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SUSTAINABLE AND RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

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7.2 INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980s, western economies seem to have entered a phase of "economic coalescence". This phenomenon has greatly contributed to important changes across the world map in economic dynamism and the emergence of new territories, which in turn have driven changes in regional development policies and strategies. At the European Union level, the regional policies implemented tend to focus on reducing regional imbalances by promoting the economic competitiveness of territories, aiming simultaneously to preserve social cohesion. In this new scenario, tourism could play a major role as it is an industry that leads to significant interaction among territories, facilitating important contact between communities. Its development potential, however, remains far from fully explored.

Tourism is commonly presented as an activity that has been following a path of increasing growth due to circumstances arising from: (i) the considerable increase in leisure time which people have access to; (ii) changes in consumption patterns; (iii) the increase of people's mobility; (iv) changes in family structures; (v) greater allocation of vacation time throughout the year; (vi) the spread of the new information technologies, allowing people to more easily access information about places and their attractiveness; (vii) the dissemination of new values of society, and (viii) the internationalization and globalization of economies (Cunha, 1997; Mota, Remoaldo, and Cadima Ribeiro, 2010; Vogeler Ruiz and Hernández Armand, 1997).

In Portugal, tourism is already a major economic activity, with significant growth potential and impacts on wealth and employment. At present, tourism represents 10% of Portuguese GDP and accounts for 10% of the workforce employment (Lopes, 2010).

The small town of Ponte de Lima is one of the oldest in Portugal. It is endowed with a wealth of natural resources, a remarkable architectural and gastronomic heritage, and strong social traditions. Supported by such environmental and patrimonial wealth and traditions, Ponte de Lima has the potential to become a creative city and, thus, to be able to develop new and more attractive tourism products.

Cultural tourism was one of the segments outlined by the National Strategic Tourism Plan (PENT) for development in Portugal in the period 2006–2015. In that context, the Minho-Lima region is thought to have one of the greatest tourism potentials in the whole country, specifically as regards developing a creative cultural dimension.

According to the aims of PENT, of the 10 strategic tourism products predicted for sustainable development, environmental tourism and cultural and landscape touring feature as the main growth products for the Northern region of Portugal and the city of Oporto.

The chapter is structured as follows: in Section 7.2.1, we present an overview of a few tourism concepts, focusing in particular on tourism resources and cultural tourism; in Section 7.3, we set out the methodology used; in Section 7.4, we proceed to an evaluation of the consistency of the tourism strategy followed in the Minho-Lima region based on an

CHAPTER

7

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS FOR TOURISM IN THE MINHO-LIMA REGION (Northwest Portugal)

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7.1 ABSTRACT

In administering their territories, most local municipalities aim to preserve their natural, historical and ethnographical resources while simultaneously using them to increase revenue and employment. In order to efficiently promote the products and services available and attract tourists, decision makers, both private and public, need to know and incorporate tourists' preferences in their marketing strategies.

In this chapter, we illustrate the use of stated preferences as an instrument to identify national and foreign tourists' preferences regarding the products and services that the touristic destination of the Minho-Lima region (Northwest Portugal) should offer. As a starting point, we have taken the three general groups of touristic resources mentioned above as attributes. We take Ponte de Lima, a municipality in this region that has a strong cultural tourism potential, as an example to identify possible future tourism scenarios for this territory.

We believe the previously identified methodology can be a valuable instrument in the identification of the strengths and weaknesses of the selected territory and, thus, support the decision making process behind its future tourist development and marketing strategies.

analysis of the results from a questionnaire applied to visitors and interviews conducted with local and regional tourism agents; the final section offers a few concluding remarks about possible strategies for achieving a consolidation of the Minho-Lima region as a cultural tourism destination, using Ponte de Lima as an example.

7.2.1 Territorial Tourism Resources and Cultural Tourism

Natural, historical and ethnographical resources are the base sources for the development of territories. This being a fact, any regions and towns aiming to increase revenue and employment should envisage preserving these resources. As resources are invariably scarce, particularly financial and human ones, any planning process implies a selection process and an evaluation of the available alternatives.

The existing tourism resources can provide a starting point for the definition of alternatives, and knowing the tourists' opinion on these resources can provide a more solid basis for selecting strategic alternatives appropriate to their preferences and the characteristics of the territory under analysis.

In recent decades, tourism destinations have been confronted with a new generation of tourists that have shown increasing preference for more diversified tourism products, including cultural ones. This has made cultural tourism a more complex segment of tourism activity (Besculides, Lee and McCormick, 2002; Hu, Horng and Sun, 2009; Pulido Fernández and Sánchez Rivero, 2009; Vareiro, Cadima Ribeiro, Remoaldo and Marques, 2011).

In a comprehensive approach, cultural tourism can be defined as every trip made by individuals to unusual places with the aim of increasing their cultural level, furthering their knowledge of historic facts, interacting with people of a different culture and having access to new knowledge and experiences (Simeon, Buonincontri and Trapani, 2009). In a more restricted sense, cultural tourism can be broadly defined as travelling for cultural and education reasons (Henriques, 2007).

In the context of changing consumer behaviour, tourism destinations can only continue supplying "traditional" cultural tourism if they are willing to accept a loss of customers. An alternative way of dealing with the changes experienced by the tourism markets is to develop new products and concepts, like those associated with creative tourism (Richards, 2009).

The concept of creativity appears to be capable of making a contribution to the changes needed in the traditional strategies followed by cultural tourism destinations and of facilitating the emergence of a more active dimension in the tourist experience.

Creativity is a complex and multidisciplinary concept, and is recognized as being one which is difficult to define (Landry et al., 1996). In general terms, it is the search for different solutions and products to be made available to the general society and to individuals, implying some or all of the following: bringing something new into our life; producing an invention, and using the imagination. That is, it has to do with the capacity to solve unexpected problems or problems that have been identified. Real creativity involves searching by trial and error, originality, breaking rules, being unconventional, building upon future scenarios, and a flexible and lateral way of looking at issues and situations (Landry et al., 1996).

For Florida (2002), the creative class includes scientists, engineers, university teachers, artists, designers and writers, researchers and analysts, and architects, among others. What these different kinds of workers have in common is what he calls a creative "ethos", which is a certain way of working with creativity, singularity, originality and merit.

Richards and Raymond (2000) defined creative tourism as a product which offers tourists the opportunity to develop their own creative potential through an active participation in the tourism experiences made available by the package of resources in the tourism destination they are visiting. For Richards and Wilson (2006), creativity gives value to places and cultural products, makes new products available, and secures the sustainability of the destination. These are just some of the reasons behind the thinking that creative tourism is a good alternative to traditional cultural tourism. In addition, it is well recognized that people travel to visit archaeological and historic places to experience the *atmosphere of those places*, to make contact with places and cities seen as having strong symbolic images (Cadima Ribeiro and Remoaldo, 2011; Riganti, 2009). The featuring of these places can be achieved through the implementation of creative cultural events, such as the 2012 European Cultural Capital in Guimarães, or, in a more restricted sense, through the renewal of certain urban quarters, like that of Bairro dos Couros, in Guimarães (a municipality also located in Northwest Portugal).

The complexity of the tourism market and the increase of segment diversity demands a well-conceived and properly defined strategy, supported by close partnerships with tourism operators, prime community actors and other stakeholders (Besculides, Lee, and McCormick, 2002; Kuvan and Akan, 2005; Pulido Fernández and Sánchez Rivero, 2009; Vareiro, L., Cadima Ribeiro, J., Remoaldo, P. and Marques, 2011).

7.3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter makes use of the results of a survey applied between May and December 2006, by Vareiro, Cadima Ribeiro, and Pardellas (2009), and of data from interviews with local and regional tourism agents, implemented between April and May 2010, by Mota, Remoaldo, and Cadima Ribeiro (2010). While in the first empirical investigation, the aim was to capture the (declared) preferences of 350 respondents, the second investigation envisaged capturing the views on the tourism phenomenon of 13 agents from representative institutions of Ponte de Lima and from some other territories that were directly or indirectly associated with regional tourism development. Both investigations studied tourism development in the Minho-Lima region, although the second was more specifically focused on the reality of the municipality of Ponte de Lima, one of the municipalities in this region.

In the first study, the empirical approach followed was based on stated preferences, a technique where data is obtained from the choices declared by individuals about hypothetical situations of consumption through a structured questionnaire (Vareiro, Cadima Ribeiro, and Pardellas, 2009). "Because it relies on individual's statements about their preferences or choices, this approach has become known as 'stated preference' (or choice) analysis" (Louvière and Timmermans, 1990, p. 10).

From a range of stated preference techniques developed in recent years, we chose to use Conjoint Analysis techniques in this particular investigation. These techniques are a family of survey-based methodologies for modelling preferences for certain products, where products are described in terms of their attributes or characteristics and the levels that these take (Louviere and Timmermans, 1990; Merino-Castelló, 2003). In Conjoint Analysis, therefore, the choice process is determined by the utilities associated at the product representation levels of a set of attributes.

Following Luce and Tukey (1964), Conjoint Analysis is a methodology that is used to analyze the action or conjoint effect of two or more independent variables on a dependent variable, or to determine the contribution of the independent variables (levels) and their respective values (utilities) for the consumers' preferences for goods or services.

One of the advantages of these techniques over revealed preference methods, and which is of particular interest to our study, is the possibility to control the attribute levels that configure the choice alternatives and the context (questionnaire) through which data are obtained. This makes it possible to evaluate possible former interventions, that is to say, before the questionnaire's application (i.e., through hypothetical attributes and levels). One of the disadvantages, as highlighted by Rodríguez and González (2002), is the effort exerted by each respondent as they move through the choice sequence, making fatigue probable, and resulting in a final loss of quality in their answers.

Besides a revision of the literature, a consultation with experts was held in order to define the particular tourism attributes in the territory to be used in the questionnaire. In this case, the experts consulted were employees from each municipal delegation of Alto Minho's Tourist Board (RTAM); hotels and restaurant owners; public and private agents with connections to tourism, and other researchers working in this area. Based on these consultations, and following the recommendations of Green and Srinivasan (1990), who suggest that a full-profile data collection method should be used in studies with only six or fewer attributes, four attributes were selected. Wittink et al. (1982, cf. Trinidad and Rotondaro, 2004) verified that attributes with larger number of levels have, proportionally, more importance than those with few levels, which suggests that a uniform number of levels should be used among different attributes.

Taking into consideration the before mentioned concerns and recommendations, three attributes were presented with three levels and one as a variable including four levels:

- ◆ *Natural resources (water)*: oceanic beaches, fluvial beaches, and rivers
- ◆ *Natural resources (land)*: national parks or protected landscape, natural recreation and leisure parks, and mountains
- ◆ *Ethnographical resources*: handicraft, festivals and gastronomy
- ◆ *Historical resources*: archaeological patrimony, religious patrimony, military patrimony and civil patrimony.

According to Louviere and Timmermans (1990), a profile is the designation given in the literature of Conjoint Analysis to each combination of attribute levels. After having defined the attributes and their levels, it was necessary to design these profiles or choice alternatives to be presented to tourists.

As such, it was necessary to determine the number of profiles that respondents were able to handle. It is important to get a certain balance between the maximization of the level of information obtained and the fatigue effect that arises when the questionnaire is too long or complex, or the exercises that the respondent should complete are repetitive (Dellaert, Brazell, and Louviere, 1999; Swait and Adamowicz, 1997).

If we use all the possible profiles (combinations and attribute levels) in a study, it is called a complete factorial design. However, in practice, complete factorial design is rarely used because the number of possible combinations is, usually, impracticable. For example, the factorial design of an experience with x attributes with a levels, and y attributes with b levels includes $a^x b^y$ combinations, the total number of situations required to identify all the effects and interactions. In our case, that meant $3^3 \times 4 = 108$ possible different combinations of levels.

An alternative is to show respondents only a small set of possible combinations, that is, to use fractional factorial designs to construct profiles (Haider, 2002; Louviere and Timmermans, 1990; Louviere, Hensher and Swait, 2000).

In this study, applying the fractional factorial design solution obtained 12 combinations/profiles (Vareiro, Cadima Ribeiro and Pardellas, 2009).

Once the profiles/choice alternatives have been defined, respondents are requested to classify the cards/profiles according to their preference. They could be asked to rank the various alternatives, to rate them or to choose their most preferred.

For the data collection process, a questionnaire was designed and then applied to tourists in several municipalities between May and December of 2006. A total of 350 complete questionnaires were obtained, 74 from foreign tourists and 276 from national tourists (Vareiro, Cadima Ribeiro, and Pardellas, 2009).

In order to formulate the model that is capable of explaining the relationship between the evaluations in the form of preference levels (dependent variable) and the different attribute levels chosen as determinant of the product in question (independent variables), the independent variables must have the dummy code (0, 1). In this way, the presence or absence of a certain level of a specific attribute will be defined by the value 1 or 0 of the correspondent variable dummy in the model. Therefore, the model to estimate is as follows:

$$y_t = \alpha + \sum_{i=1}^I \sum_{j=1}^J \beta_{ij} x_{ij} + e_t$$

where

y_t = evaluation of preference or hierarchy that represents the level of preference associated with profile t expressed by the respondent

α = constant

β_{ij} = coefficient or part-worth utility corresponding to level j of i attribute

x_{ij} = 1 if level j of i attribute is present in profile t

x_{ij} = 0 if level j of i attribute is not present in the profile t

e_t = estimate residue.

Besides the estimative for each attribute level, which are referred to as part-worth utilities, we also determined the importance of each attribute.

The analysis of data and the reliability test applied to estimates were accomplished through SPSS Conjoint 15.0.

The technique used to approach the regional and local agents, taken as privileged sources of information, was the semi-structured interview, a qualitative methodological approach to collecting data. This empirical approach was considered rewarding because it would allow for collecting different live experiences and, at the same time, ensure a large degree of flexibility to our communications with the interviewees. Specifically, this approach allowed us to adapt the questions to inquire about the specificities of each of the interviewees, taking into account the different nature of the institutions contacted. Prior to this, we had established a certain number of categories that would give some consistency and uniformity to the various interviews to be implemented. The organizing categories predicted in the 25 questions used were: (i) region and tourism region; (ii) marketing and promotion; (iii) the strategy defined in the aims of the Tourism Strategic National Plan; (iv) working areas where the organizations contacted commonly operated; (v) projects; (vi) partnerships and cooperation between tourism agents; (vii) resources; (viii) planning strategy; (ix) cultural tourism development; (x) cultural tourism potentialities.

One of the criteria used in the selection of the interviewees was to ensure the representation of the main agents directly and indirectly linked to tourism development in the Minho-Lima region and in the Oporto and Northern Portugal tourism promotional area. To this end, a list of the institutions in the target territory was drawn up. The resulting sample included 13 institutional local and regional agents, dispersed geographically by the municipality of Ponte de Lima and Northern Portugal, and ranging from a tourism expert working in the Northern Region Coordination and Development Commission (CCDR-N), the Head of the Tourism Office, the Municipal Tourism Councillor, the Manager of the Nautical Club, two professors (one from polytechnic and the other from a private university), and some technicians from various local museums and from regional and local development associations (e.g., ADRIL and TURIHAB). The Cultural Programme Director of the 2012 Guimarães European Capital of Culture was also interviewed, as Guimarães is a nearby municipality, and as such Ponte de Lima can, we believe, profit from the mega-event that will take place there during 2012.

7.4 EVALUATION OF THE TOURISM STRATEGIES FOLLOWED IN THE MINHO-LIMA REGION

7.4.1 Tourism Resources and Stated Preferences

As regards the first survey and the existing resources of the tourism destination, the results obtained are shown in Table 7.1.

The quality of the adjustment was verified via the calculation of the correlation coefficient among the classifications stated by the tourists that compose the sample and the classifications foreseen for the model, applying the *tau* of Kendall and the Pearson correlation

Table 7.1 Estimates of utilities and importance of the attributes (total of respondents)

Attribute	Level	Utility	Relative importance
Natural resources (water)	Oceanic beaches	1,768	31,790
	Fluvial beaches	-0,407	
	Rivers	-1,361	
Natural resources (land)	Mountains	-0,020	17,205
	National parks or protected landscape	0,057	
	Natural recreation and leisure parks	-0,037	
Ethnographical resources	Festivals	0,191	18,591
	Handicrafts	-0,284	
	Gastronomy	0,093	
Historical resources	Archaeological patrimony	0,938	32,415
	Religious patrimony	-0,649	
	Military patrimony	-0,399	
	Civil patrimony	0,110	
Constant			6,500
Pearson's R			0,996
Kendall's <i>tau</i>			0,970

Source: Authors' own survey data.

coefficient methods. Taking into account the values of these indicators (*tau* of Kendall: 0,970; and R of Pearson: 0,996), the quality of the adjustment was confirmed to be high.

From Table 7.1, we could verify that the tourism resources more highly valued by tourists were historical resources, with a score of 32.4%, followed by natural resources (water), with a relative importance conferred on 31.8%. The least valued attribute was natural resources (land), with a score of 17.2%. However, if we combine the natural resources (water and land), these reach a total importance of 49%.

From the previous results (Table 7.1), we can assume that the destination profile that Minho-Lima tourists prefer has the following characteristics:

- (i) *Natural resources (water)*: oceanic beaches
- (ii) *Historical resources*: archaeological and civil patrimony
- (iii) *Ethnographical resources*: festivals and gastronomy
- (iv) *Natural resources (land)*: national parks or protected landscape.

The results were also analyzed with regard to the respondents' nationality, and similar percentages of importance of the attributes were obtained. However, some differences associated with the preferred profiles could be observed, since national tourists prefer the National Parks or the Protected Landscapes, while foreign tourists attribute more value to Mountains and, in the case of the Ethnographical Resources, the national tourists attribute greater importance to Gastronomy while foreigners showed a preference for Festivals. Finally, with regard to Natural Resources (water), national as well as foreign tourists prefer Oceanic

Beaches and, as regard Historical Resources, the preference was clearly for Archaeological Patrimony.

7.4.2 Results Obtained from the Interviews

As mentioned, the municipality of Ponte de Lima is integrated in the Minho-Lima region and, in geographical terms, has a central location in the Lima Valley. It covers an area of 320.3 km², distributed among 51 parishes.

According to the National Statistical Office data (I.N.E., 2008a), it had 44.618 inhabitants in 2007. According to other data from the same Statistical Office (I.N.E., 2008b), the young people represented 24% of the total population of Ponte de Lima.

The municipality's economic base is weak and undiversified. Nevertheless, it has an important natural and historical patrimony and its main vocation is rural tourism. One of the Portuguese pilgrimage routes to Santiago de Compostela crosses the municipality. The town's historical centre, which is the main tourist attraction, has been undergoing a renovation process in recent years.

In the last fifteen years, Ponte de Lima registered a rise in terms of hotel guests. In 2006, the municipality experienced a total of 27,222 overnight stays for visitors (Mota, Remoaldo, and Cadima Ribeiro, 2010).

The Ponte de Lima free-market is one of the oldest in the country and constitutes an important tourism attraction (Sá et al., 2007). The municipality has one of the few natural protected areas in the country, The Pentieiros Pedagogical Farm, and its small lakes and ecological routes should be considered as strong bases for establishing environmental tourism projects (Sá et al., 2007). The Horse Market and the International Festival of Gardens are other events with major tourism potential that should be considered in the redesign of its tourism strategy.

7.4.3 Resources Available

Taking into account the general tourism features of Ponte de Lima, we felt it relevant to listen to the actors interviewed about the role of cultural tourism in the development of Ponte de Lima and of Northern Portugal, in general.

In terms of resources identified at the cultural level, the municipality and the cultural institutions recognize the historical centre of Ponte de Lima as the main asset. At the natural level, the Protected Area of *Lagoas de Bertandos* is seen as the most important resource. The AREA Alto Minho (the Alto Minho Environment and Energy Regional Agency) technician also identified the Historical Centre and the Protected Areas (Natural network places) as the main local resources. The protected areas were also referred to by the tourism expert from CCDR-N.

The teachers and researchers interviewed referred to the value of the local gastronomy and the attributes of the residents, and some monuments, such as the *Paço do Curutelo*, at Freixo. They also mentioned the manorhouses, the river, the biodiversity and the Peneda-Gerês National Park (PNPG) as other important resources available.

The representatives from the services sector also made mention to the historical monuments, the small lakes, the ecological routes, the manorhouses, the gastronomy, the traditional festivals, the nautical sports, the Small Food Market and the Horse Market.

The 2012 Guimarães cultural programme director claimed that North Portugal's main resources were the World Heritage Sites, the Historical Centres of the cities and towns, and the immaterial patrimony, that is, the symbolic capital of places, the industrial heritage sites, and the traditional festivals and the rituals preserved. However, the director maintained that the region does not yet know how to sell these products and continues to be inward looking. The following sentence illustrates his main view on the issue:

What we should be looking into is a mix between what is physical patrimony, immaterial patrimony and contemporaneous production. I think the solution and the success of tourism in the Northern region should be built around this triangle (2012, Guimarães European Capital Culture cultural programme director).

As regards the stage of development of cultural tourism, the representative of the Ponte de Lima municipal council felt that it is experiencing a period of growth, and indicated a few key projects to illustrate his point:

We are experiencing a period of growth as the *Terceiros* Museum is becoming a cultural attraction (...). We are developing more projects. (...) We are going to have the Earth House, (...) and we will continue promoting all traditional products and the culture of Ponte de Lima (...). (Municipal tourism councillor)

The Head of the IPVC (the Polytechnic Institute of Viana do Castelo) Tourism Studies Programme, commenting on the state of the cultural tourism in the region, claims that this segment is under stagnation. By their turn, the representatives of the Associations interviewed considered that the town is experiencing a growth period. The following statement illustrates their thoughts:

Tourism must be in constant change (...). They [the tourists] want all that is traditional but with a touch of modernity. And what are we doing to achieve that? Nothing. This year, what will we present that is new? Nothing at all (...). (Head of the IPVC Tourism Studies Programme)

On the other hand, the 2012 Guimarães cultural programme director mentioned that cultural tourism is in an initial phase of development, mainly because the public perception of its economic impacts is quite recent. He claims that it is the cultural dimension that is making people travel to different places. He was the sole respondent that underlined the need to make creative experiences available in those territories that want to have a future as cultural tourism destinations.

The technician from AREA Alto Minho focused her answer on the potentialities that Ponte de Lima possesses, such as the small lakes and the ecological routes, the gastronomic competition and the mountain of Agra. Finally, the teacher and researcher from the private University of Fernando Pessoa called attention to the need to identify precisely the target market. In his words:

It is necessary to attract a public with an ecologic sensibility and with economic purchasing power. Viana do Castelo [in Northern Portugal] is experiencing a deep crisis in its retail shops. Many are closing. We must put in place a more attractive social environment (...). Each territory must supply a diversified set of tourism products, trying to reach diversified consumers. (Teacher and researcher from Fernando Pessoa University)

The several local associations expressed different points of view about the available resources because, on the one hand, they feel that there are potentialities, but, on the other, they made mention to the existing external obstacles (the economic and financial crisis) and also to the internal ones, namely the low quality of the public transport system in place.

7.4.4 Tourism and Local and Regional Development

All answers obtained agreed about the role the tourism industry should take in the development of the Ponte de Lima municipality and in the Minho-Lima region, as a whole. Many of them told us that tourism is an economic driving force for local and regional development. The statement that follows expresses that idea of tourism as a key industry in local and regional development:

For us, tourism is a key sector (...). I used to say that Portugal should be the "leisure site" of Europe, because the best that we have is the beauty of the country; in this case, Ponte de Lima is the best that we have. (Municipal tourism councillor)

Another important element caught from the interviews is the residents' role in tourism development:

Nowadays, and I speak of creative tourism, the emergent tourism tendencies are that the tourist wants to do something, wants experiences, wants emotions and I have defended that here, in the region, we are not taking an important resource into due account (...) the residents (...), because they are part of the touristic experience (...). (Head of the IPVC tourism programme)

The importance of tourism, in terms of companies and jobs created, is mentioned in the next statement:

That question has a short and obvious answer, which is: it is very important (...), either in terms of companies operating or as regards jobs (...). It is related to its cultural expression, its patrimonial dimension, and the every day practices of the people. Every day, it is becoming more important. (2012 Guimarães European Capital Culture cultural programme director)

7.4.5 Territorial Promotional Organization of Tourism

From the analysis of the interviews, it is also clear that the promotion of tourism is considered to be a very important issue. However, it should be underlined that the opinions about the work done in terms of the promotion of Ponte de Lima and of the region are not convergent. This is related to the difficult role played by the present promotional tourism board, which is supposed to deal with a territory as large and complex as the North of Portugal. The next statement shows us that divergence:

For me, the question has two sides, because to have the tourism boards that we had before did not make any sense, because territories were all promoting the same thing (...), but (...) the Oporto and Northern Tourism promotional area is too embracing and is composed of realities that are completely different from each other. (...) Anyway, I think the strategy they are following is interesting. (Municipal tourism councillor)

A different opinion is given by the author of the statement that follows, who emphasizes the difficulty of making the institutional promotional model defined operative:

My opinion is very positive, as, at present, we have only one promotional region. But there is an aspect that should be reviewed, which is: it was made into just one region and then several strategic products were anchored in it (...). In this change, there was one aspect that was not taken into due consideration: the region, and the way it really is (...). It is not homogeneous, it has (...) the different destinations, Minho, Trás-os-Montes, the Douro and Oporto, and to this complex reality not enough attention is paid to the concept of a Northern Region promotional area (...). (Head of ADRIL and TURIHAB associations)

Another opinion also tells us a lot about the difficulties and contradictions of the promotional model put in place:

(...) at the national level, the idea behind this restructuration seems positive to me, that is, in theory, now we organize ourselves according to thematic territories or products, which is more appropriate in responding to the needs of tourists, while before we were organized by geographic spaces (...). Nevertheless, in real terms, what we have now is only the replication of the previous system. (2012 Guimarães European Capital Culture cultural programme director)

7.4.6 The National Strategic Tourism Plan

In this section, we will address the importance of planning in tourism and the respondents' opinion about the National Strategic Tourism Plan (PENT), that is, the national strategy on tourism from the Ministry of Economy and Innovation that will be in place until 2015. The general opinion collected is that it has a positive role. Meanwhile, there are some people who think that PENT, even if it makes clear the strategic priorities to be followed, does not establish a regional vision and fails to provide the organizational framework able to promote a more efficient performance within each promotional area established. The statement that follows addresses those issues:

Concerning PENT (...), from my point of view it is a strategic plan, and it provides us with positive signs as it gives us a global insight. It defines the priorities (...). What I think is that it requires a complementary operational approach as regards the different regions. (Tourism expert of CCDD-N, and Coordinator of the Regional Tourism Agenda)

The statements that we present in the following paragraphs show the prevalent concerns about the operationalization of PENT. On the one hand, it is thought that it satisfactorily defines the strategic products but, on the other, it makes clear the existence of a deficit of competences in the aim of the related local structures:

I think that a strategic document works, above all, to guide, and PENT fulfils that and provides us with a set of orientations that, to me, seem to be enough (...). The insufficiencies (...) emerge when we think about its implementation by the local structures or by the national ones, by the local public authorities or even by the private agents. Even in the private sector, we have a great deficit as regards qualifications (...). (2012 Guimarães European Capital Culture cultural programme director)

A concern expressed by several respondents was the absence in the PENT of certain products, which, in the opinion of one respondent, should be seen as strategic by both the Minho-Lima region and the Northern region promotional area, namely: Golf, ManorHouse Tourism and Rural Tourism. This is clearly expressed in the following statement:

I think that PENT must be restructured, because it was launched four years ago (...). There are two aspects that must be taken into consideration: one is the Golf product, which must be

considered as strategic for the Minho region and for the Northern region, as a whole (...). Another one is the ManorHouse Tourism and Rural Tourism, which must also be considered, because those products are now scattered between two other tourism products, Environmental and Touring tourism (Head of ADRIL and TURIHAB associations).

7.5 CONCLUSION

Tourism operators and public decision makers of a certain destination would undoubtedly be interested in knowing the contribution of each of the tourism resources (attributes) available to the success of the tourism destination where they operate or act. Such information can come from the preferences of actual or potential consumers (tourists). In the possession of this knowledge, they can evaluate the consistency of the strategy of use of those resources, as well as to make more informed decisions as regards the promotion of products and services, considering the range of resources the region is endowed with.

To summarize our results obtained from the empirical research on the Minho-Lima case, we have to conclude that the resources to which the tourists attributed more importance were Oceanic Beaches and National Parks or Protected Landscape. From a promotional perspective, because the coastal municipalities that are integrated in our study are not inserted in the Peneda-Gêres National Park, tourists should be made aware that this natural park is located in the region to which the coastal municipalities also belong. In the same way, the municipalities that are inserted in this National Park should call attention to the fact that the coastline is at just X km distance, in order to somehow include that resource in their supply offer.

By contrast, in the case of the Religious Patrimony and Handicrafts, it seems that there is a clear need to review the prominence that has been given to them in the promotional materials used, given the small importance that was conferred on them in the answers obtained from the national and foreign tourists. However, taking the perspective that it would be desirable for a tourism destination to have a wide range of products, instead of a narrow one, it seems to make sense that these last resources are taken as complementary.

In the case of Ponte de Lima, tourism is already one of the main sources of income and of job creation in the municipality. Even so, looking at the resources available, one feels that there are potentialities that have not yet been explored. From our point of view, the strengths of Ponte de Lima are: its wealth of cultural and historical built patrimony; its beautiful historical centre; its ethnographic patrimony; its rural and natural attributes; its close proximity to some of the more important towns in the region and in Northern Portugal, such as Viana do Castelo, Braga, Guimarães and Porto, and the border with Galicia (Spain); and, finally, the youth of its population.

The research developed has tried to make it clear that tourism could be an economic driving force for both the Minho-Lima region in general, and Ponte de Lima, as a particular case. Additionally, this study aims to contribute to the establishment of a new discourse in regional tourism strategy. Accordingly, the focal concept should be cultural tourism.

Our study has tried to establish the need to implement a well structured tourism planning and marketing strategy. At the resources level, to speak of better organization means also creating more attractive product packages. Having in mind the potential of Ponte de Lima to become a creative cultural tourism destination, events like the International Gardens

Festival and the Opera Festival should be complemented by other events following the same innovative pattern. The Feiras-Novas festivities and the Vaca das Cordas (the Cow's Rope festival) can, similarly, be capitalized upon as major cultural events.

To conclude from the data collected and the analysis performed, we strongly believe that the Minho-Lima has the potential to turn itself into an attractive cultural tourism destination. In order to achieve that goal, it has a huge challenge to surpass, namely in terms of: (i) developing consistent packages of cultural products; (ii) establishing consistent and long-term cooperation between the regional tourism agents and those of neighbouring places than can help it in the supply of cultural tourism packages able to capture tourist segments motivated by singular social environments and active cultural experiences; and (iii) reaching a more efficient and consensual institutional tourism organization.

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