainability on consumers' willingness to pay.

2.4.1 The Role of Discrete Emotions in Sustainable Consumption

This line of research has been explored from various theoretical perspectives, but a consistent finding is that sustainability-induced emotions have behavioral consequences. These emotions influence consumers' purchase intentions and willingness to pay, independent of cognitive evaluations of sustainability attributes.

The most comprehensive analysis of the influence of emotions on sustainable consumption behavior comes from Wang and Wu (2016). Their study shows that pride is the factor that most strongly influences sustainable consumption, both in terms of purchasing sustainable products and resistance to unsustainable alternatives, surpassing guilt, respect, and anger. According to their study, emotions influence sustainable consumption by producing two parallel effects: a direct effect on purchase intention and an indirect effect on resistance to unsustainable products. This study provides important results on how emotions influence the perception of sustainability by operating simultaneously through multiple mechanisms, and how their effect can be significantly greater than any other single-path model.

Martini (2023) integrates discrete emotions within the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), further expanding the theoretical framework provided by Wang and Wu. His study demonstrates that moral emotions such as guilt and pride significantly improve the predictive power of the TPB model for sustainable purchase intentions, and that these emotions operate independently and parallel to attitudes and subjective norms. Another important aspect emerges from his research: moral emotions are able to strengthen behavioral intentions even when cognitive judgments about sustainability are neutral, suggesting that these emotions can compensate for or even prevail over rational evaluations. Martini's finding is particularly relevant for this study, as it provides insight into how the emotional-symbolic component of PTS may generate willingness to pay, even in those whose cognitive trust in sustainability communications is limited.

The Stimulus-Organism-Response model by Fernández-Ferrín et al. (2024) provides an evolution of the emotional pathway, examining the role that positive and negative emotions have in determining willingness to pay, in their case for fair trade food products. Their study shows that attitudes towards sustainable products activate both positive emotions and product evaluation, both of which mediate willingness to pay. In terms of emotion typology, the study shows that pride exerts a much stronger mediating effect than guilt. From this, it is possible to deduce that positive moral emotions are more impactful than negative ones in transforming attitudes into concrete economic behaviors. Furthermore, it emerges that product evaluation and positive moral emotions act as mediators sequentially, meaning that the consumer first evaluates the value of the product and then activates emotional responses that in turn determine willingness to pay.

2.4.2 Green Brand Authenticity and Warm Glow

There is a particularly important concept within the literature on emotional sustainability: the so-called "warm glow." Warm glow is a moral emotion and arises from the idea of doing good through consumption. This concept is addressed in the study by Moon et al. (2023), specifically in the case of the authenticity of eco-friendly brands and the willingness to pay a premium. According to their study, those who perceive a brand as authentically eco-friendly, and therefore that the brand's commitments are consistent and rooted in its identity, develop a sense of well-being, which consequently increases environmental satisfaction and ultimately the willingness to pay a premium. This pathway operates independently of cognitive trust.

This finding is of fundamental importance to this study for two main reasons. First, it shows that authenticity, which represents one of the core dimensions of the PTS construct introduced in this study, generates economic value through an emotional rather than cognitive mechanism. Second, it is demonstrated that this emotional mechanism, which starts from a feeling of well-being, leads to satisfaction, and ultimately to willingness to pay, is distinct from and potentially even stronger than the cognitive mechanism. These two observations provide important theoretical motivation for hypothesis H5, according to which the territorial and emotional

pathway is expected to be stronger than the cognitive one in generating willingness to pay, a hypothesis that the present study tests empirically, with mixed results.

2.4.3 Place Attachment and Territorial Emotional Bonding

Place attachment, or the emotional bonds consumers develop with specific places and regions, represents another area of emotional literature. This line of research demonstrates that emotional attachment to a place can generate strong and lasting behaviors, including brand loyalty, the intention to return to that location, and willingness to pay.

Some empirical evidence of this mechanism comes from a study by Cardinale et al. (2016) in the context of wine tourism. Their research demonstrates that place attachment stems from direct sensorial and relational experiences with a wine region, experiences that mediate the relationship between brand experience and consumer loyalty. It is therefore the emotion derived from the place-related experience that creates attachment, not its rational evaluation.

An extension of this framework is provided by Santos et al. (2017), who focus specifically on the Porto wine cellars tourism context. They demonstrate that place-related emotions play a central role in consumer engagement and attachment to a given region, and in the resulting behavioral intentions. According to their study, these emotions determine the behavioral involvement-intention pathway, as they find that affective engagement with the place predicts consumer behavior much better than cognitive involvement alone.

The study by Dominici et al. (2025) further enhances our understanding of the intersection between place branding and sustainability, demonstrating that the value of a place brand positively influences consumer perceived value and their subsequent purchase intention. Furthermore, they show that when place cues and sustainability signals are perceived together, consumers perceive greater authenticity, and consequently, their perceived value is amplified, much more than either cue could produce alone. This result offers an important insight for this study: the PTS construct captures precisely this integration between territorial identity and the perception of sustainability, and can therefore generate a

qualitatively different form of value that is potentially greater than the sum of its individual components.

2.4.4 Towards an Integrated Emotional-Territorial Framework

This aspect justifies the inclusion of the emotional-symbolic component in the PTS construct, and the extensive literature provides important theoretical motivation for the hypothesis that the territorial and emotional pathway may be more powerful than the cognitive pathway, a hypothesis that the present study tests empirically.

The first aspect refers to the fact that emotions are active factors capable of influencing willingness to pay, and not simply "side effects" of the perception of sustainability, and operate independently of cognitive trust and rational evaluation. This aspect justifies the inclusion of the emotional-symbolic component in the PTS construct, and the extensive literature provides important theoretical support for the hypothesis that the territorial and emotional pathways are more powerful than the cognitive pathways.

Second, it is shown that the emotions with the greatest impact are those of an identity-related and moral nature, such as pride and personal satisfaction. This aspect is consistent with the conceptualization of the PTS construct, as it considers the perception of territorial sustainability as a source of personal and moral meaning, rather than a simple indicator of quality.

Finally, the literature highlights the existence of an important gap. Emotions and place attachment have been widely studied and considered determinants of consumer behavior in the wine sector, but they have not yet been integrated with sustainability perception into a single theoretical construct. Existing literature considers emotional connection to place a phenomenon separate from sustainability-induced emotions, and does not examine the interaction between them when sustainability itself is perceived as a constitutive element of territorial identity. The PTS construct aims to bridge this gap by integrating the dimensions of sustainability perception into a single measure. PTS is thus able to capture not only consumers' awareness of sustainability, but also its emotional and identity-related significance.

2.5 Sustainability and Willingness to Pay

The relationship between sustainability and consumers' willingness to pay a premium has been extensively studied in the green marketing literature. Studies have analyzed different types of products and markets, but a consistent pattern seems to emerge across all studies: consumers display a positive attitude toward sustainable products and, under certain conditions, are willing to pay a premium. It should be emphasized, however, that this relationship is mediated by a complex set of factors (perceptual, emotional, and contextual) that determine how sustainability translates into economic value. This section will subsequently examine the evidence on the relationship between sustainability and willingness to pay, particularly in the wine sector, identifying the main mediating mechanisms and the theoretical gap this thesis aims to fill.

2.5.1 The Sustainability-WTP Relationship in Wine: Empirical Evidence

The study of the relationship between sustainability and willingness to pay (WTP) is particularly fertile ground in the wine sector, for at least two reasons. First, wine is a product in which quality differences are strongly linked to place of origin, production method, and the producer's reputation, all of which are factors that significantly intersect with sustainability. Second, geographical indications and certifications present in the wine market are important signals of sustainability, and it is possible to isolate certain sustainability indicators from consumer evaluations.

The most comprehensive synthesis of this evidence comes from Schäufele and Hamm (2017), who conducted a systematic review of 34 empirical studies on consumer perceptions, preferences, and willingness to pay in the context of sustainable wine. First, they found that consumers consistently express positive attitudes toward sustainable wine, regardless of their market. Specifically, the factors most valued are environmental protection, reduced use of chemicals, and responsible production practices. Despite positive attitudes, however, these opinions do not always appear to translate into actual purchasing behavior. Indeed, their study shows that consumers express strong values in support of sustainability, but these values do not always translate into concrete purchasing

decisions, especially when sustainable wines are significantly more expensive than alternatives. Finally, it is important to note that the study shows that the effect of sustainability on willingness to pay is always mediated by perceptual and cognitive factors: consumer knowledge of sustainability attributes, trust in the credibility of sustainability claims, and the perceived authenticity of communications. These mediators are the true factors that determine actual consumer behavior, rather than sustainability itself.

An exploratory study by Pomarici and Vecchio (2014) extends this framework to the specific context of Italian millennial consumers. According to their study, millennials display a very positive attitude toward sustainable wine, but their knowledge of eco-labels and certification systems appears limited. Their propensity to purchase is generally high, but actual purchases inevitably depend on familiarity with the label and the information consumers have. Therefore, awareness and clarity are crucial elements in determining whether a positive attitude toward sustainability translates into actual economic behavior.

Delmas and Gergaud (2021) examine whether label certifications generate a measurable premium. Their study shows that, when wines obtain third-party certification, they command higher prices than non-certified wines. For those who have self-declared a sustainability certification, however, the effects are weaker. It is therefore clear that certification is a form of institutionalized trust in sustainability claims and is capable of generating real and measurable economic value. Nevertheless, the study demonstrates that a premium does exist, but this varies depending on the credibility and recognition of the certifying body. This concept further reinforces the central role of trust in mediating sustainability and willingness to pay (WTP).

Trust also represents a key factor in the study by Sogari et al. (2016), which offers a consumer segmentation perspective on the relationship between sustainability and WTP in Italy. Three consumer segments are distinguished based on their environmental beliefs, their attitudes toward sustainability certifications, and their willingness to pay. Consumers are then divided into those who are committed to sustainability and have a high willingness to pay, those who are sustainability-conscious but price-sensitive, and finally those who are indifferent to

the issue. Trust clearly distinguishes the first segment from the second: consumers who trust certifications are highly likely to translate their environmental beliefs into an actual willingness to pay.

2.5.2 The Conegliano Valdobbiadene Context: Direct Evidence

Moving closer to the context of this study, Galletto et al. (2021) provide a highly relevant empirical basis by examining consumers' willingness to pay for Prosecco Superiore DOCG di Conegliano Valdobbiadene compared to standard Prosecco DOC. Their analysis demonstrates that consumers do indeed recognize the existence of a qualitative hierarchy between the two appellations, but only when they are provided with information on the territorial origin. Without this information, the gap in willingness to pay is not particularly significant. This finding is attributable more to the reputation of the designation than to differences in sensory quality between the wines.

This result is of fundamental importance to this study for two main reasons. First, the study shows that territorial information, particularly that relating to the reputation and origin of the appellation, is a determining factor in willingness to pay (and this is demonstrated in the context of Conegliano Valdobbiadene). Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that the mechanism by which territorial information generates economic value is reputational rather than sensorial in nature. Consumers therefore perceive the identity and prestige of the territory, and do not objectively evaluate the quality of the product.

2.5.3 The Mediating Role of Perception: Towards a Dual-Path Account

The empirical evidence in this section leads to an important conclusion: sustainability generates willingness to pay through perceptual mediators that transform raw sustainability information into value for the consumer. The literature highlights two categories of these mediators: cognitive mediators (e.g., awareness, knowledge, trust, perceived credibility) and affective-territorial mediators (e.g., emotional responses, place attachment, identity-based perception). Despite this evidence, the studies reviewed so far have not compared the relative strength of these mediators in generating willingness to pay.

Schäufele and Hamm's (2017) studies show that purely cognitive variables (e.g., awareness) explain relatively little of how actual behavior varies, and that richer perceptual constructs (e.g., perceived authenticity or emotional engagement with sustainability) appear to play a more important role. Sreen and Bandyopadhyay (2025) demonstrate, through experimental evidence, that trust in certification sources influences perception, but is not the primary driver of willingness to pay. This suggests that the effect of the cognitive pathway can be overridden by other factors. Furthermore, studies by Wang and Wu (2016) and Fernández-Ferrín et al. (2024) analyze emotional mechanisms, and in particular, those related to pride and well-being are able to translate perceptions into economic behavior more effectively.

These findings together motivate the central research question of this thesis: is the territorial and emotional mechanism, represented by the original PTS construct, a more significant determinant of willingness to pay than the cognitive mechanism, represented by trust? The dual-pathway model of this study aims to address this question directly and empirically by simultaneously testing both pathways in the context of the Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore D.O.C.G., while acknowledging that the present sample may not provide sufficient statistical power to detect definitive differences between the two mechanisms.

2.6 The Perceived Territorial Sustainability (PTS) Construct

From the previous sections, it emerges that the four research streams analyze: sustainability in the wine sector; consumer awareness and trust, territorial identity and terroir, and the emotions and meaning of sustainable consumption. It is noteworthy, however, that although each research stream has made significant contributions to understanding how sustainability generates value for consumers, no study has fully integrated these dimensions into a unified theoretical framework. It has therefore been impossible to grasp the true complexity of sustainability perception, which is crucial in terroir-bound product categories such as wine.

In particular, the sustainability literature has focused primarily on the supply side, what producers do and why, without addressing the demand side, namely how

consumers evaluate these practices as sources of terroir value. The literature on awareness and trust has attempted to delineate a specific cognitive mechanism, extending from sustainability information to consumer behavior, but it has also emerged that this pathway presents a limitation that cognitive mechanisms alone cannot overcome. The literature on terroir and territorial branding has demonstrated that territorial identity can generate strong emotional and symbolic value, yet sustainability has been considered a peripheral dimension. Finally, the literature on emotions and meaning has demonstrated that affective responses to sustainability have consequences on consumer behavior, but these responses have not been integrated with territorial perception into a single operationalizable construct.

A very specific and significant theoretical gap thus emerges: the literature lacks a construct capable of capturing the consumer's perception of sustainability as an authentic, identity-building, and emotionally significant expression of a specific territory, as opposed to a set of technical practices, institutional certifications, or abstract environmental commitments. It is precisely this gap that the Perceived Territorial Sustainability (PTS) construct aims to fill.

2.6.1 Definition and Conceptual Boundaries

This study defines perceived territorial sustainability as the degree to which consumers perceive the sustainability of a wine-producing region as authentic, distinctive, and generating value. This means that the construct is an expression of cultural heritage and collective identity, rather than a set of simple environmental practices or institutional certifications. PTS is a consumer-focused construct, therefore, it does not measure whether and to what extent a region is objectively sustainable, but rather whether and to what extent consumers have internalized the region's sustainability as an essential part of its identity and value.

This definition seeks to differentiate between three constructs appearing in the literature that are related to PTS, but distinct from it. The first is Green Trust (Chen, 2010), because this construct captures consumers' rational evaluation of sustainability claims, while PTS seeks to capture a form of perception that goes beyond simple rationality. It also differs from terroir perception (Spielmann & Charters, 2013; Reitsamer & Becker, 2024), as the latter focuses on authenticity

and the local rootedness of the product's quality and character, while PTS focuses specifically on sustainability as an integral part of the territory. Finally, it differs from green label authenticity (Moon et al., 2023), because authenticity is based on the consumer's assessment of a brand's environmental sincerity, while PTS aims to capture a much broader territorial perception, encompassing an entire appellation, not just a single brand.

2.6.2 The Four Components of PTS

The PTS represents a reflective latent construct composed of four interrelated components, each of which is based on a distinct strand of literature, reviewed in the previous sections.

The environmental component measures consumer perceptions of a region's sustainable practices, such as reducing the use of pesticides, organic farming, biodiversity protection, and landscape conservation. This is the fundamental component of sustainability perception, as without an understanding of actual environmental practices, further perceptual development is impossible. This component draws on the literature by De Steur et al. (2020) and Flores (2018) and is considered the starting point from which consumers engage with the concept of territorial sustainability.

Another component of the PTS is the territorial component, which analyzes consumer perceptions of sustainability as an intrinsic element of the physical landscape and cultural traditions of a specific place. The underlying literature is that on *terroir* (Charters et al., 2017; Warman & Lewis, 2019; Capitello et al., 2021), which demonstrates that the most distinctive and economically valid form of perception is one in which the product's character is considered an integral part of its territory of origin. In the context of PTS, this *terroir*-based territorial component captures the degree to which consumers perceive the sustainability of the territory as rooted in its physical and cultural landscape. It therefore represents the expression of what the place is, and not what the producer does.

The third component is identity, which bases the consumer's perception of sustainability as an expression of the collective identity of the territory, including its history, local traditions, community values, and shared heritage. The literature

on which this component is based concerns territorial branding (Spielmann & Williams, 2016; Melewar & Skinner, 2020; Charters & Spielmann, 2014), which analyzes how territorial brands generate competitive advantages when they successfully convey a sense of collective identity. Particular attention should be paid to Spielmann and Charters' (2013) concept of internalized authenticity, which measures the extent to which consumers perceive the identity of a territory as something directly belonging to them, a value with which they recognize and identify. According to their study, internalized authenticity is the strongest predictor of perceived quality and purchase intention among all the dimensions of terroir authenticity.

Finally, the emotional-symbolic component captures the consumer's perception of a terroir as a source of emotional and symbolic meaning, taking into account feelings such as moral satisfaction, pride, warmth, and connection to a broader cultural narrative. For this component, the relevant literature is that on emotional consumption (Moon et al., 2023; Wang & Wu, 2016; Fernández-Ferrín et al., 2024; Coyne et al., 2025), which demonstrates how sustainability-induced emotions trigger behavioral consequences and operate independently of cognitive evaluations. When consumers perceive a region's sustainability as aligned with their own moral values, they experience moral satisfaction, and the resulting response generates more value than cognitive trust alone can produce.

2.6.3 Positioning PTS in the Literature

The introduction of the PTS construct aims to make three specific contributions to the existing literature. First, it aims to integrate the traditions of sustainability and terroir, as existing studies have largely developed them in parallel, without fitting them into a unified framework in which sustainability is a constitutive dimension of territorial identity, rather than a separate attribute. Second, the PTS construct aims to go beyond the cognitive framework of sustainability perception that has dominated the Green Marketing literature to date. This requires incorporating emotional and identity dimensions, which have been neglected in the literature on awareness and trust. Finally, it aims to connect the macro-level narrative of territorial sustainability, i.e., that is communicated by institutions (e.g., the Protection Consortium and UNESCO World Heritage designation), with micro-level

perceptual processes, i.e., how individual consumers internalize and evaluate the narrative.

Table B1 summarizes the positioning of this study within the existing literature, highlighting the specific position of the PTS between sustainability, territorial identity and consumer value creation, and specifying the gap that this study aims to fill (see Appendix B).

2.6.4 From Literature to Model

The literature review conducted in this chapter aims to lay the theoretical foundation for the dual-path model proposed in Chapter 4. The cognitive path (Awareness → Trust → Willingness to Pay) draws on the awareness and trust literature reviewed in Section 2.2 of this study, which analyzes how information generates rational assessments of credibility with respect to sustainability, which then translates into willingness to pay. The territorial and emotional path (Awareness → Perception of Territorial Value → Willingness to Pay) brings together the literature on terroir (Section 2.3), the literature on emotions and meaning (Section 2.4), and the literature on sustainability and willingness to pay (Section 2.5). Together, these strands demonstrate that the strongest factor in generating willingness to pay a premium is not cognitive trust, but the authenticity of the territorial and emotional perception of sustainability.

The central hypothesis of this study posits that the territorial and emotional pathway generates a stronger effect on willingness to pay than the purely cognitive pathway (H5), and emerges directly from this literature review as a theoretically motivated proposition that the empirical analysis aims to test.

III TERRITORIAL CONTEXT ANALYSIS

3.1 The Conegliano-Valdobbiadene DOCG territory

The Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore DOCG is one of the most historically significant wine denominations in Italy. The Consorzio di Tutela del Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco DOCG, the private body responsible for protecting and promoting the denomination, was founded in 1962. In 1969, the area was first recognized as a DOC (Controlled Designation of Origin) zone, and then in 2009 it obtained DOCG (Controlled and Guaranteed Designation of Origin) status, thus placing it at the pinnacle of Italian wine quality.

The denomination encompasses 15 municipalities in the province of Treviso, including Conegliano, Valdobbiadene, Vittorio Veneto, Pieve di Soligo, and Follina. The geomorphology of the area is distinctive, with hills characterized by steep ridges, whose slopes are almost entirely covered in vineyards. The vineyards are planted on narrow grassy terraces, called ciglioni, creating a mosaic landscape encompassing woodlands, villages, and vineyards. This conformation dictates a form of viticulture known as "heroic viticulture." Agricultural operations are still carried out by hand today due to the steep slope of the land, which allows for limited use of mechanized equipment.

From a historical perspective, the territory's viticultural vocation is deeply rooted: the city of Conegliano hosted Italy's first Enological School, founded in 1876, and the first Experimental Institute for Viticulture, established in 1923. The earliest documented reference linking Prosecco wine to this territory dates back to 1772, making the denomination one of the oldest and most deeply rooted in the European wine landscape.

3.2 Sustainability Initiatives

The Consorzio di Tutela has developed, over the years, a structured set of tools to guide producers toward increasingly sustainable practices. The primary instrument is the Viticultural Protocol (Protocollo Viticolo), which reached its fourteenth edition in 2024. First introduced in 2011, the Protocol is a guidance

document addressed to member producers, aimed at promoting low-environmental-impact agronomic practices through the reduction of phytosanitary product use and the integration of more sustainable vineyard management techniques. The approach to sustainability is very gradual. Initially in 2013 several active substances were excluded from use, after which in 2019 the entire denomination formally banned the use of glyphosphate, making the territory the largest wine-growing area in Europe to be free of glyphosphate. Furthermore, in 2021 there was a further development of pest management practices and organic farming methods began to spread more and more. The biodistrict project was launched in 2022 and then in 2023 and 2024 some soil, biodiversity and water management practices were introduced.

A central pillar of this strategy is the SQNPI certification (Sistema di Qualità Nazionale Produzione Integrata, National Quality System for Integrated Production), which allows certified producers to display the so-called "bee" logo on their products, vineyards, and promotional materials. The certified vineyard surface has grown rapidly in recent years: from 1,203 hectares in 2021, to 3,039 hectares, approximately 34.9% of the denomination's total surface, by early 2024, representing a 152.7% increase. In 2025 the certified area was 52% of the total area. The objective declared by the Consortium is to obtain complete certification by 2029.

This growth in sustainable practices develops within a territory whose geomorphology could be defined as "mosaic", this is because 57% of the territory is covered by woods, 30% by vineyards, 9% by other crops and finally only 4% by urbanized areas. This type of composition allows us to fully understand the narrative behind the sustainability of the denomination, because the vineyards represent a minority of the surface area of the territory, and are inserted in a context mainly composed of woods and naturally diversified.

3.3 Sustainability Communication

The communication of sustainability within the Conegliano Valdobbiadene territory occurs across multiple levels and through several institutional instruments. At the certification level, the SQNPI "bee" logo functions as the

primary visual signal of sustainable practice: certified producers and viticulturists may display it on product labels, in vineyards, on websites, and in promotional materials, making sustainability visible to both trade partners and final consumers.

At the institutional level, the Consortium has progressively expanded its communications infrastructure. In 2024, the Denomination's first Sustainability Report was published, which systematizes and clarifies the region's collective commitment to environmental, economic, and social sustainability.

In 2022, on the occasion of the Consortium's 60th anniversary, two additional projects were launched: the Green Academy, conceived as an incubator for research, studies, and ideas aimed at working in an increasingly structured and concrete manner on territorial sustainability, and the Wine Tourism Lab, aimed at engaging younger generations and raising their awareness of the opportunities that concern not only wine, but also landscape, wellness, food, and nature.

The recognition of the region as a UNESCO World Heritage Site represents an implicit form of sustainability communication for the territory.

Despite these efforts, this communication architecture seems to present problems. In fact, sustainability is communicated mainly using technical channels and institutions, such as protocols or certifications. These methods allow us to reach traders more effectively, but translating these technical tools to the broader group of end consumers still remains a challenge.

3.4 UNESCO Recognition and Its Identity Significance

In 2019, following a candidacy process that began in 2008, the site "Le Colline del Prosecco di Conegliano e Valdobbiadene" was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List as a cultural landscape, becoming the 55th Italian site on the list. The inscription was far from automatic: the candidacy had already been rejected once, in 2018, before being formally approved on 7 July 2019 during the 43rd session of the World Heritage Committee, held in Baku, Azerbaijan. This detail is worth emphasizing, as it indicates that the recognition was not a foregone conclusion, but the outcome of a long and contested process requiring sustained institutional commitment.

The inscription was justified under Criterion (v): the Colline del Prosecco represent a vinicultural landscape resulting from the interaction between nature and human activity over several centuries. The adaptation and transformation of the area's challenging hogback geomorphology required the development of specific land-use practices, including manual vineyard management on steep slopes, the grassy terraces known as ciglioni that follow the contours of the land and stabilize soil and vineyards, and the bellussera vine-training system, which developed in the area around 1880.

The designation is divided into three zones. The Central Zone extends over 9,197 hectares and includes 12 municipalities. Its landscape attributes are those that initially motivated the original nomination. The Buffer Zone extends over 9,769.80 hectares and does not coincide with the administrative boundaries. The hilly areas of this zone have a less steep slope than those of the Central Zone. Finally, the Commitment Zone is a larger area that includes municipalities that have signed a shared protocol for the management and protection of the rural landscape.

UNESCO recognition is not simply an honorific title for the territory; its significance goes far beyond that. It formalizes the link between product, territory, and collective identity, and encourages the preservation of heritage for future generations. As stated by the Consorzio at the time of inscription, the recognition does not represent an endpoint but a milestone in an ongoing process aimed at enhancing the cultural, artistic, and agricultural heritage of the territory. From this perspective, sustainability ceases to be a purely technical practice and becomes an identity-based commitment, precisely the conceptual core of the Perceived Territorial Sustainability (PTS) construct developed in this thesis.

3.5 Critical Reflection

The Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore D.O.C.G. represents a compelling case study for testing the model proposed in this thesis, for at least three reasons.

First, it is a territory that has invested systematically in sustainability, with consolidated instruments and measurable targets, such as full certification of all member companies by 2029. It is therefore possible to measure consumer

perception thanks to the existence of a real and growing foundation of sustainable practices.

Furthermore, the recognition of the area as a UNESCO World Heritage Site has given value and significance to the place, characteristics that go far beyond the simple certification of product quality. This makes Conegliano-Valdobbiadene even more suitable for this study, as it allows for an in-depth analysis of the identity and emotional-symbolic components of the PTS construct.

Furthermore, territorial differentiation (Prosecco DOC, Conegliano Valdobbiadene DOCG, Rive, Superiore di Cartizze) translates into price differentiation, offering further insight into the relationship between PTS and WTP. This is confirmed by empirical evidence from Galletto et al. (2021), which demonstrates the existence of a WTP gap between Conegliano Valdobbiadene DOCG and standard Prosecco DOC when consumers receive information on their territorial origin.

IV RESEARCH MODEL AND HYPOTHESIS

4.1 Theoretical Framework

The marketing and consumer behavior literature has largely examined the relationship between sustainability and value creation. Despite this, it commonly emerges that sustainability does not directly translate into willingness to pay. In fact, it turns out that consumers may be aware of sustainable practices, but they do not always attribute an economic value to them. In this discrepancy between awareness and willingness to pay a premium price, intermediate perceptual mechanisms play a fundamental role in creating value.

Based on this premise, this thesis proposes a dual-pathway model, which distinguishes two alternative mechanisms by which sustainability awareness can lead to willingness to pay. On the one hand there is a purely cognitive path, in which knowledge increases consumer trust in sustainability communications, which in turn determines the willingness to pay. On the other hand, there is a territorial and emotional path, according to which awareness allows us to activate a broader perception of sustainability, recognized as an authentic, identifying value rooted in the territory, here conceptualized by the construct Perceived Territorial Sustainability (PTS), which then generates willingness to pay.

The cognitive path mechanism is strongly consolidated within the Green marketing literature: consumers who are exposed to sustainability information develop trust in the communicating entity, and this trust translates into behavioral outcomes including purchase intention and acceptance of the price premium (Chen, 2010; Gorton et al., 2021). It should be underlined that more recent studies, such as that of Sreen & Bandyopadhyay (2025), demonstrate that there are also other factors that incentivize willingness to pay, such as product quality or region. Consequently, the introduction of a second parallel path is necessary.

The territorial and emotional path finds its basis in the literature on terroir and place-based marketing, the results of which show that consumers tend to attribute a higher value to products if they are perceived as authentically linked to a specific territory (Charters et al., 2017; Melewar & Skinner, 2020). One of the most

emblematic studies on this topic is that of Moon et al. (2023), who demonstrate that when sustainability is perceived not only as a technical attribute, but as an expression of territorial identity and cultural heritage, it generates emotional and symbolic connections, connections that cognitive trust alone is unable to produce. It is this evidence that suggests that the form of perception captured by PTS may be a more powerful driver of willingness to pay than cognitive trust alone.

Figure 1 presents the dual-path model proposed in this study, illustrating the two parallel mechanisms through which sustainability awareness generates willingness to pay a price premium. The empirical testing of this model is presented in Chapter 6.

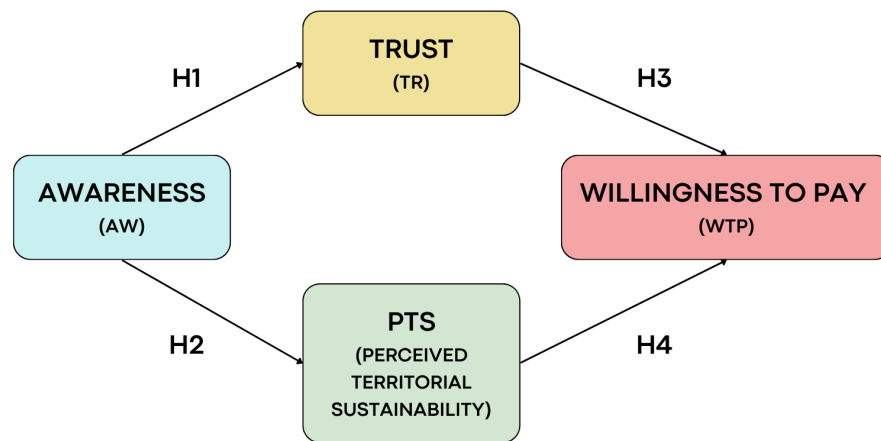


Figure 1. The Dual-Path Model of Territorial Sustainability and Willingness to Pay. H5: $\beta(PTS \rightarrow WTP) > \beta(TR \rightarrow WTP)$

The two paths share a common antecedent, awareness of sustainability, and a common outcome, willingness to pay. However, they operate through two completely different psychological mechanisms. Consequently, the central research question of this study is not simply whether sustainability influences WTP, but which of these two mechanisms is more effective in transforming this awareness into economic value. This question is addressed through the formulation of five hypotheses, analyzed in Section 4.3, and empirically tested in the specific context of Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore D.O.C.G.

4.2 Construct Definition

4.2.1 Awareness

Sustainability awareness is defined by Pomering and Dolnicar (2009) as consumers' level of awareness of the existence and content of sustainability initiatives undertaken by a company or region. Turning now to the context of this study, awareness specifically represents consumers' knowledge of the practices, certifications, and specific commitments implemented in the Prosecco Superiore D.O.C.G. di Conegliano Valdobbiadene region.

The role of awareness in this study's model is fundamental, as it represents the common antecedent of both the cognitive and territorial pathways. It is therefore a necessary condition for the functioning of both systems. This positioning is consistent with the Pomering and Dolnicar study, as they demonstrate that consumer attitudes and behaviors cannot be influenced by simple sustainability communications without prior awareness. Studies by Mastroberardino et al. (2020) and Gorton et al. (2021) also support this view. The first study demonstrates that Italian wine consumers' awareness of sustainability initiatives remains limited, but that even a small level of awareness can positively influence their perception of sustainability and the resulting propensity to purchase. The second study also establishes that uncertainty is reduced by knowledge, and that the latter amplifies the effect of evaluative processes, both cognitive and perceptual.

In the model analyzed in this study, awareness does not directly influence willingness to pay, but its role is at the beginning of the process. This construct, in fact, is responsible for activating two parallel mechanisms—trust and perceived territorial sustainability—through which sustainability is then transformed into economic value. In this study, therefore, awareness represents a preliminary condition and not a determining factor, consistent with the literature on green marketing.

Awareness is measured using the scale developed by Pomering & Dolnicar (2009), adapted to the context of territorial sustainability of the Conegliano Valdobbiadene

DOCG. Full construct operationalization details, including scale sources, adaptations, and definitions for all four constructs, are provided in Appendix C.

4.2.2 Trust

Trust is defined by Chen (2010) as a consumer's belief in the credibility, honesty, and reliability of sustainability communications and practices associated with a brand or region. Specifically in the context of Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore DOCG, trust represents the degree to which consumers consider the region's commitments to be authentic and consistent.

According to the green marketing literature, trust plays a key mediator between sustainability information and actual consumer behavior. The foundational studies on this construct are primarily Chen (2010), who demonstrates that brand image and environmental satisfaction strongly influence trust and purchase intention, and Bonn et al. (2015), who study the wine sector more specifically, demonstrating the role of trust as a moderator between perceived sustainability and purchase intention.

In the model proposed by this study, trust has the role of transforming awareness into willingness to pay through a purely cognitive mechanism. This means that a consumer, if aware of a region's sustainability initiatives and believing them to be credible, rationally attributes an economic value to that region's product. It is worth highlighting the findings of the study by Sreen and Bandyopadhyay (2025), which states that willingness to pay is not determined exclusively by trust, but that other factors, such as quality or value, also influence consumer perception. This finding is particularly important because it implies that the cognitive path is relevant, but may also have limitations in generating a premium price. Hence the comparison with an emotional territorial path, operationalized in this study through the PTS construct.

Trust is measured using the scale developed by Chen (2010) and adapted to the specific context examined in this study.

4.2.3 Perceived Territorial Sustainability (PTS)

The Perceived Territorial Sustainability (PTS) construct represents the original theoretical contribution of this study. As mentioned in previous sections, PTS measures the degree to which consumers perceive a region's sustainability as authentic, defining, and generating value. This means that this construct is not limited to a set of environmental practices, but encompasses the entire cultural heritage and collective identity rooted in that specific region.

The idea of introducing this new construct arose from the need to fill a gap in the literature. Existing studies show that sustainability perceptions have been analyzed primarily from a purely cognitive perspective, referring to factors such as recognition of eco-labels or trust in certifications.

While this cognitive approach is certainly capable of capturing one dimension of how consumers evaluate sustainability, it fails to take into account other fundamental dimensions, such as emotional and territorial ones, which are integral to the perception of sustainability in place-based products such as wine. PTS was conceived precisely for this purpose: to fill this gap by integrating four distinct yet interconnected components into a single reflective construct.

Within the model, PTS seeks to highlight how sustainability is an integral part of the territory. Spielmann and Charters (2013) define this very thesis, stating that the most impactful dimension of a territory's authenticity is internalized, that is, elaborated by the consumer as a form of identity and meaning, and not based on the product or institutions. The PTS construct extends their concept further, proposing that when consumers perceive sustainability as an authentic reflection of a territory, this perception may generate a stronger form of value than cognitive trust alone, a proposition that this study tests empirically.

The PTS construct is composed of four interrelated components (environmental, territorial, identity, emotional-symbolic), each grounded in a distinct body of literature. Together, they capture the multidimensional nature of territorial sustainability perception. Therefore, not just as a technical evaluation, but as a synergy between place, identity, emotion, and meaning.

Initially, the PTS operationalization included six indicators to cover all four components. However, following an evaluation of the measurement model, carried out following the recommendations of Hair et al. (2019), three indicators were removed. PTS3 (“The sustainability of this territory appears authentic and genuine to me”) was excluded because it seemed to conceptually overlap with the Trust construct, as it captures the perception of credibility and not the perception of territorial sustainability per se. PTS5 (“Sustainability increases the perceived value of wines from this territory”) and PTS6 (“The sustainability of this territory makes its wines more meaningful to me on a personal level”) were removed because they appear to capture the perceived value and personal meaning of the PTS construct rather than direct measures of the construct itself. Consequently, the revised scale includes three indicators that more directly capture the perception of sustainability. This revised operationalization of the construct is in line with the narrower definition of PTS that is adopted in the final model, namely, PTS represents the extent to which consumers perceive sustainability and its practices as characteristics of the territory.

The measurement scale for PTS is developed specifically for this study, drawing on items adapted from Charters et al. (2017), Capitello et al. (2021), Moon et al. (2023), and Spielmann & Charters (2013), and integrated with original items designed to capture the territorial sustainability context of the Conegliano Valdobbiadene DOCG.

4.2.4 Willingness to Pay (WTP)

Willingness to pay (WTP) is defined by Netemeyer et al. (2004) as a consumer's propensity to pay a premium for a product compared to a comparable alternative, based on the perceived value associated with that product. In the specific context of this thesis, WTP refers more precisely to a consumer's willingness to pay more for a Prosecco Superiore DOCG di Conegliano Valdobbiadene compared to its alternative, based on the perceived value generated by the sustainability of the region.

According to existing studies, numerous factors influence the willingness to pay a premium. Among these, one of the most important is perceived quality. The study by Netemeyer et al. (2004) confirms this very concept, namely that perceived

quality is one of the factors that determine the willingness to pay a premium, along with other factors such as brand association and brand awareness. Sreen and Bandyopadhyay (2025) further argue that it is the perceived quality of the product that determines willingness to pay, and not trust, although they acknowledge that the latter still influences consumer perception.

This study does not aim to provide an exhaustive overview of the entire literature on WTP, but rather focuses on two specific mechanisms through which a region's sustainability can generate a willingness to pay a premium. This choice stems from the underlying research question of this study: which of these two mechanisms is more effective in transforming awareness into economic value. The role of other factors, such as perceived quality and perceived value as potential additional antecedents, and their possible interaction with WTP, may provide a starting point for future research and are discussed in the final chapter.

In this thesis's dual-path model, WTP is the common outcome of both the cognitive and the territorial and emotional paths. Hypothesis H5, which tests whether the territorial-emotional path generates a stronger effect on WTP than the cognitive path, has direct theoretical and managerial implications for how sustainability should be communicated, implications that are discussed in Chapter 7 in light of the empirical results.

Willingness to pay (WTP) is measured using the scale developed by Netemeyer et al. (2004), adapted to the context of territorial sustainability of Prosecco Superiore D.O.C.G. Conegliano Valdobbiadene.

4.3 Hypothesis Development

4.3.1 Awareness positively influences Trust

The first hypothesis assumes that consumer awareness of sustainability initiatives implemented by the Prosecco Superiore D.O.C.G. Conegliano Valdobbiadene region positively influences trust in the credibility of these initiatives and their communication.

Green marketing literature theorizes a fundamental principle underlying this hypothesis: trust cannot develop in the absence of prior knowledge. According to

Pomeroy and Dolnicar (2009), a consumer cannot develop an assessment of the credibility of sustainability practices without an informational basis. Awareness is therefore the necessary antecedent to building trust, meaning that without it, the cognitive process that leads to trust cannot be initiated.

H1: Consumer awareness of territorial sustainability initiatives positively influences trust in the credibility of those initiatives.

4.3.2 Awareness positively influences PTS

The second hypothesis assumes that consumer awareness of the sustainability initiatives undertaken by the Prosecco Superiore D.O.C.G. Conegliano Valdobbiadene region positively influences the perception of such sustainability as authentic at the territorial and emotional levels, i.e., Perceived Territorial Sustainability (PTS).

Awareness is a fundamental prerequisite for the territorial and emotional pathway, not just the cognitive one, as it leads to PTS. Indeed, consumers can internalize sustainability as an expression of identity and meaning only if they are first aware of the existence of sustainability practices. Nevertheless, the mechanism underlying this pathway is qualitatively different from the first. In this case, awareness provides an informational basis that allows for a deeper understanding than the mere rational assessment of credibility, based on what sustainability represents in the region.

H2: Consumer awareness of territorial sustainability initiatives positively influences Perceived Territorial Sustainability.

4.3.3 Trust positively influences WTP

The third hypothesis posits that consumer trust in the credibility of territorial sustainability communications positively influences their willingness to pay a premium for Prosecco Superiore D.O.C.G. Conegliano Valdobbiadene.

This relationship is part of the model's cognitive pathway: a consumer who trusts the authenticity and accuracy of territorial sustainability communications develops a rational basis for attributing additional economic value to the product.

As discussed in previous sections, it is worth noting that the strength of this relationship could be limited by other factors, including perceived quality.

In the specific context of the Conegliano Valdobbiadene DOCG, this hypothesis implies that consumers who trust the credibility of territorial sustainability communications, those conveyed by the Consortium's Viticultural Protocol, the SQNPI certification, and the Sustainability Report, are more willing to pay a premium for the product in question than consumers who place less trust in them.

H3: Consumer trust in territorial sustainability communication positively influences willingness to pay a price premium.

4.3.4 PTS positively influences WTP

The fourth hypothesis states that Perceived Territorial Sustainability positively influences the willingness to pay a premium for Prosecco Superiore DOCG di Conegliano Valdobbiadene.

This hypothesis focuses on the territorial and emotional path of the model. As established in Sections 2.3 and 2.4, when sustainability is internalized as a constitutive element of a territory's identity, it generates a form of value that goes beyond purely rational evaluation.

Several studies provide the basis for this hypothesis. The first is that of Moon et al. (2023), who demonstrate that the perceived authenticity of a "green" brand triggers a sense of well-being resulting from the feeling of contributing to a meaningful cause through consumption. Melewar and Skinner (2020) and Reitsamer and Becker (2024) extend the concept to the territorial context, and their studies demonstrate that consumers are willing to pay a premium price when products are perceived as authentically linked to a specific place.

H4: Perceive Territorial Sustainability positively influences willingness to pay a premium.

4.3.5 The effect of PTS on WTP is stronger than the effect of Trust on WTP

The fifth hypothesis is the central one of this study, stating that the path from Perceived Territorial Sustainability to Willingness to Pay is significantly stronger than the path from Trust to Willingness to Pay. This hypothesis aims to answer the central research question of this study: to what extent do emotional and territorial

perceptions of sustainability influence willingness to pay, compared to traditional cognitive factors such as trust?

As discussed in the previous sections, a growing body of research suggests that affective mechanisms generate stronger and more lasting behavioral effects than purely cognitive evaluations. The most emblematic study on this topic is that of Schäufele and Hamm (2017), who noted the importance of perceptual and emotional factors in the mediation process between sustainability and willingness to pay, demonstrating that other purely cognitive variables (e.g., awareness and trust) fail to fully explain actual purchasing behavior. Wang and Wu's (2016) study also takes emotions into account. Their results demonstrate that discrete emotions, such as pride, are able to predict consumer behavior much better than cognitive assessments alone.

This evidence suggests that, although willingness to pay may be influenced by both trust and PTS, the latter is theoretically expected to produce a stronger effect, given its capacity to capture a deeper form of value attribution rooted in identity and emotional meaning. This expectation is tested empirically in Chapter 6, where the results provide directional but inconclusive evidence for this hypothesis.

H5: The positive effect of Perceived Territorial Sustainability on willingness to pay is significantly stronger than the positive effect of Trust on willingness to pay.

V METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research Design

This study's research approach is quantitative and based on a positivist and deductive epistemological paradigm. The study aims to test a series of theoretically derived hypotheses regarding the causal relationships between four latent constructs (Awareness, Trust, Perceived Territorial Sustainability, and Willingness to Pay) in the specific context of the Prosecco Superiore DOCG Conegliano Valdobbiadene region. The hypotheses are tested empirically using the collected data.

The choice of a quantitative approach stems from three specific needs of this study. The first concerns the latent constructs of the research model, as these are variables that cannot be directly observed but can only be understood by bringing together numerous measurable indicators. These indicators require the right measurement tool and a sufficient sample size to be reliably estimated. Second, the study aims to test the relationships between constructs and compare the relative strength of two parallel paths: this requires statistical techniques capable of handling multivariable relationships simultaneously. Finally, the study's goal is to obtain generalizable results, and for this reason, a quantitative method is more suitable than a qualitative one.

Data collection was conducted using a structured, self-administered questionnaire, developed in Italian, and distributed online to a sample of Italian wine consumers. The unit of analysis is the individual consumer. The questionnaire is structured with a socio-demographic and screening section, followed by four measurement scales corresponding to each of the model's constructs. All items were measured on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree), a choice motivated by its ability to capture greater variance in responses than the more common five-point scale. This aspect of variance is particularly important when measuring complex and multidimensional constructs, as was the case in this study.

5.2 Questionnaire Design and Data Collection

The questionnaire is structured into two main sections. The first section collects socio-demographic information and screening data, including age, gender, region of residence, frequency of wine consumption, personal wine purchasing behavior, familiarity with the Conegliano Valdobbiadene DOCG region, and consumption of Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore DOCG in the past twelve months. It was considered necessary to include screening variables to describe the sample and, more importantly, to identify respondents who met the inclusion criteria for this study.

Inclusion criteria are defined as follows: respondents must be wine consumers (i.e., they must consume wine at least occasionally), and must have at least a minimum level of familiarity with the Conegliano Valdobbiadene DOCG region or its product. The constructs studied, particularly those related to willingness to pay, presuppose at least minimal involvement with the product and some knowledge of the local area. Consequently, those who stated in the questionnaire that they had never consumed wine were excluded from the analysis. This filtering method was necessary, as it was essential to maintain consistency with the study's objective. This filtering allows us to focus on those who are exposed to sustainability communications in the context of analysis and are able to form a personal perception of it.

The second section of the questionnaire presents the four measurement scales corresponding to the model's constructs (Awareness, Trust, Perceived Territorial Sustainability, and Willingness to Pay), for a total of 18 items. All items are mandatory, ensuring complete responses from all participants and avoiding missing data at the item level.

The questionnaire was created using Google Forms and administered online. The data were collected through non-probability sampling, selecting participants based on accessibility and availability criteria. Distribution was conducted through social media and personal networks, targeting adult Italian wine consumers.

The complete questionnaire, in both Italian and English, is provided in Appendix D.

5.3 Measurement scales

The measurement tools used in this study were selected from validated scales available in the literature and adapted to the specific context of territorial sustainability in the Prosecco Superiore D.O.C.G. di Conegliano Valdobbiadene area. All items were translated from English into Italian following standard translation procedures to ensure linguistic accuracy and conceptual equivalence with the original scales. The four scales, mentioned in the previous sections, are presented in more detail below.

Awareness

The awareness construct is measured using four items adapted from the scale developed by Pomering & Dolnicar (2009). This scale was originally designed to assess consumer awareness of CSR initiatives in a corporate context. The scale was modified by replacing references to companies and corporate initiatives with references to Conegliano Valdobbiadene, adapting it to the context of this study. Specifically, the four items measure: general awareness of sustainability as a relevant dimension in the sector; exposure to sustainability-related information communicated by the region; familiarity with specific sustainable practices adopted within the appellation; and attention to territorial sustainability indicators.

Trust

The reference scale for the trust construct is the green trust scale developed by Chen (2010). His scale originally defined green trust as the willingness to rely on a product, service, or brand based on the belief that it is reliable, safe, and honest with respect to its environmental commitments. Chen's scale was adapted in this study to measure consumers' trust in the credibility and authenticity of sustainability commitments communicated by the territory under study as a collective entity, and not as a single company or brand. The four items measure: the perceived credibility of the territory's sustainability communications; the perceived consistency of sustainability actions over time; trust in the territory's authentic commitment to sustainability; and trust in relying on the territory's sustainability claims.

Perceived Territorial Sustainability (PTS)

The PTS measurement scale, as it represents the original theoretical contribution of this study, was developed specifically for this research. Given the innovative nature and the integration of four different dimensions of the perception of sustainability, there is no validated scale for this construct in the existing literature. In fact, the development of the scale derives from the adaptation of items from different sources: the dimensions of territorial and symbolic value come from the studies of Charters et al. (2017), the dimensions of identity from the literature of Capitello et al. (2021), the emotional-symbolic dimensions from Moon et al. (2023) and finally the dimensions of authenticity and meaning from Spielmann and Charters (2013).

The six items of the PTS scale capture all four components of the construct. The environmental component is represented by two items that measure consumers' perception of the territory as environmentally sustainable and associated with responsible practices towards the environment and the local community. The identity component is captured by an item measuring the perception of sustainability as an integral part of the local identity. The environmental component is represented by two items that measure consumers' perception of the territory as environmentally sustainable and associated with responsible practices towards the environment and the local community. The identity component is captured by an item measuring the perception of sustainability as an integral part of the local identity. The territorial component, while implicitly present across all items, is the dimension least explicitly represented in the scale, a deliberate choice to maintain simplicity in the operationalization of the construct. The implications of this limitation are discussed in Chapter 8.

The territorial component is represented less explicitly than the other three components, but this was a deliberate choice to maintain a certain simplicity in the operationalization of the construct, thus making the questionnaire easy for respondents to understand. The implications of this limitation are discussed in Chapter 8.

Following the assessment of the measurement model, an item purification procedure was conducted in accordance with Hair et al. (2019). Three indicators

were removed from the initial six-item scale: PTS3 was excluded due to conceptual overlap with the Trust construct, while PTS5 and PTS6 were excluded as they appeared to capture potential consequences of PTS rather than direct measures of territorial sustainability perception. The final PTS scale therefore comprises three indicators: PTS1, PTS2, and PTS4. The complete six-item scale as originally administered is provided in Appendix D.

Willingness to Pay (WTP)

The WTP construct is measured using the price premium scale by Netemeyer et al. (2004) as a basis. This scale is considered one of the most validated tools for measuring willingness to pay a premium price in the brand equity literature. Again, the scale was adapted to the specific context of Conegliano Valdobbiadene, replacing references to a generic brand with references to the territory under examination. The four items capture: the general willingness to pay a higher price for DOCG wine compared to comparable alternatives; the preference for the wine even when the price is higher than that of similar alternatives; the willingness to pay a price premium specifically attributable to the sustainability of the territory; and the perceived justification for a higher price based on territorial sustainability.

The operationalization of the construct, including the scale sources, adaptations and theoretical definitions, is included in Appendix C.

5.4 Data Analysis Method

The study uses SEM, structural equation modeling, to test the hypothesized relationships between the four latent constructs. SEM is a multivariate statistical technique, which manages to simultaneously estimate the causal relationships between the latent variables, also taking into account the measurement error at the item level. The analysis involves two sequential phases. First the measurement model is evaluated, after which the structural model is tested.

The R code used for the PLS-SEM estimation can be found in Appendix G.

5.4.1 Measurement Model Assessment

The first phase aims to evaluate the psychometric properties of the model's four measurement scales. This is done through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), which ensures that each construct is measured reliably before proceeding to verify the structural relationships between the constructs. Specifically, three properties are assessed.

The first is reliability, which is assessed using Cronbach's alpha (α) and composite reliability (CR). Both of these indices must exceed the threshold of 0.70 to confirm that the items within each scale are internally consistent (Hair et al., 2010). It is important to note that composite reliability, which does not assume equal factor loadings for the items, is more appropriate for reflective constructs than Cronbach's alpha.

The second property assessed is validity, measured using factor loadings (λ) and average variance extracted (AVE). Each item must load significantly on the designated construct, with a standardized loading of at least 0.70 (Hair et al., 2010). The AVE must exceed 0.50, indicating that the construct explains more than half of the variance of its indicators (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Finally, discriminant validity is assessed using the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT), the criterion recommended for PLS-SEM by Henseler et al. (2015). HTMT values below 0.90 indicate acceptable discriminant validity between construct pairs, confirming that the four constructs measure empirically distinct dimensions.

Model fit assessment in PLS-SEM differs substantially from covariance-based SEM. Indices such as CFI and RMSEA are specific to CB-SEM and are not appropriate for PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2019). In PLS-SEM, model quality is primarily evaluated through the endogenous constructs' R^2 values, effect sizes (f^2), and the statistical significance of path coefficients via bootstrapping. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) may be reported as a supplementary indicator of overall model fit, with values below 0.08 considered acceptable (Henseler et al., 2015).

5.4.2 Structural Model Assessment

The second phase tests the five hypotheses of the study by estimating the structural relationships between constructs. For each hypothesized path, the

analysis produces a standardized path coefficient (β) indicating the strength and direction of the relationship, and a t-value or p-value indicating its statistical significance. Conventionally, a path is considered statistically significant if $p < 0.05$. Hypotheses H1, H2, H3 and H4 are considered supported if the corresponding path coefficients are positive and statistically significant, subject to the adequacy of the measurement model for each construct.

As regards hypothesis H5, it is tested using the bootstrapping method with 5,000 resamplings. This procedure generates a confidence interval for the difference between the two coefficients ($\beta(\text{PTS} \rightarrow \text{WTP}) - \beta(\text{Trust} \rightarrow \text{WTP})$). H5 is supported if this difference is positive and the confidence interval does not include zero, indicating that the superiority of the PTS path over the Trust path is statistically significant and not attributable to sampling variability.

In PLS-SEM the quality of the model is assessed using the R^2 values of the endogenous constructs, the effect sizes (f^2) and the statistical significance of the path coefficients via bootstrapping. An additional indicator of overall model fit that can be used is the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), which considers values less than 0.08 as acceptable (Henseler et al., 2015).

VI RESULTS

6.1 Sample Decision

The data was collected through a self-administered online questionnaire, distributed via social media and personal networks between July and August 2026. Of the 150 responses initially collected, 11 were excluded from the analysis because the respondents stated they never consumed wine and therefore did not meet the study's inclusion criteria. The final sample therefore consisted of 139 respondents.

Table 1. Sample Description

Variable	Category	N	%
Age	18-29	105	75.5%
	30-44	20	14.4%
	45-59	7	5.0%
	60+	7	5.0%
Gender	Male	100	71.9%
	Female	39	28.1%
	Prefer not to say	0	0%
Region	Veneto	88	63.3%
	Friuli Venezia Giulia	14	10.1%
	Trentino Alto Adige	3	2.2%
	Other regions	34	24.5%
Wine Consumption Frequency	3+ times/week	18	12.9%
	1-2 times/week	60	43.2%
	1-3 times/month	51	36.7%
	Less than once/month	10	7.2%
Personal wine purchase	Yes	102	73.4%
	No	37	26.6%%
Ever	Yes	131	94.2%

purchased/tasted DOCG	No	8	5.8%
Territory familiarity	Know it well	75	54.0%
	Know it somewhat	52	37.4%
	Only heard of it	12	8.6%
DOCG consumption last 12 months	Yes	127	91.4%
	No	6	4.3%
	Don't remember	6	4.3%

Note. N=139. Descriptive statistics for all 18 indicators are reported in Appendix E.

From an analysis of the initial data, the sample appears to be predominantly young. In fact, 75.5% of respondents fall within the 18-29 age group. This result depends largely on the sampling strategy adopted and the online distribution channels used. The gender distribution shows a predominance of male respondents (71.9%). Geographically, 63.3% of respondents reside in Veneto, implying a relatively high level of familiarity with the region in the sample. This assumption is confirmed by the screening data, as it emerges that 94.2% of respondents have already purchased or tasted Prosecco Superiore DOCG di Conegliano Valdobbiadene, and 91.4% report having consumed it at least once in the last year. This level of familiarity with the product certainly ensures that respondents are in a significant position to assess the sustainability of the region. However, it may also limit the generalizability of the results, as discussed in Chapter 8.

6.2 Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model was assessed through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), estimated using the *sempr* package (version 2.3.2) in R (version 4.5.2). The assessment followed the two-step procedure recommended by Hair et al. (2019) for reflective measurement models: first, reliability was evaluated through internal consistency indicators; second, validity was assessed through convergent and discriminant validity criteria.

6.2.1 Indicator Reliability and Internal Consistency

Table 2 reports the standardized factor loadings for all 14 indicators across the four constructs.

Table 2. Factor Loadings

Construct	Item	Loading
Awareness (AW)	AW1	0.698
	AW4	0.600
Trust (TR)	TR1	0.842
	TR2	0.893
	TR3	0.725
	TR4	0.904
PTS	PTS1	0.841
	PTS2	0.848
	PTS4	0.739
WTP	WTP1	0.785
	WTP2	0.755
	WTP3	0.734
	WTP4	0.959

Note. All loadings estimated via PLS-SEM using seminr (R). Loadings ≥ 0.70 considered acceptable (Hair et al., 2019). AW indicators and reliability indices fall below conventional thresholds; results involving AW are treated as exploratory.

With the exception of the Awareness construct, all indicators load on their designated constructs at or above the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019). For the Awareness construct, following item purification, only AW1 and AW4 are retained in the final model. Both indicators load below the 0.70 threshold (AW1 = 0.698, AW4 = 0.600), and the AVE (0.424) remains below the 0.50 criterion despite item removal, indicating limited convergent validity. Reliability indicators are also below threshold ($\alpha = 0.590$, $\rho_C = 0.594$). These results reflect the multidimensional nature of the Awareness construct, whose items capture conceptually distinct facets of consumer sustainability knowledge that do not

converge sufficiently on a single underlying dimension. Given these limitations, results involving the Awareness construct should be treated as exploratory and interpreted with caution. This limitation is acknowledged and discussed in Section 8.2.

Table 3. Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Cronbach's α	rhoA	rhoC (CR)	AVE
Awareness (AW)	0.590	0.599	0.594	0.424
Trust (TR)	0.909	0.914	0.908	0.712
PTS	0.855	0.856	0.852	0.658
WTP	0.890	0.897	0.885	0.661

Note. α = Cronbach's Alpha; rhoA = Dijkstra-Henseler's rhoA; rhoC = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted. Thresholds: α , rhoA, rhoC > 0.70; AVE > 0.50.

Trust, PTS, and WTP demonstrate excellent internal consistency, with Cronbach's Alpha, rhoA, and Composite Reliability all well above the 0.70 threshold, and AVE values ranging from 0.658 to 0.712, comfortably exceeding the 0.50 criterion for convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The Awareness construct presents a more nuanced picture: following item purification, Cronbach's Alpha (0.590), rhoA (0.599), and Composite Reliability (0.594) all fall below the minimum threshold of 0.70, and the AVE (0.424) remains below 0.50, indicating limited convergent validity even after the removal of AW2 and AW3. This result confirms that the Awareness scale captures heterogeneous facets of consumer sustainability knowledge that do not converge on a single underlying dimension as strongly as the other constructs. Given these limitations, results involving the Awareness construct are retained in the model but treated as exploratory, with this limitation explicitly acknowledged.

6.2.2 Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT), the criterion recommended for PLS-SEM by Henseler et al. (2015). HTMT values below 0.90 indicate acceptable discriminant validity between construct pairs.

Table 4. HTMT Matrix

	AW	TR	PTS	WTP
AW	-			
TR	0.470	-		
PTS	0.338	0.872	-	
WTP	0.292	0.581	0.615	-

Note. HTMT values below 0.90 indicate acceptable discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). Values below 0.85 indicate strict discriminant validity. The construct correlation matrix is reported in Appendix F.

All construct pairs show HTMT values well below 0.90. Notably, the TR–PTS pair, which had yielded an HTMT value of 0.903 in the original six-item PTS specification, now yields a value of 0.872 following item purification — within the acceptable range. This improvement confirms that the removal of PTS3, which overlapped conceptually with Trust, successfully resolved the discriminant validity concern between the two constructs. The two constructs remain theoretically distinct in their definition and operationalization: Trust captures the rational credibility evaluation of sustainability claims, while PTS captures the emotional, identity-based, and territorial internalization of sustainability as value.

6.3 Structural Model Assessment

To estimate the structural model, a bootstrap procedure with 5,000 resamples and a fixed seed (seed = 123) was used, as recommended by Hair et al. (2019) for PLS-SEM. The model was assessed for multicollinearity using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), and then the hypothesized paths were tested. The VIFs for both Trust and PTS as antecedents of WTP yielded values of 2.422. According to Hair et al. (2019), such a value, well below the threshold of 5.0, indicates no multicollinearity concerns in the inner model.

Table 5. Structural Model Results

Hypothesis	Path	β	T-stat	p-value	CI 2.5%	CI 97.5%	Supported?
H1	AW $\rightarrow$ TR	0.468	3.881	0.000	0.211	0.684	Provisional

H2	AW → PTS	0.339	2.623	0.014	0.070	0.577	Provisional
H3	TR → WTP	0.221	0.909	0.313	-0.285	0.676	No
H4	PTS → WTP	0.431	1.736	0.070	-0.037	0.928	No
H5	$\beta(\text{PTS} \rightarrow \text{WTP}) > \beta(\text{TR} \rightarrow \text{WTP})$	0.210	0.438	0.328	-0.715	1.198	No

Note. β = standardized path coefficient; bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples; significance threshold $p < 0.05$. H1 and H2 yield statistically significant path coefficients but are treated as provisional findings given the insufficient psychometric properties of the Awareness construct ($CR = 0.594$, $AVE = 0.424$).

Table 6. R-Squared Values

Endogenous Construct	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Q ²
Trust (TR)	0.219	0.213	0.483 (medium)
PTS	0.115	0.109	0.561 (large)
WTP	0.400	0.391	0.675 (large)

Note. Q^2 values computed via PLSpredict with 7-fold cross-validation following the Stone-Geisser procedure (Hair et al., 2019). $Q^2 > 0.25$ = medium predictive relevance; $Q^2 > 0.50$ = large predictive relevance.

Table 7. Additional Model Quality Criteria

Criterion	AW → TR	AW → PTS	TR → WTP	PTS → WTP
VIF	-	-	2.422	2.422
f ²	0.281	0.130	0.021	0.075

Figure 2 shows the estimated structural model with standardized path coefficients and significance levels (calculated using the bootstrap method). Solid arrows indicate significant paths, while dashed arrows indicate non-significant ones.

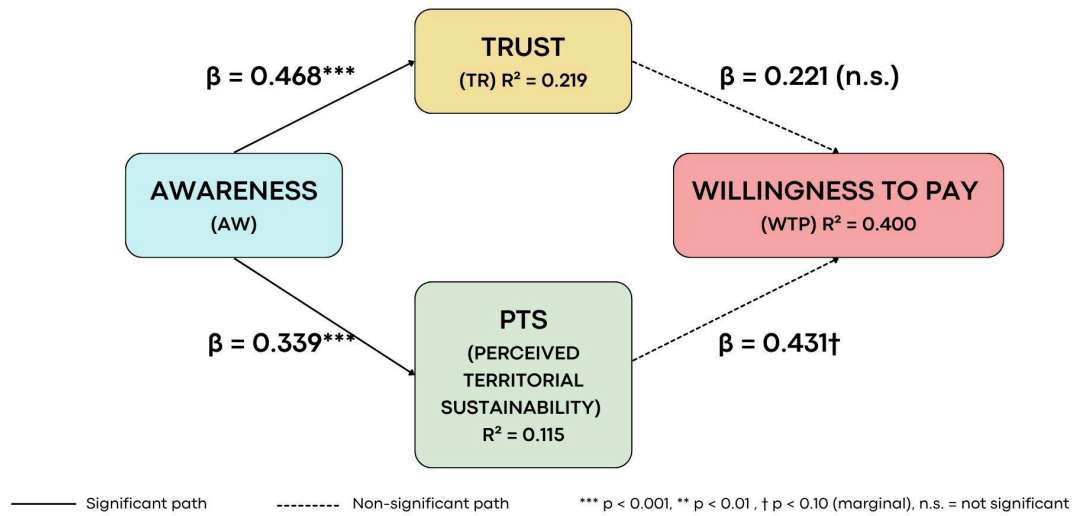


Figure 2. Structural Model Results with Standardized Path Coefficients (N = 139)

The path coefficient of hypothesis H1 (AW → TR, $\beta = 0.468$, $p < 0.001$) is statistically significant, with a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.281$). Awareness explains 21.9% of the variance in trust ($R^2 = 0.219$). Despite this, this result cannot be presented as a solidly supported hypothesis, considering the insufficient psychometric properties of the awareness construct (CR = 0.594, AVE = 0.424). It should be treated as an interim finding and replicated with an improved awareness scale.

The path coefficient of hypothesis H2 (AW → PTS, $\beta = 0.339$, $p = 0.014$) is also statistically significant, with a small effect size ($f^2 = 0.130$). Awareness explained 11.5% of the variance in PTS ($R^2 = 0.115$). Again, considering the measurement limits of the Awareness construct, this result cannot define H2 as a supported hypothesis, but remains a provisional result.

Conversely, hypothesis H3 (TR → WTP, $\beta = 0.221$, $p = 0.313$) is not supported. The data show that trust does not significantly influence willingness to pay a premium. The path coefficient, although positive, does not reach statistical significance at conventional thresholds, with a small effect size ($f^2 = 0.021$) and a 95% confidence interval that includes zero [-0.285, 0.676].

Hypothesis H4 ($\text{PTS} \rightarrow \text{WTP}$, $\beta = 0.431$, $p = 0.070$) is not supported at the conventional 5% significance level. The path coefficient is positive and directionally consistent with the theoretical framework, but $p = 0.070$ and the 95% confidence interval marginally includes zero $[-0.037, 0.928]$. The effect size is small ($f^2 = 0.075$). The relationship between these two constructs should be interpreted with caution and considered exploratory evidence that needs to be replicated with larger samples."

Finally, hypothesis H5 ($\beta(\text{PTS} \rightarrow \text{WTP}) > \beta(\text{TR} \rightarrow \text{WTP})$) is also not formally supported. A bootstrap difference test yields a difference in coefficients of 0.210 ($T = 0.438$, $p = 0.328$, 95% CI $[-0.715, 1.198]$). The fact that the confidence interval includes zero indicates that the difference between the two path coefficients is not statistically significant. Although the point estimate would seem to suggest a direct advantage of the PTS path over the Trust path, the comparison remains inconclusive from an inferential standpoint.

Overall, the model's explanatory power can be considered satisfactory: the dual-path model explains 40.0% of the variance in consumers' willingness to pay a premium ($R^2 = 0.400$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.391$). Furthermore, Q^2 values indicate medium predictive relevance for Trust ($Q^2 = 0.483$) and large predictive relevance for both PTS ($Q^2 = 0.561$) and WTP ($Q^2 = 0.675$), confirming meaningful out-of-sample predictive relevance of the model.

VII DISCUSSION

7.1 Interpretation of Results

The structural model's estimation results provide a clear and theoretically coherent picture of the mechanisms through which consumer awareness of territorial sustainability generates a willingness to pay a premium for Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore D.O.C.G. wine. This section discusses each result, relating it to the theoretical framework of Chapter 4 and the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

7.1.1 Awareness as a Common Antecedent of Both Pathways

The results show that consumer awareness of local sustainability initiatives yields statistically significant path coefficients toward both Trust (H1: $\beta = 0.468$, $p < 0.001$) and Perceived Territorial Sustainability (H2: $\beta = 0.339$, $p = 0.014$). However, given the insufficient psychometric properties of the Awareness construct ($CR = 0.594$, $AVE = 0.424$), these results cannot be presented as robustly supported hypotheses and should be treated as provisional findings. With this caveat, the directionality of the results is consistent with the theoretical role of awareness as the upstream driver of both pathways. It emerges that the effect of Awareness on Trust is slightly stronger than its effect on Perceived Territorial Sustainability ($f^2 = 0.281$ vs. $f^2 = 0.130$). This suggests that in the sample studied, sustainability information is processed more through a cognitive assessment of credibility rather than through local and emotional processing. This asymmetry could arise because cognitive trust is a more immediate response to sustainability information. Conversely, internalizing sustainability as a territorial identity may require greater prior familiarity with the region and its cultural heritage. These findings are consistent with studies by Pomering and Dolnicar (2009), who demonstrate the importance of awareness as a necessary precondition for consumer responses to sustainability issues. Furthermore, there is also consistency with Gorton et al. (2021), whose study shows that consumer knowledge amplifies the effect of subsequent evaluation processes.

The relatively modest R^2 values for both Trust (0.219) and PTS (0.115) suggest that awareness alone explains only a limited proportion of the variance in both constructs. This suggests that other factors may play an important role in the mechanism, such as prior familiarity with the product and personal values.

7.1.2 The Cognitive Pathway: Trust Does Not Drive WTP

As anticipated, hypothesis H3 (TR $\rightarrow$ WTP: $\beta = 0.221$, $p = 0.313$) is not supported. The analysis shows that trust in sustainability communications does not significantly influence willingness to pay a premium, with a small effect size ($f^2 = 0.021$). This result leads to the conclusion that in the presence of a territorial sustainability communications system, trust does not independently generate willingness to pay.

The fact that H3 is not supported is consistent with the findings of Sreen and Bandyopadhyay (2025). Their study demonstrates that trust in sustainability communications certainly influences consumer perception, but is not the determining factor in their willingness to pay. It is also consistent with the literature examining the relationship between sustainability and willingness to pay, as trust and cognitive knowledge are consistently identified as insufficient mediators of the relationship. This implies that rational evaluation, based on the credibility of sustainability communications, has a ceiling effect on its economic impact. Trust may play a role in activating the sustainability evaluation process, but it does not automatically translate into a willingness to pay more.

7.1.3 The Territorial-Emotional Pathway: PTS Shows a Positive but Non-Significant Effect on WTP

Hypothesis H4 (PTS $\rightarrow$ WTP: $\beta = 0.431$, $p = 0.070$) is not supported at the conventional 5% significance level. Furthermore, the confidence interval marginally includes zero [-0.037, 0.928], and the effect size is small ($f^2 = 0.075$). This result shows that, although the direction of the effect is consistent with both the theoretical framework and previous literature, it does not reach conventional statistical significance. This implies that the PTS $\rightarrow$ WTP relationship cannot be confirmed with the standard level of confidence.

This limited result may arise from several factors. First, the sample size. 139 respondents may not provide sufficient statistical power to accurately detect effects of the size observed, especially when path coefficients are estimated simultaneously in a multi-construct model as in this case. Furthermore, the PTS scale reduced to three individual items (PTS1, PTS2, PTS4) may capture a narrower operationalization of the construct than the original version containing six items. This choice may have attenuated the observed effect. Finally, the predominance of a sample belonging to the 18-29 age group, residing in Veneto and highly familiar with the area may have contributed to the reduction of variance in PTS scores, thus making it more difficult to detect the effect on willingness to pay (WTP).

7.1.4 H5: The Pathway Comparison

The study's most original hypothesis, H5, is not formally supported. The bootstrap difference test yields a coefficient of 0.210 ($T = 0.438$, $p = 0.328$, 95% CI [-0.715, 1.198]), with a confidence interval that includes zero. Thus, the advantage of the PTS approach over the Trust approach emerges at the descriptive level, but the difference between the two coefficients does not reach statistical significance and therefore cannot be distinguished from sample variability at conventional levels.

From these results, it must be stated that the present study cannot provide empirical support for the theoretical premise of H5, according to which the perception of territorial and emotional sustainability could be a more powerful determinant of WTP than cognitive trust. Probably the sample size and the specific characteristics of the empirical context could have limited the statistical power of the study in detecting and comparing the effects of the two paths on WTP, and this is suggested by the non-significance of H3, H4, and H5.

7.1.5 Overall Model Performance

Despite the mixed support for the hypotheses, the dual-path model demonstrates a significant overall explanatory power, with an R^2 value of 0.400 for WTP. This value indicates that the model explains 40% of the variance in consumers' willingness to pay a premium, a result consistent with other similar models in the literature on sustainability and wine consumer behavior. The statistically significant path coefficients for H1 and H2, albeit provisional given the measurement limitations of

the Awareness construct, are directionally consistent with the theoretical role of awareness as the upstream driver of both pathways. Finally, H4 provides preliminary evidence of the potential role of sustainability perception in generating economic value, a role that should be confirmed with larger and more heterogeneous samples. Furthermore, Q^2 values indicate medium predictive relevance for Trust ($Q^2 = 0.483$) and large predictive relevance for both PTS ($Q^2 = 0.561$) and WTP ($Q^2 = 0.675$), further supporting the model's value as a theoretical framework for future research.

7.2 Theoretical Contributions

This study offers several theoretical contributions regarding sustainability, place marketing, and consumer behavior in the wine sector, each grounded in the empirical results presented in Chapter 6.

The first and most significant contribution is the initial operationalization of the Perceived Territorial Sustainability (PTS) construct. This construct is introduced to address a gap in the existing literature, of which the work of Spielmann and Charters (2013) provides a particularly clear illustration. Their study defines a three-dimensional model of terroir authenticity and demonstrates that "internalized authenticity", defined as the degree to which consumers personally construct a territory's identity by assigning it meaning, is the primary predictor of perceived quality and purchase intention, surpassing even product and institutional authenticity. However, their study treats terroir as a generic territorial construct and thus fails to address sustainability as a constitutive dimension of that identity. Another limitation appears in the study by Moon et al. (2023), which demonstrates that the authenticity of a "green" brand drives willingness to pay through a "warm glow" mechanism, the emotional gratification derived from virtuous behavior. Yet, this study also has a limitation: its construct operates at the level of individual brands rather than at a collective territorial level. The PTS construct aims to bridge this gap by extending the concept of internalized authenticity to the realm of sustainability. PTS posits that consumers can internalize a territory's sustainability not merely as a set of practices and certifications, but as an authentic expression of its collective identity and cultural

heritage. Consequently, the resulting form of value differs qualitatively from that identified by both Spielmann and Charters and Moon et al.

Empirical results provide preliminary support for the validity of this construct. The revised three-item scale demonstrates satisfactory internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.855$, $\rho_C = 0.852$) and acceptable convergent validity ($AVE = 0.658$). Furthermore, the directional effect of PTS on WTP ($\beta = 0.431$, $p = 0.070$) aligns with theoretical expectations, even though it falls short of conventional significance thresholds. However, it should be noted that the three indicators of the revised scale (PTS1, PTS2, and PTS4) primarily capture environmental sustainability, territorial identity, and responsible practices. Conversely, the emotional-symbolic component, central to Spielmann and Charters' (2013) concept of internalized authenticity and Moon et al.'s (2023) concept of "warm glow", is not convincingly represented by the revised scale. This undoubtedly constitutes a limitation of the current operationalization and partly explains the significance level observed for hypothesis H4. Indeed, by capturing only a portion of the PTS construct, one that is narrower than theoretically envisioned, the scale may underestimate the overall effect of perceived territorial sustainability on WTP.

The second contribution lies in the dual-pathway model proposed and tested in this study. This model stems from the need to address a gap identified by Schäufele and Hamm (2017) in their systematic review of 34 empirical studies on sustainability and willingness to pay (WTP) in the wine sector. Their analysis revealed that existing studies treat the relationship between sustainability and WTP as a process driven by a single mechanism, explained by purely cognitive variables (such as awareness and knowledge), which accounts for a relatively small proportion of the variance in actual purchasing behavior. The authors explicitly recommended future research that incorporates more complex perceptual constructs capable of examining the relative effectiveness of different mediating mechanisms. Prompted by this suggestion, the present study proposes a theoretical framework in which two parallel mechanisms, one cognitive and one territorial-emotional, sharing the same antecedent and outcome, are tested simultaneously.

The provisional path coefficients for H1 (AW→TR: $\beta = 0.468$, $p < 0.001$) and H2 (AW→PTS: $\beta = 0.339$, $p = 0.014$) are directionally consistent with the theoretical framework proposed by Pomering and Dolnicar (2009), despite measurement limitations regarding the Awareness construct. Pomering and Dolnicar (2009) regard awareness as an essential prerequisite for any consumer response regarding sustainability. The fact that the path coefficients ($f^2 = 0.281$ for AW→TR versus $f^2 = 0.130$ for AW→PTS) are asymmetrical suggests that the cognitive evaluation of sustainability information allows for easier processing compared to the territorial and emotional processing required for PTS. This result aligns with the findings of Spielmann and Charters (2013), who state that internalized authenticity requires greater prior familiarity with the territory than institutional authentication does.

The third contribution concerns the negative findings regarding the Trust construct. The lack of statistical significance in the Trust → WTP path (H3: $\beta = 0.221$, $p = 0.313$) constitutes a theoretically significant finding that extends the existing literature. A study by Chen (2010) on the computer and electronic products sector in Taiwan indicates that "green trust" positively influences "green brand equity." While the present study appears to contradict this result, the apparent discrepancy is theoretically justifiable. Research by Sreen and Bandyopadhyay (2025) demonstrates that perceived credibility does not significantly influence WTP ($p = 0.118$), unlike perceived quality. This suggests that cognitive trust is not an immediate determinant of WTP. Finally, turning to the specific context of the Conegliano Valdobbiadene DOCG, Galletto et al. (2021) show that it is the territory's established reputation, rather than sensory quality, that enables a WTP premium for the DOCG compared to standard Prosecco DOC. This implies that in a context where institutional credibility is already deeply rooted in consumers' territorial knowledge, cognitive trust in sustainability communications may not generate additional WTP beyond what the established reputation already provides. Taken together, these studies indicate that while trust may play a role in the sustainability evaluation process, the present findings suggest it is not sufficient to independently generate willingness to pay a price premium. Trust triggers the evaluation process; however, in the case of "place-based" products, those linked to a specific territory and characterized by a strong identity, it does

not, on its own, generate a willingness to pay a higher price. Consequently, the negative evidence, combined with positive Q^2 values for all endogenous constructs (TR = medium; PTS and WTP = high), confirms that the model retains its predictive validity even when individual paths do not reach formal statistical significance.

The fourth contribution concerns the study's empirical context. Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore DOCG combines a well-established sustainability governance framework with UNESCO recognition, making it a particularly interesting case for testing the model. Galletto et al. (2021) demonstrated that, under blind tasting conditions, the price premium (WTP premium) associated with the DOCG decreases significantly. This implies that the value derived from the territory is primarily reputational and informational in nature, rather than sensory. This study aims to broaden that perspective by investigating whether communicating sustainability can generate additional economic value beyond that already stemming from the territory's established reputation among consumers. Although the result regarding hypothesis H4 is not statistically conclusive, it suggests that sustainability can serve as a distinctive value-creation mechanism when perceived as an authentic expression of territorial identity. A value-creation mechanism is thus identified that is distinct from the general reputational premium observed in the study by Galletto et al. (2021). Given that no hypothesis received formal statistical confirmation, despite a context seemingly favorable to observing both cognitive and emotional-territorial effects, the sustainability-linked value-creation process proves complex; this highlights the need for analysis using more heterogeneous samples and more refined measurement tools to detect these effects with certainty.

7.3 Managerial Implications

The practical implications of this study concern the governance, communication and marketing strategy of Prosecco Superiore DOCG Conegliano Valdobbiadene, but can also be extended to all wine-growing regions that aim to translate investments in sustainability into truly measurable economic value. Implications are then presented, to be interpreted as direction guidelines and based on the results of the study. These implications take into account the exploratory and

provisional nature of the results, given that H1 and H2 are based on a construct with insufficient psychometric properties, H3, H4, and H5 are not supported at conventional significance levels.

7.3.1 Implications for the Consorzio di Tutela

The study's findings, particularly the statistically significant path coefficients for H1 (AW $\rightarrow$ TR: $\beta = 0.468$, $p < 0.001$) and H2 (AW $\rightarrow$ PTS: $\beta = 0.339$, $p = 0.014$), albeit provisional given the measurement limitations of the Awareness construct, suggest that consumer awareness of local sustainability initiatives is directionally the most important upstream factor in the model, simultaneously activating both the cognitive and the local-emotional pathways. For the Consortium, these findings have a direct implication: investing in sustainability communication is the first step for the value creation mechanism, whatever it may be, to be activated and effective. Awareness cannot be taken for granted, but must be actively generated.

The fact that the Trust $\rightarrow$ Willingness to Pay path (H3: $\beta = 0.221$, $p = 0.313$) is non-significant suggests that the Consortium's current communication infrastructure can certainly be effective in generating consumer awareness and trust, but at the same time, it is insufficient on its own to induce a greater willingness to pay already high prices. Communication about certifications could have a ceiling effect, because consumers who trust local sustainability claims do not automatically translate this trust into a willingness to pay more. Given the exploratory nature of the data, this conclusion should be interpreted with caution, but it suggests that the Consortium should enhance its institutional communication by integrating stronger narrative and experiential formats that can engage consumers more deeply.

It is clear that the directional effect of PTS on WTP (H4: $\beta = 0.431$, $p = 0.070$) does not reach conventional significance, but it is nevertheless consistent with the hypothesis that sustainability perceived as an authentic expression of territorial identity can generate greater economic value than credibility-based trust alone. This effect certainly needs to be studied in future research using larger and more heterogeneous samples, but if confirmed in the future, it would provide empirical justification for investing in communication formats capable of conveying emotional and place-related dimensions (e.g., the UNESCO-recognized landscape,

generations of winemaking heritage, the community of producers, and wine production methods). The Consortium's initiatives, Green Academy, and Wine Tourism Lab, certainly represent steps in this direction.

7.3.2 Implications for Individual Producers

At the individual producer level, the findings suggest that sustainability communication based on labels and certifications is certainly important for building awareness and trust, but should nevertheless be complemented with richer, more narrative communication that connects the product to the identity and specific meaning of the terroir. Producers who communicate sustainability as an expression of who they are and where they come from may be better positioned to activate the emotional-territorial mechanism and generate consumer acceptance of premium prices than those who communicate sustainability simply as compliance with regulations. This means, for example, changing label design and digital communication methods. It could be effective to base social media communication on more narrative content that conveys the experience of sustainable viticulture in the hills of Conegliano Valdobbiadene, including elements such as the family history behind each bottle.

7.3.3 Implications for Territorial Governance and Policy

From a broader perspective, the findings have implications for the governance of wine geographical indications and for territorial sustainability policies. The finding that 40% of the variance in consumers' willingness to pay is explained by the dual-path model suggests that combining awareness, trust, and perception of territorial sustainability provides a meaningful framework for understanding how sustainability generates value for consumers in product categories tied to the territory.

In particular, the study highlights the fundamental role of awareness in the process that leads to value creation. This means that governance bodies and all those involved in sustainability certifications and territorial branding must work to increase the reach of communications, making all initiatives visible and known to consumers. This should be considered a strategic priority, on a par with other factors such as the quality or credibility of the initiatives themselves.

Finally, the directional pattern observed, with awareness showing significant path coefficients toward both pathways (H1: $\beta = 0.468$ vs. H2: $\beta = 0.339$), suggests that sustainability communication may trigger both rational and emotional processing in consumers, though this conclusion remains provisional pending replication with improved measurement scales. Therefore, future communication strategies must be designed to activate both mechanisms, providing clear and credible information while simultaneously promoting narrative and identity-building meanings.

VIII CONCLUSIONS

8.1 Summary of Findings

The objective of this thesis was to investigate the mechanisms through which consumers' awareness of territorial sustainability generates a willingness to pay a premium for wine, focusing specifically on Prosecco Superiore D.O.C.G. Conegliano Valdobbiadene. The study introduced a new theoretical construct, defined as Perceived Territorial Sustainability (PTS), and a dual-path model. The model distinguishes a cognitive path (Awareness $\rightarrow$ Trust $\rightarrow$ Willingness to Pay) and a territorial-emotional path (Awareness $\rightarrow$ PTS $\rightarrow$ Willingness to Pay). A PLS-SEM analysis was used to empirically test five hypotheses, using the *sempr* package in R, on a sample of 139 Italian wine consumers.

The results reveal a heterogeneous, yet theoretically relevant, picture of how sustainability generates economic value in the wine sector. Consumer awareness of local sustainability initiatives yields statistically significant path coefficients toward both Trust (H1: $\beta = 0.468$, $p < 0.001$) and PTS (H2: $\beta = 0.339$, $p = 0.014$). However, given the insufficient psychometric properties of the Awareness construct (CR = 0.594, AVE = 0.424), these results must be treated as provisional findings rather than robustly supported hypotheses. Their directionality is nonetheless consistent with the theoretical role of awareness as the upstream driver of both pathways.

However, the analysis clearly shows that the effects at the end of the two pathways diverge. The cognitive pathway does not generate a direct and significant effect on willingness to pay (H3: $\beta = 0.221$, $p = 0.313$), with a small effect size ($f^2 = 0.021$). However, it should be considered a theoretically significant result, as it suggests that cognitive trust, in the presence of PTS, does not independently translate into a willingness to pay a higher price. The territorial and emotional pathways, however, show a positive and consistent effect on willingness to pay (H4: $\beta = 0.431$, $p = 0.070$), but the result does not reach the conventional 5% significance threshold, with a confidence interval that marginally includes zero $[-0.037, 0.928]$. This limited result nevertheless suggests the existence of the PTS $\rightarrow$ WTP relationship.

within the context examined, but requires replication with larger and more diverse samples.

Finally, H5, the most original and central hypothesis of the study, is not formally supported. Indeed, after performing a bootstrap coefficient difference test, which revealed a difference of 0.210 between the PTS and Trust path coefficients ($T = 0.438$, $p = 0.328$, 95% CI $[-0.715, 1.198]$), it is clear that the hypothesis does not reach statistical significance.

Despite mixed support for the hypotheses, the overall explanatory power of the model is satisfactory, considering that it explains 40.0% of the variance in consumers' willingness to pay a premium ($R^2 = 0.400$). The study therefore contributes to the literature by introducing the PTS construct (although only partially validating it), demonstrating the non-significance of the Trust $\rightarrow$ Willingness to Pay path in the presence of PTS, and providing a different methodological approach through the introduction of the dual-path model. Overall, the results suggest that sustainability generates value for consumers through a complex, multi-layered process that cannot be fully captured by cognitive trust mechanisms alone. Preliminary evidence of the PTS $\rightarrow$ WTP relationship is not statistically conclusive, but nevertheless, its direction is consistent with the theoretical framework and previous studies on the role of territorial identity and emotional significance in this process of generating willingness to pay premium prices.

8.2 Limitations

The present study is subject to a number of limitations that should be acknowledged when interpreting its findings. These are organized below by category.

8.2.1 Sampling and Generalizability

This study used a convenience, non-probability sampling approach, with the questionnaire distributed online via social media and personal networks. While this approach is widely used in consumer behavior research and is considered acceptable for testing theoretical relationships, it does not allow for probabilistic

inferences about the entire population of Italian wine consumers. The sample may overrepresent certain demographic segments, particularly younger, more educated, and digitally connected consumers, and consequently underrepresent others. The results should therefore be interpreted as evidence of theoretical relationships within the observed sample, rather than as estimates of population-level parameters.

Furthermore, the study was conducted exclusively in Italian and targeted Italian consumers. Therefore, cross-cultural generalizability was limited. Perceptions of sustainability, territorial identity, and willingness to pay are constructs that can be influenced by various factors, such as cultural values and familiarity with the specific appellation under study. These factors can vary considerably across countries and cultural contexts. Future research should test the model on non-Italian consumer populations to assess the cross-cultural robustness of the dual-path framework and the PTS construct.

8.2.2 Research Design

The data, being collected at a single point in time through a cross-sectional survey, capture a static snapshot of consumer perceptions, rather than their evolution over time. The constructs analyzed in this study are intrinsically dynamic and can therefore be influenced by changes in the local sustainability communication strategy, media coverage, or even by consumers' experience with the brand over time. A longitudinal research design, which would allow for measurement of the constructs at different points in time, would be necessary to more fully grasp how the relationships between awareness, trust, sustainability perception, and willingness to pay develop and change over time as consumers accumulate knowledge and direct experience of the local area. This means that, due to the nature of this study, the directionality of the hypothesized relationships, although theoretically motivated, cannot be definitively established.

8.2.3 Self-Report Bias and WTP Measurement

The data on which this study is based are exclusively self-reported, collected via a structured questionnaire. This leads to two related limitations. First, the responses reflect perceptions and stated intentions, not actual behaviors. As widely

documented in sustainable consumption research (particularly Schäufele & Hamm, 2017), the two can diverge due to the gap between intentions and behaviors. Consumers may express positive attitudes toward sustainability, but their behavior may differ at the time of actual purchase.

Second, willingness to pay is measured using a seven-point Likert scale that measures a stated intention, not a perceived preference compatible with incentives. Other methods, such as the experimental auction used by Galletto et al. (2021), are able to capture actual financial commitments, making the studies more behaviorally valid than hypothetical measures of willingness to pay. Using a declarative scale such as the Likert scale may overestimate actual willingness to pay. Given the non-significance of H4, it is concerning that the true effect size may be slightly smaller than suggested by the current estimate. Furthermore, social desirability bias could also contribute to inflating responses regarding sustainability, as consumers may feel compelled to express pro-environmental attitudes given the research context.

8.2.4 PTS Scale Development

The Perceived Territorial Sustainability scale, being an original construct developed specifically for this study, has not been previously validated in the literature. Initially, it was decided to develop the scale using six items, covering four conceptual components: environmental, territorial, identity, and emotional-symbolic dimensions. Following a review of the item content, it was decided to remove three items. PTS3 was excluded due to overlap with Trust, while PTS5 and PTS6 were removed because they were better suited to capturing potential consequences rather than direct measures of the construct. The three-item scale has satisfactory psychometric properties ($\alpha = 0.855$, $\rho_{\text{hoC}} = 0.852$, $\text{AVE} = 0.658$), but it represents a much narrower operationalization of the construct than originally intended.

The main implications of this reduction are twofold. First, the emotional-symbolic dimensions related to the construct, theoretically central to the definition of PTS, may not be fully captured by the reduced scale, potentially attenuating the observed $\text{PTS} \rightarrow \text{WTP}$ effect. Furthermore, it should be noted that the item reduction process was carried out using the same dataset used for hypothesis

testing, and not on a separate sample. This process could introduce overfitting problems and reduce the generalizability of the scale's psychometric properties.

8.2.5 Contextual Specificity

The characteristics of the context in which the model is being tested, the Conegliano Valdobbiadene DOCG, are particularly distinctive. We can recognize the presence of a consolidated sustainability governance trajectory, UNESCO World Heritage recognition, a strong territorial identity, and a pyramidal qualitative structure. These peculiarities certainly make the context very rich and fertile for analysis, but at the same time limit the possibility of external validation of the results. The relative strength of the two pathways could likely differ significantly in other appellations, perhaps with less territorial recognition or less consolidated sustainability governance. In particular, the fact that H3, H4, and H5 are non-significant in the context under analysis, despite favorable conditions for observing territorial and emotional effects, suggests that the boundary conditions for the PTS → WTP relationship may be even more restrictive. Replicating the study in other winemaking regions is necessary to generalise the dual-pathway model.

8.2.6 Model Scope

Other antecedents of willingness to pay, previously documented in the literature, were not included in the theoretical model. In particular, perceived quality, which is one of the most robust predictors of willingness to pay a price premium (Netemeyer et al., 2004; Sreen & Bandyopadhyay, 2025), was not considered as a construct. It is possible that the omission of perceived quality as an additional antecedent or mediator could lead (in part) to the non-significance of H3 and the non-significance of H4. It is plausible that PTS indirectly generates WTP through a construct such as perceived quality, and that the direct path PTS → WTP could be weaker than a mediated path would be.

8.3 Future Research

The findings of this study open several promising directions for future research, which are outlined below.

8.3.1 Replication and Cross-Context Validation of the PTS Construct

The most immediate direction for future research concerns the replication and validation of the PTS construct across different wine regions and geographical contexts. This study tests the dual-path model in a single territorial context, the DOCG Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore, which, as previously analyzed, presents highly specific characteristics in terms of sustainable governance, UNESCO recognition, and territorial identity. Future studies should verify whether the PTS construct maintains its psychometric properties and its relationship with Trust in generating Willingness to Pay (WTP), and whether the directional pattern observed in this study can be replicated and confirmed with larger samples across different wine regions (for example, comparing the DOCG Conegliano Valdobbiadene with the DOCG Franciacorta, the DOCG Barolo, or international appellations such as Champagne or Marlborough). This would allow us to establish the boundary conditions of the dual-path model and assess the generalizability of the PTS → WTP relationship.

8.3.2 Cross-Cultural Testing

This study was conducted exclusively in Italian and targeted Italian wine consumers, a population characterized by high familiarity with the specific appellation under investigation and cultural proximity to the territorial identity narrative underlying the PTS. Future research should test the model on non-Italian consumer populations to assess whether the directional pattern observed in this study, with the territorial-emotional pathway showing a stronger point estimate than the cognitive pathway, is culturally universal or culturally contingent. Consumers from markets less familiar with Italian wine culture may exhibit different patterns of relationships between Awareness, Trust, PTS, and Willingness to Pay, potentially with a stronger role for the cognitive pathway in markets where territorial identity narratives are less accessible or less culturally resonant.

8.3.3 Integration of Perceived Quality as an Additional Antecedent

As discussed in Sections 4.2.4 and 8.2.6, this model does not include perceived quality as a construct, even though the literature has highlighted it as one of the most robust antecedents of willingness to pay (WTP) (Netemeyer et al., 2004;

Sreen & Bandyopadhyay, 2025). Future research should investigate the role of perceived quality within the dual-path framework, examining whether it functions as an additional parallel antecedent of WTP, as a moderator of the PTS → WTP relationship, or as a mediator between PTS and WTP. The interaction between perceived territorial sustainability and perceived product quality is particularly interesting in the wine sector, where quality and origin are closely intertwined: it is plausible that PTS amplifies perceived wine quality, which in turn influences WTP, suggesting a sequential mediation path that future studies could test empirically.

8.3.4 Longitudinal Design

The present study's cross-sectional design captures a static snapshot of consumer perceptions at a single point in time. Future research should adopt a longitudinal approach, measuring constructs across multiple points in time to understand how the relationships between awareness, trust, PTS, and WTP evolve as consumers accumulate knowledge and experience regarding the region's sustainability. This is particularly relevant in the context of the Conegliano Valdobbiadene DOCG, whose sustainability journey is still actively underway, with the Consortium aiming to achieve 100% SQNPI certification by 2029. This goal represents a significant future milestone that could alter the landscape of consumer awareness and trust. A longitudinal study would also allow for a more rigorous determination of causal directionality, addressing one of the main limitations of the cross-sectional design.

8.3.5 Moderating Variables

The present study treats the dual-path model as uniform across all consumers. Future research should investigate whether the relative strength of the cognitive and territorial-emotional pathways varies as a function of individual-level moderating variables. Particularly promising moderators include: wine involvement (consumers with higher wine involvement may be more sensitive to territorial identity cues and therefore show stronger PTS effects), prior territorial experience (consumers who have visited the Conegliano Valdobbiadene territory may have developed richer and more emotionally grounded PTS, amplifying the PTS → WTP relationship), and environmental values (consumers with stronger

pro-environmental orientations may show different patterns of trust and PTS activation in response to sustainability information).

8.3.6 PTS Scale Refinement and Formative Operationalization

The PTS scale developed in this study is a first-generation instrument that requires further validation and refinement. Future research should conduct formal scale development procedures, including exploratory factor analysis with new samples, multi-sample confirmatory testing, and cross-context replication, to establish the psychometric stability of the PTS scale across different populations and territorial contexts. Additionally, future studies should explore whether a formative or hierarchical operationalization of PTS, in which the four components (environmental, territorial, identity-based, and emotional-symbolic) are treated as distinct dimensions that constitute rather than reflect the overall construct, provides a more accurate representation of the construct's internal structure. Future scale refinement should also continue to monitor the discriminant validity between Trust and PTS, given their theoretical proximity and the HTMT value of 0.872 observed in the revised model.

8.3.7 Actual WTP Measurement

The present study measures willingness to pay through a declarative Likert scale, which captures intended rather than actual economic behaviour. Future research should complement this approach with incentive-compatible revealed preference methods (such as the Becker-DeGroot-Marschak (BDM) experimental auction employed by Galletto et al. (2021) in the specific context of the Conegliano Valdobbiadene DOCG) to obtain more behaviourally valid WTP estimates. Comparing the results of declarative and revealed preference methods in the same sample would also allow the magnitude of the social desirability and hypothetical bias identified in Section 8.2.3 to be quantified.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A - SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

Table A1. Systematic Literature Review

Author(s)	Paper	Journal	Rank ABS AJG 2024	Focus	Key Variables	Methodology	Mechanism	Main Findings
Flores (2018)	What is sustainability in the wine world? A cross-country analysis of wine sustainability frameworks	Journal of Cleaner Production	2	Conceptualization of sustainability in wine	Sustainability meaning	Conceptual paper	Conceptual/e motional	It is not possible to reduce the concept of sustainability in the wine industry solely to environmental practices. Through a comparative analysis of the various sustainability models adopted across different countries, it emerges that cultural, territorial, and identity-related dimensions are underrepresented within existing frameworks. This article aims to integrate and conceptualize place and heritage as constitutive elements of sustainability in the wine sector.
De Steur et al. (2020)	Drivers, adoption, and evaluation of sustainability practices in Italian wine SMEs	Business Strategy and the Environment	3	Adoption of sustainability practices in Italian wine SMEs	Sustainability drivers (internal/external), barriers, sustainability practices (marketing, chain, operational, innovation), heritage	Quantitative: survey (64 SMEs, two Italian wine regions), cluster analysis, correlational analysis	Conceptual	This paper identifies two groups characterized by low (30%) and high (70%) sustainability orientation. These groups differ significantly in terms of sustainability perception, key driving factors, and the adoption of sustainable practices.

Galbreath (2011)	To what extent is business responding to climate change? Evidence from a global wine producer	Journal of Business Ethics	3	Strategic response of wine firms to climate change as a sustainability driver	Sustainability practices, ecosystem services, climate change response, firm strategy	Qualitative: case study. Global wine producer	Conceptual	"The sustainability strategies adopted by wine companies are not limited to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, but also incorporate the protection of ecosystem services. Sustainability is therefore not merely a matter of regulatory compliance, but rather a strategic response to systemic environmental pressures. "
Muscio, Maghssudipour & Wang (2025)	Digital Transformation for Eco-Innovation: Evidence from Agriculture 4.0 Adoption in Wine Firms	Business Strategy and the Environment	3	How digital transformation and Agriculture 4.0 enable sustainability as a strategic differentiator in Italian wine firms	Agriculture 4.0, eco-innovation, Cleaner Production strategy, sustainable differentiation, premium market positioning, competitive advantage	Quantitative: survey-based, multi-layered empirical analysis	Conceptual	Sustainability functions as a strategic differentiation lever and a source of competitive advantage within the wine industry. Consequently, firms that adopt digital technologies exhibit a significantly greater likelihood of competing in premium and ultra-premium market segments.
Mastroberardino et al. (2020)	Sustainability in the wine sector. An empirical analysis of the level of awareness and perception among the Italian consumers	British Food Journal	1	Consumer awareness and sustainability	Awareness, perception, WTP	Empirical	Precondition	At present, consumers' awareness of sustainability initiatives and certifications within the Italian wine sector remains limited. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that even partial knowledge can influence perceptions of sustainability and consumers' propensity to purchase. This study argues that awareness represents a necessary, although not sufficient, condition for sustainability to generate value for consumers.
Pomering & Dolnicar (2009)	Assessing the prerequisite of successful CSR implementation:	Journal of Business Ethics	3	CSR awareness and consumer perception	Awareness, CSR initiatives, consumer perception	Quantitative: survey-based	Precondition	A communication gap exists insofar as consumers' awareness of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives

	consumer awareness of CSR initiatives							is systematically lower than managers tend to assume. In the absence of prior knowledge, sustainability-related communication is unable to influence consumers' attitudes or behaviors. Consequently, consumer awareness should not be underestimated.
Chen (2010)	The drivers of green brand equity: green brand image, green satisfaction and green trust	Journal of Business Ethics	3	Green trust and consumer perception	Green trust, brand image, satisfaction, consumer perception	Quantitative: survey-based, SEM	Cognitive	Consumers' trust loyalty is grounded in the brand's green image, green satisfaction, and green trust. This study aims to identify green trust as a fundamental construct underlying consumers' green behavior.
Bonn et al. (2015)	Do environmental sustainable practices of organic wine suppliers affect consumers' behavioral intentions? The moderating role of trust	Cornell Hospitality Quarterly	1	Sustainable practices & consumer behavior in wine	Sustainability, consumer trust, behavioral intention	Quantitative: survey-based	Cognitive (trust-based)	Consumers' trust in organic wine producers moderates the relationship between perceived sustainability practices and behavioral intentions. When such trust is high, behavioral outcomes become stronger and more consistent. Conversely, in its absence, consumer behavior is not influenced even in the presence of significant sustainability efforts. This demonstrates that trust acts as a necessary mediator between sustainability-related information and consumer responses.
Gorton et al. (2021)	What determines consumers' use of eco-labels? Taking a close look at label trust	Ecological Economics	3	Determinants of eco-label use	Eco-labels, trust, consumer behavior, sustainability	Quantitative: survey-based	Cognitive	Consumers' knowledge, trust in the certifying institution, and familiarity with the label determine the use of green labels. The strongest predictive factor for the adoption of green labels is trust in the institution, namely the organization issuing the certification. This study

								highlights a cognitive pathway that begins with information, develops through trust, and ultimately leads to behavioral outcomes.
Sreen & Bandyopadhyay (2025)	Who is behind the eco-label? Certification source, trust in government and their impact on consumer perceptions and willingness to pay a premium	Marketing Intelligence & Planning	2	Role of certification source and trust in shaping WTP	Eco-labels, trust, WTP, consumer perception, certification source	Experimental design	Cognitive	This study demonstrates that trust in the certifying body influences consumers' perceptions of sustainability. However, perceived product quality emerges as the direct determining factor of willingness to pay (WTP). Therefore, sustainability must be internalized as a signal of quality in order to generate economic value.
Schäufele & Hamm (2017)	Consumers' perceptions, preferences and willingness-to-pay for wine with sustainability characteristics: A review	Journal of Cleaner Production	2	Sustainability perception and willingness to pay for wine	Sustainability, wine, willingness to pay, consumer perception, eco-labels	Qualitative: systematic literature review	Cognitive	A systematic review of 34 empirical studies published between 2000 and 2016 examines sustainable wine consumption. The findings reveal a consistently positive consumer attitude across all markets. However, a gap emerges between purchase intention and actual buying behavior. Consumer knowledge, trust in labels, and the perceived credibility of sustainability attributes influence willingness to pay (WTP). The paper concludes that sustainability must be perceived as credible and meaningful in order to generate price premiums.
Warman & Lewis (2019)	Wine place research. Getting value from terroir and provenance in premium wine value chain interventions	International Journal of Wine Business Research	1	Premium wine sector, focus on place (terroir and provenance)	Terroir, provenance, wine value chain, place-based marketing,	Conceptual	Cognitive, emotional, sensory	"The "wine/place experience," in order to create value in the premium wine sector, requires the presence of four conditions: physical terroir, human expertise, narrative coherence,

					consumer perception, authenticity, storytelling			and consumer involvement. Product intrinsic attributes, together with extrinsic place-related cues, jointly generate value. Neither dimension is sufficient on its own. "
Sogari et al. (2016)	Factors driving sustainable choice: the case of wine	British Food Journal	1	Consumer perception, beliefs and attitude toward sustainable wine certification in Italy	Sustainable wine perception, environmental beliefs, certification attitude, WTP, consumer segmentation	Survey	Cognitive	This paper identifies three distinct consumer segments differentiated according to environmental beliefs, attitudes toward sustainability certifications, and willingness to pay. Consumer evaluations are significantly influenced by trust in certifications. Given the substantial heterogeneity in consumer behavior, targeted sustainability communication strategies are therefore required.
Dominici et al. (2025)	Territorial brand equity in the wine market and the role of the organic label: A consumer perspective	Food Quality and Preference	1	Territorial brand equity	Territory, organic label, value	Empirical	Emotional	Consumers' perceived value and purchase intention are positively influenced by the territorial value of the brand. Territory is conceptualized as a value-generating element that functions not merely as a signal of quality, but as an identity-based source of differentiation and meaning.
Spielmann & Charters (2013)	The dimensions of authenticity in the terroir products	International Journal of Wine Business Research	1	Wine/terroir products	Terroir dimensions, quality perception, satisfaction, purchase intention	Quantitative: survey, EFA + CFA, regression analysis	Emotional	Product, institutional, and internalized authenticity together form a multidimensional construct referred to as terroir authenticity. These three dimensions independently and positively predict perceived quality, consumer satisfaction,

								and purchase intention. Among them, internalized authenticity exhibits the strongest effect.
Coyne et al. (2025)	USA wine consumers' self-expansion to territorial brand attachment	International Journal of Hospitality Management	2	Self-expansion and emotional attachment to territorial brands	Territorial brand, emotional attachment, self-congruence, perceived value, wine involvement	Quantitative: survey-based	Emotional, cognitive	According to self-expansion theory, wine consumers develop a place-based attachment to a brand through a sequential process. This sense of well-being generates perceived value and increases wine involvement, which in turn strengthens emotional attachment to the brand. Such attachment is not purely affective, but rather originates from identity-based cognitive processes.
Cardinale et al. (2016)	Place-based brand experience, place attachment and loyalty	Marketing Intelligence & Planning	2	Place-based brand experience and consumer loyalty	Place attachment, brand experience, emotions, loyalty, wine tourism	Quantitative survey-based	Emotional	Place attachment is generated through sensory experiences and direct interactions with the wine-producing territory. This attachment acts as a mediator between brand experience and consumer loyalty. The driving force behind such attachment is the emotional quality of the place-based experience, rather than its rational evaluation. In this sense, territory represents an experiential asset of the brand.
Santos et al. (2017)	The relationship between involvement, destination emotions and place attachment in the Porto wine cellars	International Journal of Wine Business Research	1	Destination emotions and place attachment in wine tourism	Place attachment, destination emotion, involvement, behavioral intentions, wine tourism	Quantitative survey-based	Emotional, cognitive	Consumer involvement with wine activates destination-specific emotions, as examined in this paper within the context of wine tourism in Porto. These emotions subsequently drive place attachment and future behavioral intentions, while also mediating the relationship between consumer involvement

								and behavioral intentions.
Charters et al. (2017)	The nature and value of terroir products	European Journal of Marketing	3	Symbolic value of terroir in consumer perception	Terroir, perceived value, emotional connection, authenticity, identity, place attachment	Conceptual	Symbolic	According to Resource-Advantage Theory, terroir represents a place-based value proposition that is environmentally inimitable, culturally embedded, and commercially distinctive. Terroir provides consumers with identity, authenticity, and cultural rootedness, while offering producers inimitability and legal protection. Altogether, these elements enable terroir to generate competitive advantage.
Capitello et al. (2021)	Wine terroir commitment in the development of a wine destination	Cornell Hospitality Quarterly	1	Wine tourism, terroir destination	terroir, place branding, resident commitment, wine tourism, loyalty, identification, experience, territorial brand	Mixed	Emotional	The depth of the relationship between consumers, stakeholders, and a wine-producing territory is measured through the construct of Wine Territory Commitment (WTC). Five factors determine this construct: identification with the territory, territorial loyalty, experience, prestige, and residents' commitment. The strongest predictors are identification with the territory — namely, the extent to which consumers perceive the territory as central to the meaning of the wine — and loyalty to the territory.
Moon et al. (2023)	Impact of green brand authenticity on warm glow, green satisfaction, and willingness to pay more	Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing	1	Green brand authenticity, emotions and willingness to pay	Green brand authenticity, warm glow, green satisfaction, willingness to	Mixed: qualitative content analysis, quantitative survey	Emotional	An authentic “green” brand triggers a sense of well-being, which in turn enhances ecological satisfaction and consumers' willingness to pay a premium price. This paper

					pay, brand-self congruence			demonstrates that sustainability activates the emotional mechanisms underlying economic value only when it is perceived as authentic.
Wang & Wu (2016)	The impact of emotions on the intention of sustainable consumption choices: evidence from a big city in an emerging country	Journal of Cleaner Production	2	Emotional drivers of sustainable consumption	Emotions, pride, guilt, respect, anger, sustainable consumption, purchase intention	Quantitative: survey-based	Emotional	Pride is the emotion that most positively motivates sustainable consumption. Guilt, respect, and anger instead play secondary roles, with varying directional effects. Increased purchasing of sustainable products and growing resistance to non-sustainable alternatives represent the two parallel pathways through which emotions influence sustainable consumption. This paper demonstrates that emotional states elicited by sustainability have behavioral consequences. In doing so, it supports the emotional dimension of sensitivity to change as a determinant of willingness to pay (WTP).
Fernández-Ferrín et al. (2024)	Drivers of consumer's willingness to pay for fair trade food products: the role of positive and negative emotions	International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing	1	Positive and negative emotions in willingness to pay	Willingness to pay, fair trade, sustainability, emotions (pride, guilt), attitudes, valuation, S-O-R	Quantitative: survey-based	Emotional	This paper demonstrates that attitudes toward fair trade products activate positive emotions and influence product evaluation. These two factors act as mediators of consumers' willingness to pay. Furthermore, the study shows that positive moral emotions are more effective than negative ones in translating sustainability-related attitudes into economic behaviors.
Sinesio et al. (2021)	Influence of wine traits and context on liking, intention to consume,	Food Quality and Preference	1	Context and emotions in wine consumption	Wine, emotions, sensory perception,	Quantitative: experimental design	Emotional, sensory	This article compares an in-home consumption test with a laboratory-based test,

	wine-evoked emotions and perceived sensory sensations				liking, consumption intention			demonstrating that naturalistic consumption contexts significantly alter the emotions and sensory perceptions elicited by wine when compared to a controlled laboratory setting. However, these differences do not affect overall liking or consumption intention. The findings therefore suggest that emotional responses to wine are strongly context-dependent.
Martini (2023)	Differentiating emotions in the theory of planned behavior: evidence of improved prediction in relation to sustainable food consumerism	British Food Journal	1	Emotions and sustainable food consumerism	Emotions, moral emotions, sustainable consumption, TPB, food consumer behavior	Quantitative: survey-based	Emotional, cognitive	According to the Theory of Planned Behavior, a distinction exists between anticipatory and moral emotions. Feelings of guilt and pride significantly improve the model's ability to predict intentions to purchase sustainable food products. Moral emotions operate independently and in parallel with attitudes and subjective norms, thereby strengthening behavioral intentions even when cognitive evaluations are neutral or ambiguous.
Melewar & Skinner (2020)	Territorial brand management: Beer, authenticity, and sense of place	Journal of Business Research	3	Territorial brand management and the role of terroir in conveying authenticity and place-based identity	Terroir, brand authenticity, sense of place, brand origin, country of origin, consumer perception	Mixed: case study, in-depth interviews with management, survey	Emotional	The key differentiating factor of territorial brands lies in place-based authenticity. Products perceived as authentically connected to a specific place encourage consumers to pay a premium price. However, place of origin is perceived differently across consumer groups; consequently, a clear understanding of this mechanism is essential for the effective management of a territorial brand.

Spielmann & Williams (2016)	It goes with the territory: Communal leverage as a marketing resource	Journal of Business Research	3	How territorial identity and communal resources are leveraged as collective marketing assets in wine regions	Territorial identity, communal leverage, place-based marketing, collective brand, consumer perception	Quantitative: survey-based. Structural analysis	Emotional	Consumers perceive greater value when producers enhance and promote place-based common resources, as territorial identity represents an important marketing asset. This identity enables premium positioning insofar as it strengthens authenticity and differentiation.
Reitsamer & Becker (2024)	How do customers experience terroir? An investigation of its ability to increase brand relationship quality	Journal of Business Research	3	Consumer perception of terroir and its impact on brand relationship quality through authenticity and psychological distance	Terroir perception, brand authenticity, psychological distance, brand relationship quality, perceived value	Exploratory qualitative and quantitative	Emotional	Perceived authenticity and psychological proximity to place represent the two mechanisms through which terroir perception enhances the quality of the consumer–brand relationship. When consumers perceive a product as authentically connected to a specific territory, they develop stronger affective bonds with the brand. The underlying premise is that place-based identity generates both relational and economic value.
Spielmann, Williams & Kohli (2024)	Local Roots and Global Responsibility: Terroir Brands and Their Responsible Engagement	Journal of International Marketing	3	How terroir brands manage collective identity and responsible engagement across local and global markets	Terroir branding, collective brand, territorial identity, GI, brand responsibility, place-based competitive advantage	Multi-industry analysis	Emotional	Expansion beyond the original territory risks weakening the meaning of the brand's identity and generating perceptions of inauthenticity. This occurs because territorial brands create value through a collective identity that is deeply rooted in the place itself.
Netemeyer et al. (2004)	Developing and validating measures of facets of customer-based brand equity	Journal of Business Research	3	Price premium and brand equity	Price premium, brand equity, willingness to pay	Quantitative: scale development, CFA	Behavioral	This paper aims to validate consumers' willingness to pay a price premium as a distinct and reliable dimension of brand equity through a multi-study scale development process (EFA, CFA, and nomological validation). The findings

								demonstrate that the price premium is driven by perceived quality and brand associations. Moreover, it predicts purchase intention independently of the other dimensions of brand equity.
Delmas & Gergaud (2021)	Sustainable practices and product quality: Is there value in eco-label certification? The case of wine	Ecological Economics	3	Eco-labels and wine value	Certification, quality perception, WTP	Quantitative: empirical	Behavioral	The price premium associated with green certification is measurable in terms of quality within the wine market; however, its effects vary depending on the type of certification. For instance, organically produced wines certified by third parties tend to command higher prices, whereas self-declared sustainability claims exert a weaker effect. This paper highlights that the credibility of the certifying body significantly influences the price premium generated by green labels. In doing so, it links sustainability communication to the creation of economic value.
Pomarici & Vecchio (2014)	Millennial generation attitudes to sustainable wine: An exploratory study on Italian consumers	Journal of Cleaner Production	2	Millennial consumer attitudes and purchase intentions toward sustainable wine in Italy	Sustainability awareness, eco-labels, willingness to buy, purchase intention, consumer segmentation	Quantitative: online survey (Italian millennial consumers), descriptive, inferential analysis	Behavioral	Although millennials display a positive attitude toward sustainable wine, they demonstrate limited knowledge of eco-labels. Actual purchasing behavior regarding sustainable wine is influenced by familiarity with the label and the clarity of the information provided. Awareness and information therefore act as mediators between sustainability values and purchasing decisions.
Galletto et al. (2021)	Do consumers really recognise a distinct quality hierarchy	British Food Journal	1	Consumer WTP and quality perception of Conegliano	WTP, quality perception, PDO hierarchy, GI	Quantitative: non-hypothetical Becker-DeGroot-	Behavioral	The reputation of the Geographical Indication (GI) establishes the superiority of

	amongst PDO sparkling wines? The answer from experimental auctions			Valdobbiadene Prosecco DOCG vs Prosecco DOC	reputation, information effects, price premium, experimental auctions	Marschak (BDM) experimental auction		Conegliano Valdobbiadene DOCG over Prosecco DOC, rather than the intrinsic sensory quality of the product itself.
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APPENDIX B - RESEARCH POSITIONING

Table B1. Research Positioning

Study Stream	Product Context	Type of Emotion	Mechanism	Outcome focuses	Main Limitations
Sustainability (wine/food)	Wine, food	None/weak	Cognitive (knowledge, trust)	WTP, purchase intention	Neglect of emotional dimension
Sustainable consumption (general)	Food	Moral emotions (guilt, pride, warm glow)	Emotional → cognitive	WTP, intention	Not applied to wine or territory
Wine consumption (hedonic)	Wine	Hedonic / sensory emotions	Emotional, experiential	Liking, consumption	No link with sustainability
Territory & terroir	Wine	Symbolic / identity-based emotions	Emotional, place attachment	Perceived value, loyalty	No link with sustainability perception
Integrated study	Mixed	Mixed emotions	Cognitive, emotional	Behavior	Fragmented and incomplete
THIS STUDY (PTS model)	Wine, sustainability, territory	Hedonic, moral, symbolic emotions	Integrated emotional, cognitive, experiential	Perceived value, WTP, perception	-

APPENDIX C - CONSTRUCT OPERATIONALIZATION

Table C1. Construct Operationalization and Measurement Sources

Construct	Dimension	Type	N. Items	Measurement	Reference Scale	Paper	Journal	ABS AJG 2024	Adaptation	Definition
Awareness (AW)	Unidimensional: cognitive awareness of sustainable initiatives	Reflective	4	7-point Likert (1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree)	Adapted from Pomeroy & Dolnicar (2009): CSR Awareness Scale	Assessing the prerequisite of successful CSR implementation: consumer awareness of CSR initiatives	Journal of Business Ethics	3	CSR/sustainability awareness adapted from firm-level to territorial context	The extent to which consumers recognize, are informed about, and are exposed to sustainability initiatives promoted within a specific territory
Trust in Territorial Sustainability (TR)	Unidimensional: credibility, reliability, integrity, and confidence toward territorial sustainability	Reflective	4	7-point Likert (1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree)	Adapted from Chen (2010): Green Trust Scale	The drivers of green brand equity: green brand image, green satisfaction and green trust	Journal of Business Ethics	3	The original green trust scale (brand-level) was adapted to a territorial context by replacing the focal object (brand → territory). Items capture credibility, consistency, integrity and confidence, avoiding overlap with PTS	The extent to which consumers perceive a territory as credible, reliable, and genuinely committed to sustainability, and feel confident in relying on the sustainability information and actions associated with that territory
Perceived Territorial Sustainability (PTS)	Unidimensional: environmental, territorial, identity-based, and emotional-symbolic dimensions of sustainability perception	Reflective	6	7-point Likert (1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree)	Original scale developed for this study. Drawing mainly on Charters et al. (2017)	The nature and value of terroir products	European Journal of Marketing	3	Developed by integrating terroir dimensions (territorial identity, authenticity, symbolic value) with sustainability perception measures. Conceptualizes sustainability as an intrinsic and	The extent to which consumers perceive sustainability as an intrinsic, authentic, and value-generating characteristic of a specific territory, integrating environmental practices, territorial identity, and emotional meaning

									value-generating characteristic of the territory, not merely a technical attribute	
Willingness to Pay (WTP)	Unidimensional: price premium willingness	Reflective	4	7-point Likert (1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree)	Adapted from Netemeyer et al. (2004): Price Premium Scale	Developing and validating measures of facets of customer-based brand equity	Journal of Business Research	3	General WTP price premium scale adapted to the wine sector, specifying the Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore D.O.C.G. Additional items capture the role of sustainability and territorial value in justifying the price premium	The extent to which consumers are willing to pay a higher price for a product compared to similar alternatives, reflecting the value attributed to its characteristics, including sustainability and territorial origin

APPENDIX D - SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire was administered in Italian to Italian wine consumers. An English translation is provided below for reference.

A.1 Italian Version (administered)

Titolo: Questionario sulla percezione della sostenibilità nel territorio del Conegliano-Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore D.O.C.G.

Dichiarazione introduttiva: Questo questionario ha finalità esclusivamente accademiche e mira a comprendere come i consumatori percepiscono la sostenibilità nel territorio del Conegliano-Valdobbiadene e come tale percezione influenzi le loro scelte di acquisto. Le risposte sono anonime e saranno utilizzate solo a fini di ricerca.

Sezione 1: informazioni socio-demografiche e di screening

1. Età
2. Genere
3. Regione di residenza
4. Con quale frequenza consumi vino? (Mai / Meno di una volta al mese / 1-3 volte al mese / 1-2 volte a settimana / 3 o più volte a settimana)
5. Acquisti personalmente vino? (Sì / No)
6. Hai mai acquistato o degustato un Prosecco Conegliano-Valdobbiadene D.O.C.G.? (Sì / No)
7. Conosci il territorio del Conegliano-Valdobbiadene D.O.C.G.? (Lo conosco bene / Lo conosco abbastanza / Ne ho solo sentito parlare / Non lo conosco)
8. Negli ultimi 12 mesi hai consumato almeno una volta un Prosecco Conegliano-Valdobbiadene D.O.C.G.? (Sì / No / Non ricordo)

Sezione 2: item di misurazione

Per ciascuna delle seguenti affermazioni, indica il tuo grado di accordo utilizzando una scala da 1 (Totalmente in disaccordo) a 7 (Totalmente d'accordo).

Awareness - Consapevolezza

- AW1. Sono consapevole che la sostenibilità è un tema importante nel settore del vino.
- AW2. Sono stato/a esposto/a a informazioni sulla sostenibilità del territorio (es. etichette, campagne, eventi).
- AW3. Ho familiarità con alcune pratiche sostenibili adottate nel territorio.
- AW4. Quando scelgo un vino, presto attenzione agli aspetti di sostenibilità legati al territorio.

Trust - Fiducia nella sostenibilità territoriale

- TR1. Credo che le informazioni sulla sostenibilità comunicate dal territorio siano credibili.
- TR2. Ritengo che le azioni di sostenibilità del territorio siano coerenti nel tempo.
- TR3. Credo che il territorio sia realmente impegnato nella sostenibilità.
- TR4. Mi sento sicuro/a nel fare affidamento sulle dichiarazioni di sostenibilità del territorio.

Perceived Territorial Sustainability - Percezione della sostenibilità territoriale

- PTS1. Percepisco il territorio del Conegliano-Valdobbiadene come ambientalmente sostenibile.
- PTS2. La sostenibilità è parte integrante dell'identità del territorio.
- PTS3. La sostenibilità di questo territorio mi appare autentica e genuina.
- PTS4. Associo questo territorio a pratiche responsabili verso l'ambiente e la comunità locale.
- PTS5. La sostenibilità aumenta il valore percepito dei vini di questo territorio.
- PTS6. La sostenibilità di questo territorio rende i suoi vini più significativi per me.

Willingness to Pay - Disponibilità a pagare

- WTP1. Sono disposto/a a pagare un prezzo più alto per il Conegliano-Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore DOCG rispetto ad altri vini comparabili.
- WTP2. Sceglerei questo vino anche se costa più di alternative simili.
- WTP3. Sono disposto/a a pagare un sovrapprezzo per vini di questo territorio grazie alla loro sostenibilità.
- WTP4. La sostenibilità di questo territorio giustifica un prezzo più elevato per i suoi vini.

A.2 English Translation (for reference only)

Title: Survey on the Perception of Sustainability in the Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore DOCG Territory

Introductory Statement: This questionnaire is intended exclusively for academic purposes and aims to understand how consumers perceive sustainability in the Conegliano Valdobbiadene territory and how this perception influences their purchasing decisions. Responses are anonymous and will be used solely for research purposes.

Section 1: Socio-demographic and Screening Information

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Region of residence
4. How frequently do you consume wine? (Never / Less than once a month / 1–3 times a month / 1–2 times a week / 3 or more times a week)
5. Do you personally purchase wine? (Yes / No)
6. Have you ever purchased or tasted a Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore DOCG? (Yes / No)
7. Are you familiar with the Conegliano Valdobbiadene DOCG territory? (I know it well / I know it somewhat / I have only heard of it / I do not know it)

8. In the past 12 months, have you consumed a Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore D.O.C.G. at least once? (Yes / No / I do not remember)

Section 2: Measurement Items

For each of the following statements, please indicate your level of agreement on a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree).

Awareness

- AW1. I am aware that sustainability is an important topic in the wine sector.
- AW2. I have been exposed to information about the sustainability of this territory (e.g. labels, campaigns, events).
- AW3. I am familiar with some of the sustainable practices adopted in this territory.
- AW4. When choosing a wine, I pay attention to sustainability aspects related to the territory of origin.

Trust

- TR1. I believe that the sustainability information communicated by this territory is credible.
- TR2. I consider the territory's sustainability actions to be consistent over time.
- TR3. I believe that this territory is genuinely committed to sustainability.
- TR4. I feel confident relying on this territory's sustainability claims.

Perceived Territorial Sustainability (PTS)

- PTS1. I perceive the Conegliano Valdobbiadene territory as environmentally sustainable.
- PTS2. Sustainability is an integral part of this territory's identity.
- PTS3. The sustainability of this territory appears authentic and genuine to me.
- PTS4. I associate this territory with responsible practices toward the environment and the local community.

- PTS5. Sustainability increases the perceived value of the wines from this territory.
- PTS6. The sustainability of this territory makes its wines more personally meaningful to me.

Willingness to Pay (WTP)

- WTP1. I am willing to pay a higher price for Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore D.O.C.G. compared to other comparable wines.
- WTP2. I would choose this wine even if it costs more than similar alternatives.
- WTP3. I am willing to pay a price premium for wines from this territory due to their sustainability.
- WTP4. The sustainability of this territory justifies a higher price for its wines.

APPENDIX E - DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Table E1. Descriptive Statistics of All Indicators

Item	Construct	Mean	SD	Median	Min	Max
AW1	Awareness	5.89	1.29	6	1	7
AW2	Awareness	4.72	1.69	5	1	7
AW3	Awareness	4.07	1.88	4	1	7
AW4	Awareness	3.84	1.80	4	1	7
TR1	Trust	4.54	1.46	5	1	7
TR2	Trust	4.30	1.36	4	1	7
TR3	Trust	4.35	1.55	5	1	7
TR4	Trust	4.39	1.58	4	1	7
PTS1	PTS	4.34	1.67	5	1	7
PTS2	PTS	4.94	1.68	5	1	7
PTS3	PTS	4.46	1.50	5	1	7
PTS4	PTS	4.35	1.67	5	1	7
PTS5	PTS	5.14	1.53	6	1	7
PTS6	PTS	4.62	1.82	5	1	7
WTP1	WTP	4.77	1.77	5	1	7
WTP2	WTP	4.69	1.73	5	1	7
WTP3	WTP	4.47	1.69	5	1	7
WTP4	WTP	4.58	1.70	5	1	7

Note: N = 139. Scale range: 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). SD = Standard Deviation. The final measurement model uses AW1, AW4, TR1–TR4, PTS1, PTS2, PTS4, and WTP1–WTP4. Remaining indicators (AW2, AW3, PTS3, PTS5, PTS6) were collected but excluded following item purification.

APPENDIX F - CONSTRUCT CORRELATION MATRIX

Table F1: Construct Correlation Matrix

	AW	TR	PTS	WTP
AW	1.000			
TR	0.327	1.000		
PTS	0.310	0.823	1.000	
WTP	0.109	0.521	0.598	1.000

Note: N = 139. Construct scores computed as the mean of respective indicators. Pearson correlations.

APPENDIX G - R CODE FOR PLS-SEM ANALYSIS

The following R code was used to estimate the PLS-SEM model using the `seminr` package (version 2.3.2) in R (version 4.5.2).

```
# Load required packages

library(seminr)

library(psych)

# 1. DATA IMPORT

# Dataset contains 18 indicators (AW1-4, TR1-4, PTS1-6, WTP1-4)

# Final model uses: AW1, AW4, TR1-4, PTS1, PTS2, PTS4, WTP1-4

data <- read.csv("data_smartpls.csv")

cat("Data loaded:", nrow(data), "observations,", ncol(data), "variables\n")

# 2. MEASUREMENT MODEL SPECIFICATION

# Note: PTS scale revised from 6 to 3 items following measurement model
assessment.

# PTS3 excluded (overlap with Trust); PTS5 and PTS6 excluded (potential
consequences of PTS).

# Final PTS indicators: PTS1, PTS2, PTS4.

mm <- constructs(

  reflective("AW", c("AW1", "AW4")),

  reflective("TR", multi_items("TR", 1:4)),

  reflective("PTS", c("PTS1", "PTS2", "PTS4")),

  reflective("WTP", multi_items("WTP", 1:4))

)

# Note: AW scale revised from 4 to 2 items following measurement model
assessment.
```

```
# AW2 and AW3 excluded due to low loadings (< 0.60).
# Final AW indicators: AW1, AW4. CR = 0.594, AVE = 0.424 — below thresholds.
# Results involving AW treated as provisional findings.
```

3. STRUCTURAL MODEL SPECIFICATION

```
sm <- relationships(
  paths(from = "AW", to = c("TR", "PTS")),
  paths(from = "TR", to = "WTP"),
  paths(from = "PTS", to = "WTP")
)
```

4. PLS-SEM ESTIMATION

```
pls_model <- estimate_pls(
  data = data,
  measurement_model = mm,
  structural_model = sm
)
```

```
sum_model <- summary(pls_model)
```

5. MEASUREMENT MODEL ASSESSMENT

Factor loadings

```
cat("\n=== FACTOR LOADINGS ===\n")
print(sum_model$loadings)
```

Reliability and convergent validity

(Cronbach's Alpha, rhoA, Composite Reliability, AVE)

```
cat("\n=== RELIABILITY AND CONVERGENT VALIDITY ===\n")
print(sum_model$reliability)
```

Discriminant validity (HTMT)

```

cat("\n=== HTMT — DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY ===\n")
print(sum_model$validity$htmt)

# 6. STRUCTURAL MODEL — BOOTSTRAPPING

boot_model <- bootstrap_model(
  seminr_model = pls_model,
  nboot      = 5000,
  seed      = 123
)

sum_boot <- summary(boot_model, alpha = 0.05)

# Path coefficients with bootstrapped significance

cat("\n=== PATH COEFFICIENTS (Bootstrapped) ===\n")
print(sum_boot$bootstrapped_paths)

# R-squared values

cat("\n=== R-SQUARED VALUES ===\n")
print(sum_model$paths)


# 7. PREDICTIVE RELEVANCE Q2 — Stone-Geisser via PLSpredict

blindfold_out <- predict_pls(
  model = pls_model,
  technique = predict_DA,
  noFolds = 7,
  reps = 10
)

sum_blind <- summary(blindfold_out)

print(sum_blind$construct_error)

```

```

#  $Q^2 = 1 - (\text{OOS\_MSE} / \text{observed variance})$ 

var_TR <- var(rowMeans(data[, c("TR1","TR2","TR3","TR4")]))
var_PTS <- var(rowMeans(data[, c("PTS1","PTS2","PTS4")]))
var_WTP <- var(rowMeans(data[, c("WTP1","WTP2","WTP3","WTP4")]))

Q2_TR <- 1 - (sum_blind$construct_error["OOS_MSE","TR"] / var_TR)
Q2_PTS <- 1 - (sum_blind$construct_error["OOS_MSE","PTS"] / var_PTS)
Q2_WTP <- 1 - (sum_blind$construct_error["OOS_MSE","WTP"] / var_WTP)

cat("Q2 TR:", round(Q2_TR, 3), "\n")
cat("Q2 PTS:", round(Q2_PTS, 3), "\n")
cat("Q2 WTP:", round(Q2_WTP, 3), "\n")

```

8. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

```

cat("\n=== DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS ===\n")
desc <- psych::describe(data[, c("mean", "sd", "median", "min", "max")])
print(round(desc, 3))

```

9. CONSTRUCT CORRELATION MATRIX

```

cat("\n=== CONSTRUCT CORRELATION MATRIX ===\n")
cor_matrix <- cor(data.frame(
  AW = rowMeans(data[, c("AW1","AW4")]),
  TR = rowMeans(data[, c("TR1","TR2","TR3","TR4")]),
  # Note: PTS composite score computed using final 3-item scale (PTS1, PTS2, PTS4)
  PTS = rowMeans(data[, c("PTS1","PTS2","PTS4")]),
  WTP = rowMeans(data[, c("WTP1","WTP2","WTP3","WTP4")])

```

```
))  
print(round(cor_matrix, 3))
```

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