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The importance of experience in participant's motivations in sport tourism events of recreational practice

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INTRODUCTION

The general aim of this research is the analysis of sport tourism events of recreational practice in order to know and to perceive the tourist's motivations to participate in these events.

Nowadays tourism is increasingly claiming its role as one of the main sectors contributing for the economic development of many countries. In recent years there has been a remarkable increase of the touristic flow, as evidenced by World Tourism Organization data, January 2017: "Demand for international tourism remained robust in 2016 despite challenges....Some 46 million more tourists (overnight visitors) travelled internationally last year compared to 2015".

Besides in Portugal it is plain to see the major and increasing importance of the touristic sector for the national economy over the last years. Some internal factors were particularly important, such as the great commitment from both political and economic decision makers in the development of infrastructures as well as country's promotion abroad (cities of Lisbon and Oporto, and also Madeira and Azores island, have been ranked as some of the best European destinies for tourism). Peculiar features like gastronomy are today consensually considered relevant at international level. According to the Portuguese magazine *Evasões*, the number of Portuguese restaurants awarded with Michelin stars passed from fourteen in 2016 to twenty-one in 2017. Also a wide range of Portugal's features, like the weather, an extensive coast or yet the diverse countryside and Portugal's geographical position, project the tourism characteristics of Portugal, internationally progressively assuming its place as a competitive choice comparing to other touristic destinies.

In addition, the relevant external aspect associated with security which is crucial nowadays when agents make a decision about touristic destinies in a world facing many uncertainties.

Data published by Banco de Portugal (BP) and Instituto Nacional de Estatística (INE) confirm a new maximum concerning overnight stays and visits in 2016 in Portugal.

	Exports			Imports		
	January/16	January/17	January 17	January/16	January/17	January/17
	(10 ⁶ euros)		(rhs – in %)	(10 ⁶ euros)		(rhs – in %)
Travel and Tourism	584	686	17.4	271	320	17.8

Figure. 2. International trade of goods and services

Source: Banco de Portugal

Sport tourism is essentially associated to the convergence of two factors: the travel destination and the type of activity. The destination regions have shown that there has been a change to the initial demand for sun and sea due to behavioral shifts leading to new realities and interest for other type of activities.

This type of tourism (sport) as we know it today appeared in mid-20th century and is associated to the Winter sports in the Alps. According to Pigeassou, Bui-Xuan and Gleyse (2003), the concept of sport tourism itself doesn't appear before the seventies.

According to Gibson (1998), "the concept of Sports and Tourism is leisure based on the travel that takes individuals temporarily out of their origin communities to engage in physical activities, to watch physical activities or to worship attractions related to physical activities".

This author subdivides the topic of Sport Tourism into three major areas: Nostalgia Sport Tourism (as for example, the travel related to sporting attractions like a stadium, museums, etc.), Active Sport Tourism (the tourists want to participate in sport events, either being active if they travel to take part in a competition, or being hobbyists if they practice a sport as a way of leisure), and Sport Tourism Events (striking sport events like Olympic Games).

From this division, the second group, Active Sport Tourism, was the starting point for this research. According to Robinson & Gammon's (2011) characterization, they are divided the tourists' motivations in "hard" and

“soft”, depending on whether they are competitive or recreational sports, within sport tourism, thus contributing to describe motivations and experiences of sports tourists.

They stated clearly, however, that at this point it is still necessary a wider and more in-depth study of their respective interactions: “research now needs to focus more on these categories to further examine motives of the sport tourist and to assess in more general terms the utility of the framework”.

In this research, the focus is the search for the tourist’s motivations model based on Weed & Bull’s (2004) conceptualization, supported by the interaction among people, place and activity, analyzing these motivations within the sports activities developed in the water, land and air as per the characterization made by Aspas (2000).

Thus, in order to achieve the underlining research problem of this study, it is intended to reach the following specific objectives:

- to give a theoretical contribution that allows going further in the analysis of sport tourism by improving the conceptualization area in terms of the active sport tourism;
- to develop a conceptual framework of recreational practice in sport tourism events considering the definition of soft sport tourism given by Robinson & Gammon (2011);
- to build a framework for tourist’s motivations within each construct;
- to give a theoretical contribution in order to achieve interrelationships among different motivations of the constructs;
- to understand why the tourist travels to participate in recreational sports tourism events and what determines the will of the tourist in the practice of this sporting activity;
- to understand what kind of experiences, socially, tourists aim to get when they practice these activities;
- to determine which constructs (Activity, People or Place) attract larger numbers of tourists to participate in the event;
- to determine homogeneous segments based on the motivations.

The methodology was developed in two phases according to the main objectives of the study. First, an in-depth interview was made to three responsible managers of sport event companies in the different areas: Land, Water and Air (Survivors Run, Associação Naval do Guadiana and Wind). From these interviews, an open and close answer questionnaire was applied to compile the variables of the constructs (activity, place and people) and work as the basis to define some hypotheses of the model as will be seen in this work. This will allow understanding what are the most important variables in each construct. These variables will, therefore, be fundamental to the motivational classification which is intended to be created when inquiring the participants. These data has been analyzed using the software MAXQDA 12.

The second phase is composed by questionnaires made to participants in three specific events in Portugal: Corrida das Nações (Nations trail) – Lisboa (1st edition); Regata à Vela subida e descida Rio Guadiana (Up and Down the Guadiana River Sail Regatta) – Vila Real de Santo António (30th edition); and Festival Nacional de Parapente (National Paragliding Festival) – Linhares da Beira (11th edition). The participants in these events are the population of the research. They will characterize the motivational profile of this type of tourist. In this quantitative analysis, SPSS software was used.

Finally, a conceptualization of a recreational sports tourism events model is presented. The development of this model aims to explore the interactions among sport tourism events and recreational participation in sport tourism.

The following three hypotheses are summarized below:

H1: “Activity” has a positive effect on the resulting “Experience” obtained from Sport Tourism Events and recreational participation in sport tourism.

Gammon & Robinson (1997) include the status of the sport activity in the motivational profile of the tourist. According to Weed & Bull (2004) the unique motive for participating in sports is the desire to win and to test abilities. The perceived well-being and excitement induced by the respective activity appears as a core motive.

H2: “Place” has a positive effect on the resulting “Experience” obtained from Sport Tourism Events and recreational participation in sport tourism.

According to Weed & Bull (2004): “the essential characteristic of sport is that it involves some active pursuit and such activity requires.....specific locations” and as Higham (2005) stated “ while many people can quite

easily pursue their sport close to home, they often choose to travel elsewhere to participate in what might be regarded as a preferred environment”.

According to Higham (2005) “different destinations offer specific sport tourism experiences because they are characterized by distinct sport and tourism resources”. On the other hand, Hinch & Higham (2004) underlined the importance of natural landscape and cultural heritage once they are not reproducible.

H3: “People” has a positive effect on the resulting “Experience” obtained from Sport Tourism Events and recreational participation in sport tourism.

To Yusof & Douvis (2001) involvement is an important contributor for the individual’s identity which is again important for the pillar “people”.

Costa & Chalip (2005), who have studied social and cultural aspects, have demonstrated that participants create their own particular space to socialize among them and they don’t interact with the natives nor visit the place.

The next stage of the research focus consisted of looking into each construct in order to assess which variables are more important in accordance to the participants’ responses to the questionnaires, with the following results considering:

Activity: Among all variables (Prestige, Risk, Adventure, Pleasure, Self-esteem, Health, Participation, Improve one’s skills, Rewards and Gifts) the participants have been faced with, Pleasure was considered the most important, followed very closely by Participation as it is confirmed by questionnaire results.

Place: In this case and among all variables considered (Safety, Weather, Environment, Destination image, Travel, Ability to learn, Proximity, Organizational Components, Infra-structures and Accessibilities), Proximity has got the biggest number of responses and Organizational components was in second place, although with a huge difference in terms of percentage responses.

People: Finally, among correspondent variables to this construct (Group affiliation, Audience support, Team spirit, Recognition, Socialize and Reward) Socialize was the only one to stand out.

The obtained results of this research made possible to verify that the 3 hypotheses are validated and that Activity is regarded as the most important according to the questionnaire responses.

This study is limited to the national context applied to Portugal and the gathered data have been based only upon three events with a reduced number of investigations, but provides the general analysis guidelines that enable it to be applied to other contexts and regions of similar characteristics

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