

Session VI – “Tourism Experiences and Marketing”

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Integrating Industrial Tourism in Active Industrial Companies: Advantages, Strategies, and Barriers - A Delphi Methodology Approach

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Abstract

Purpose: This article is part of a broader ongoing research project, which aims to find scientifically relevant information on how to incorporate industrial tourism into active industrial businesses whose primary focus is industrial production rather than tourism. Its methodological basis is the Delphi methodology, with the participation of 27 experts from various fields. After applying a first round of questionnaires, it was possible to identify advantages, disadvantages, strategies, and barriers to implementing Industrial Tourism in industrial companies. There is a growing interest in Industrial Tourism in Portugal; however, its applicability in industrial companies still needs to be studied. Being Industrial Tourism, one of the promoters of regional development, is it also important for the strategies of industrial companies in activity? What are the critical points of this relationship? This work also intends to contribute to the identification of the impacts of this product in industrial companies, as well as strategies and barriers to its implementation.

The ongoing research intends to find relevant data on the integration of Industrial Tourism in industrial companies and how this tourism product can be an added value for these companies. The article aims to present the preliminary findings from the application of the panel of experts' first round of questionnaires. It is evident the growing interest in this theme, transversal to several research areas, being adopted, in most cases, a qualitative methodology of case studies (Montenegro et al., (in press)). As a promoter of regional development, industrial tourism has economic,

social and ecological benefits, but also some drawbacks, such as excessive commercialization and loss of authenticity of the sites. This work contributes to identifying the impacts of this product, the development strategies and the barriers to its implementation in industrial enterprises.

Methodology: The Delphi Methodology is a widely used and accepted method for collecting data from respondents within their field of expertise (Hsu & Sandford, 2007), the value of which has been scientifically and practically proven (von der Gracht, 2012). Delphi methodology can be used in theory building. Its results are valuable in the early stage of theory development - helping researchers identify variables of interest and generate propositions, increasing the likelihood that the resulting theory will hold across multiple contexts and settings (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004).

Delphi methodology aims to achieve convergence of opinion (von der Gracht, 2012; Rowe & Wright, 1999; Hsu & Sandford, 2007) on a specific real-world issue and has been used in various areas, namely, planning, needs assessment, policy design, and resource utilization in order to find a comprehensive range of alternatives, present the underlying assumptions, and correlate judgments on an issue according to a wide variety of disciplines (Hsu & Sandford, 2007).

Consensus building using this method is accomplished by applying a series of questionnaires, using multiple iterations to collect data from a panel on specific topics (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). According to Landeta (2006) the main characteristics of this methodology are:

- 1) It is a repetitive process. Experts must be consulted at least twice on the same question so that they can reconsider their answer with the help of the information they receive from the other experts.
- 2) It maintains the anonymity of the participants, allows working with experts in different locations, and avoids the negative influence that could be exerted between the personalities and status of the participating experts.
- 3) Controlled feedback. The information collected in each round of questions is processed, collated and integrated in the next round, so that the experts have feedback on the overall perspectives and opinions of the panel.
- 4) Statistical group response. All opinions are part of the final response. The questions are formulated to treat the answers quantitatively and statistically.

After a round of questionnaires has been prepared, and after reviewing the responses from that round, each participant can decide whether to change their previous answer or stay with their initial decision. If the answers differ strongly from the group response, the participants are motivated to argue their perspectives, ensuring that only in-depth statements are given (von der Gracht, 2012). According to von der Gracht (2012), analysing the data over successive rounds makes it possible to measure the existence of consensus and its strength and the convergence of opinions.

The feedback process allows and encourages Delphi participants to reevaluate their initial judgments about the information provided in previous rounds. According to

Hsu & Sandford (2007), participants in successive rounds can alter or modify the results of previous rounds. Controlled feedback in the Delphi process is designed to reduce the noise effect, consisting of a well-organized process where the previous round is summarized, allowing each participant to generate additional knowledge and further clarify the data presented in previous rounds (Hsu & Sandford, 2007).

According to Landeta (2006), one should ensure that the study is aimed at something good for society, facilitating collaboration among experts by promoting pride in participating in research that benefits the community. Special care should be given to creating a plural team with good knowledge of the studied area (Landeta, 2006). To ensure the success of the process, it is crucial to prioritize the motivation of experts. The coordinator should consider what factors could encourage their active participation and collaboration until the completion of the project. Therefore, it may be necessary to sacrifice questions and rounds to ensure participation and continuity of the panel (Landeta, 2006).

Hsu & Sandford (2007) argue that the selection of topics, time frames for completion and completion of the study, the possibility of inadequate response, and unintentionally guiding feedback from the respondent group are all areas that should be considered when designing and implementing a Delphi study.

The first round of this study, which is the subject of this paper, began, as is traditionally referred to in Delphi methodology (Hsu & Sandford, 2007), with the presentation of a questionnaire consisting of open-ended questions, serving as a guide for the remainder of the study. This first questionnaire is used as the instrument for the second round of data collection.

This article reflects on the results found in this first round.

Results The Delphi expert panel comprises 27 specialists from various areas of training, such as History and Heritage, Business Sciences, Engineering, and Tourism. The panel includes several stakeholders of Industrial Tourism, namely City Councils, Industrial Companies, Travel Agencies, Tourism Associations, Regional Tourism Entities, Museums, and Universities. The first round of the study was composed of open questions, which the experts had to answer according to their knowledge and experience on the following topics: advantages, disadvantages, strategies and barriers of Industrial Tourism for industrial companies.

As for the advantages and disadvantages of industrial tourism for industrial companies, after analysing and reviewing all answers, it was possible to resume the panel's main opinions, as shown in Table I.

Table I: Advantages and disadvantages of IT for Industrial companies

Advantages	Disadvantages
Adding value to and publicizing the brand and its products	Initial investment and implementation costs
Sharing of knowledge with audiences outside the company	Disturbances in the production chain and in the company's operation
Extra source of revenue	Need to conserve the industrial heritage and adapt the facilities to visitor spaces
Motivation and valorization of employees - internal MKT	Need to allocate HR to IT, diverting them from other tasks
Contact with new customers and stakeholders	Seasonality and visiting hours

Source: Own elaboration

The advantages most mentioned by the experts in this first round are related to the company's internal and external Marketing, while the disadvantages are more diversified, focusing on the Financial, Productive and Human Resources areas.

Also, the experts were asked to present their opinions related to the strategies for implementing Industrial Tourism in industrial companies and possible barriers to the success of this partnership. Table II resumes the main proposals identified by the experts.

Table II: Strategies and barriers to Industrial Tourism in industrial companies

Strategies	Barriers
Promotion of IT in the national and European market (e.g. participation in tourism fairs)	Lack of interest from entrepreneurs and managers
Promotion of training actions in the companies about IT	Limitations in the hours and periods available to receive visitors throughout the year
Creation of incentives, tax benefits and specific funding programs for Industrial Tourism	Implementation costs

Support to the definition of itineraries / guided tours	Need for secrecy of internal processes
Creation / association to a national and international IT network.	Excessive bureaucracy

Source: Own elaboration

The most referred strategies for the implementation of Industrial Tourism in the companies is in line with the identified advantages, being also related to Marketing. However, it is also focused on the operational level of Industrial Tourism and on the relationship with the various stakeholders. As for the barriers to the success of Industrial Tourism in the industrial companies, the Financial and Operational areas of the companies were identified, and much importance was also given to the company manager, to his interest in the implementation or not of this tourism product.

The information presented by the experts will undoubtedly enrich Industrial Tourism and industrial companies in several areas, having so far identified areas such as Marketing, Innovation, Diversification, Financing, and Human Resources.

The implementation of Industrial Tourism in an industrial company involves a wide variety of areas which, on the one hand, enriches and diversifies the company but, at the same time, requires a strategic alignment. Otherwise, they may act as barriers to the success of this tourism product.

Research limitations: As a limitation, but also as a source of future research, we have the fact that this article reflects the preliminary stage of the study.

Originality: The originality of this work is based on the innovative approach to the subject, through a qualitative methodology based on the collaboration of several experts (Delphi methodology), contributing in a collaborative way to increase knowledge about the strengths and weaknesses of the implementation of Industrial Tourism in small and medium companies.

Keywords: *Industrial Tourism; Industrial Enterprises; Delphi Methodology.*

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