

MPRA

Munich Personal RePEc Archive

Regional expression of tourism development

Margarida Vaz and João Albino Silva and José Pires Manso

University of Beira Interior, University of Algarve

March 2010

Online at <http://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/21716/>

MPRA Paper No. 21716, posted 29. March 2010 07:47 UTC

Regional Expression of Tourism Development

Margarida M. Vaz

Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities/University of Beira Interior

João Albino Silva

Faculty of Economics/University of Algarve

José R. Pires Manso

Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities/University of Beira Interior

Abstract

This paper¹ aims to highlight the importance of tourism to strengthen the capacities of the different regions and their resources. With this goal in mind an empirical study was conducted in a tourist destination located in the inner part of Portugal (Beira Interior), which aimed to measure the satisfaction obtained by tourists and also to identify the elements of the supply that the demand considers more important to choose this destination. The research stated that the symbolic aspects related to the specific resources of the region were the most important elements that help tourists to choose their destination and the same elements are also those that make tourists more satisfied. Assuming that the symbolic contents are in fact the underlying identity of the region, one can conclude that the more the identity of the region is reinforced, the more the difference is motivating and the more this identity is a key factor of its attractiveness.

Key-words: regional development, differentiation, specific resources, tourist destination, demand-oriented assessment

1. Introduction

The goal of this article is to underlie the importance of tourism in the enhancement of the differentiated capacities and resources of the regions. Since the demand needs to experience different environments then the supply needs to identify, exploit and manage these differentiating elements in order to meet the needs and expectations of demand, while contributing to the viability of sustainable development of these regions.

¹ Published on Journal of Tourism and Development, N° 13/14/2010, Volume 2, Ed. Universidade de Aveiro, Aveiro, ISSN: 1645.9261, pp: 829-839

In this context was conducted an empirical study² in a Portuguese tourist destination, whose aim was to evaluate its tourism performance through the satisfaction obtained by tourists, and also to identify the elements of supply that demand consider more important to choose this destination. The major objective was to identify to what extent those who seek the region for tourism, they do it because they recognize an identity that differentiates this region from other regions, and how far the region itself takes advantages from its own identity and makes the difference, which necessarily is reflected in the performance of its various tourist (and non tourist) stakeholders. As it is referred by Jennings (2006:14), the quality of tourism experiences is a result of the interactions “between tourists, host communities and their residents, tourism providers, government bodies, and environmental settings – and [...] all of these constructions and interpretations have cultural and temporal contexts”.

The main obtained results will be opportunely presented, after a brief theoretical appointment and reference to methodological issues.

2. Theoretical framework

As referred by Ploner (2005) the globalization generates “localizations” as a way to compensate or balance the shift to the global homogenization. While spatial and temporal barriers seem to disappear the localities/regions are trying to construct a distinctive image capable of attracting capital, highly skilled workers and visitors.

From the endogenous development point of view, the territorial development does not obey to a just one standard way since the historical, cultural, institutional and natural matrices of the regions give to the territory a flexibility that opposes the uniformity to the variety and to the difference (Crevoisier, 2001). As referred by Crevoisier (2001), an innovative territory is always based on the previous system (matrices territory) and it is from its dynamics that the innovative territory results.

In this context, the specific resources of a territory, assume the role of basic inputs for the regional/local differentiation. And taking this territory as tourist destination it also means that the more the tourism resources are deep-rooted in local socio-cultural and natural reality, the greater is its specificity.

² This empirical research was done in the context of the doctoral thesis of Margarida Vaz, under the supervision of Prof. Dr. João Albino da Silva and Prof. Dr. José Pires Manso, co-authors of this paper

The knowledge and the contact with these specific resources determine the demand of the variety and of the difference which underlies the current tourist motivations. It is in this context that such resources are transformed into tourist resources and tourist specific products. This means that a territory faced like a tourist destination, must to identify, to value and to promote its own specific resources and when mobilizing them in an innovative way, constructs its competitive advantages based on the differentiation. As it is referred by Millard and Christensen (2004) the regional differences remain the prime sources of competitive advantage.

Taken the differentiation as a strategy, tourism constitutes a way to accentuate those differences as its territorial anchoring requires, for its survival, the preservation and enhancement in a sustainable way of its product: the environment, culture, knowledge, institutions, organizations, host communities with their way of life and their relationships (in short, the tourist destination faced as a tourism product).

To reinforce this trend, the "economy of signs and symbols" (Lash and Urry, 1994), using distinctive signs contained in the "branding" and "theming", produces and distributes on a global scale a lot of different images based on the uniqueness and identity of certain spaces (Franklin, 2003, cited by Ploner, 2005: 2).

However, the reduction of the concept of "regional identity" to a mere static and symbolic concept has been challenged by a growing number of researchers of the regional thematic (eg Ploner, 2005; Paasi, 2001, 2000, Thrift, 1998; Meethan, 2003, Coleman and Crang, 2002). For example, Paasi (2001) stated that although the traditional argument of the uniqueness of the regions can be accepted, should not take for granted. Rather, it is necessary to find a basis for comparison by developing abstractions to make visible the common elements of the regions. Especially since the construction of regions and territories is part of the perpetual process of transformation of the space in which regions emerge, which means that they may exist for some time and may also disappear.

This process is called by Paasi (2001) the institutionalization of regions which, according to the author, analytically distinguishes four aspects of the same process: 1) the territorial, 2) symbolic and 3) institutional forms of a region and 4) its establishment as an entity in the regional system and in the social conscience of the society in question.

We believe that a 5th aspect could enrich the analysis and that corresponds to how visitors read / interpret, live and interact with that process.

The referred author (Paasi, 2001) advocates the need to distinguish the identity of a territory (narratives, symbols and practices associated with a specific territory, be it linked to their nature, landscape, history or population) and regional identity of its inhabitants (i.e. its regional consciousness or the expression of spatial experience both personal and communal). However, in the contemporary world, the movement of people, goods and capital does not conform to the definition of territorial identities closed and confined to "us." On the contrary, the increasing mobility of people and the growing number of people on the move - and with them the elements of their own and hybrid identities - call to the importance of analytically distinguishing one other aspect: the regional identity in the perspective of their visitors, i.e., the awareness they have of the region / territory visited or to be visited.

Because tourism can be a driving force in the (re) production of the identity of the territories and in its symbolism and images, can have a powerful position in the representation and mobilization of the identity of the territories. It may therefore be able to change traditional settings and create new meanings of spaces/regions, whether defined as geographic, cultural, economic, social, institutional or symbolic ones. Hence the importance of integrating in the analysis the external influences in reshaping the identities of the regions.

3. Empirical research: starting point and methodology

The starting point for the empirical research focuses on the hypothesis that if visitors expect to find in a destination certain characteristics that differentiate substantially from what they have in their daily life and if it is the "difference" that is on the base of a destination perception, thus this destination must be different in order to go on being a tourist destination.

These issues were behind the information gathered from the 217 tourists that, since the beginning of August until mid September 2002, visited a tourist destination located in an inner region of the centre of Portugal called Beira Interior. The data collected through individual structured interviews, although essentially qualitative in nature, allowed a quantitative treatment, in an attempt to evaluate the performance of the geographical area in study from the point of view of their tourists. The size and

construction of the sample³ allowed the application of statistical tests (T test for independent samples and the ANOVA, among others) and statistical analysis (Factorial Analysis). It was adopted a mixed methodological approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis.

The statistical tests used were essentially the T test for independent samples and the tests of Analysis of the Simple Variance (ANOVA) whenever the conditions of applicability allowed it; when it was not possible, it was used the Kruskal-Wallis Test, a non parametric test⁴. The confidence interval used in the analysis was 95%.

Tests for Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) are applicable in situations where there are two sub-samples or groups. According to Silva, Mendes and Guerreiro (2001), the following are the conditions of applicability of these tests: existence of at least three groups; independence of the samples to be compared; normality of the observations within each group⁵; and homoscedasticity, i.e., equality of variances. Satisfying these conditions, the analysis of variance can be used to test the hypothesis that the mean of more than two groups are not significantly different. When significant differences are detected, the tests for multiple comparisons (such as eg Bonferroni) allow identifying among which groups these means are different. We used the Bonferroni test for a significance level of 5%.

The Factorial Analysis of Principal Components, as a statistical multivariate method, allows transforming an initial set of correlated variables into another set of variables not correlated, identified as principal components, which result from linear combinations of the initial set. For the effect, and after testing the application conditions for the above-mentioned method, the criteria of Keiser was used to select the number of components to extract among the several variables that we found as motivating the tourists to come to our tourist destination.

³ After consulting relevant literature (Veal, 1992, Ryan, 1995; Trochim, 2006) it was decided to opt for the construction of an intentional non-probabilistic sample, selected from a non-proportional quota. The sample used is therefore not a probability sample which requires care in extrapolating the results to the population under study.

⁴ In accordance with Pestana & Gageiro (2000) although the failure of normality does not prevent the application of ANOVA, the lack of homoscedasticity within each group, when the number of observations in each group is different, puts in risk the findings of the analysis of variance, advising to use a non-parametric test, since they do not require equal variance. This is the case of the Kruskal Wallis test.

⁵ Although the normality is not restrictive for the application of ANOVA when the number of elements of each group is relatively high, the no normality has a minimum level of interpretation of results, unless the distribution is much skewed.

As we analysed a large amount of variables, at the different levels of the tourist offer (the functional and symbolic contents of lodging, restoration, transports, information system, tourist resources and attractions), we gathered a large number of data, which we intend to resume, in the context of this paper, presenting mainly the results of the application of the T test for independent samples, the Kruskal-Wallis Test, the ANOVA test and the Bonferroni test for multiple comparisons.

The statistical software SPSS - Statistical Package for the Social Science was used for processing the data and all statistical tests were performed for a 5% significance level.

4. Main empirical findings and contributions

The Factorial Analysis, namely of the method of Analysis of Principal Components, allowed us to identify the existence of two components in the criteria of choice of a destination which correspond to the functional and symbolic contents referred by Gyimóthy (2000: 173). For the effect, after testing the conditions⁶ for the application of the above-mentioned method, the criterion of Keiser⁷ was used to select the number of components to extract from between six variables that we found as common to any tourist destination. We identified two components, corresponding to around 57 % of the total variance, as we can see in the next table.

Table 1. Total Explained Variance and Components Extracted according to the criterion of Keiser

| Components | Initial own values | Relative Variance (%) | Relative Accumulated Variance (%) | Own values of extracted components | Relative Variance (%) | Relative Accumulated Variance (%) |
|------------|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1 | 2,071 | 34,520 | 34,520 | 2,071 | 34,520 | 34,520 |
| 2 | 1,355 | 22,584 | 57,105 | 1,355 | 22,584 | 57,105 |
| 3 | 0,801 | 13,349 | 70,454 | | | |
| 4 | 0,730 | 12,172 | 82,625 | | | |
| 5 | 0,608 | 10,132 | 92,758 | | | |
| 6 | 0,435 | 7,242 | 100,000 | | | |

Source: own elaboration

⁶ The statistic KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Ollin) obtained, 0,615, is superior to 0,5 and the level of the significance associated to the test of Bertlett is 0,000 and so, inferior to 0,05, which allows to reject the hypothesis of the correlations matrice to be the identity matrice; in other words, it reveals the existence of correlations between the variables.

⁷ Such a criterion demands that the components have own values equal or superior to the unity, representing the own values the quantity of variance contained or explained by each component

The first component is undoubtedly the most important, acting for almost 35 % of the total variance. In the next table are presented the contributions⁸ of the variables for the retained components, representing such contributions the existent correlation between each original variable and each one of the factors, allowing interpreting its nature. For the effect, it was considered as significant contributions those of value equal or superior to 0,5, similarly to other studies.

Table 2. The Functional and Symbolic Dimensions of a Tourist Destination

| Functional Dimension | Contributions |
|--|----------------------|
| Importance attributed to accommodation | 0,832 |
| Importance attributed to food/restaurants | 0,791 |
| Importance attributed to transports/accessibilities | 0,600 |
| Symbolic Dimension | Contributions |
| Importance attributed to the information system (resources, attractions, ways of life, history...of a tourist destination) | 0,795 |
| Importance attributed to the intensity/peculiarity of the experience lived in holidays | 0,760 |
| Importance attributed to the tourist resources/attractions | 0,630 |

Source: own elaboration

These functional and symbolic aspects of the tourist destination are contained in the dimensions “Facilitation of the Stay”, “Mediation of the Services”, “Facilitation of the Movement” and “Mediation of the Destination”, from which, following Gyimóthy (2000: 173), it is possible to assess the performance of a destination from the point of view of its tourist demand. In this context we asked respondents about the degree of importance they attached to certain elements, inherent to any tourist destination. We intended to know which of these elements have greater relative weight in the evaluation of a destination. The degrees of importance were measured using a Likert scale, with graduations from 1 to 5, where 1 is "nothing important" and 5 representing "extremely important"; 0 corresponds to "no opinion". Analysing the descriptive measures of the following table, we notice the value assigned to the information system of a tourist destination, whose average value (3,94) is the highest compared with the other elements⁹, followed by the singularity of the experiences lived in holidays, resources and attractions, food/ restaurants¹⁰, accommodation and transport / accessibilities.

⁸ The contributions in the table are already the obtained ones after application of the VARIMAX rotation method.

⁹ Subject, however, to some bias in this result, since most of interviews took place in tourism offices, where tourists usually go asking for information

¹⁰ It is relevant that the food/restaurants and the information system have the lower coefficients of variation, which means that the dispersion of the responses about their importance is lower than that of the other items; namely the intensity and uniqueness of the experience on holidays, which

Table 3. Ranking of responses according to the average of the importance attributed to common elements of any tourist destination

| Elements | Mean | Standard deviation | Coef. of variation |
|---|------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Information system of destination (resources, attractions, ways of life, history, etc.) | 3,94 | 0,91 | 23,01% |
| Singularity of the experience lived in holidays | 3,74 | 1,09 | 29,18% |
| Tourist resources and attractions | 3,72 | 0,92 | 24,61% |
| Food/restaurants | 3,60 | 0,81 | 22,49% |
| Lodging | 3,43 | 0,98 | 28,67% |
| Transports/ accessibilities | 3,32 | 0,95 | 28,49% |

Source: own elaboration

However, we registered differences statistically significant according to nationality and age of the respondents about the degree of importance assigned to accommodations¹¹, food and restaurants¹² and transports and accessibilities¹³. Through the test of multiple comparison of Bonferroni was possible to detected (for a significance level of 5%) that the Portuguese gave more importance to the accommodations that the French and Dutch, for whom this item is not very important. Also the group of Portuguese and the group of tourists from "other countries" attached more importance to transport and accessibilities than the French group.

We also wanted to know, through an open question, which sensations and/or experiences they evaluate more in holidays and, in the sequence, to know which sensations and/or experiences marked their stay in the tourist destination under study. Facing the obtained answers, we found important to analyse how far the experiences and/or sensations they lived in this region had correspondence with the experiences and/or sensations they affirmed to evaluate in the holiday times. For the effect, was built an indicator that intended to translate that correspondence and which we designated as "satisfaction indicator" (ϕ), once it considers the relative weight of the experience or sensation effectively lived, in the attributed evaluation.

For that, we adopt a methodology which, in the essential, consists as follow: it was divided the number of answers obtained in each one of the sensations and/or experiences they said they lived in this tourist destination by the corresponding sensations and/or experiences they said they evaluated in holidays and multiplying the

presents the highest coefficient of variation (29.18%) and therefore greater dispersion (already evidenced by the higher value of the standard deviation).

¹¹ F = 7862, df = 5; sig = 0000

¹² F = 3978, df = 5; sig = 0002

¹³ F = 3894, df = 5; sig = 0002

quotients obtained by 100. Thus, for values equal to 100, the interpretation of the obtained coefficient will be that the valued item found full correspondence during the stay in this destination, whereas for values superior to 100, the sensation and/or experience lived in this region surpassed the value that had been attributed to it. For values inferior to 100, the sensation or experience lived in the region were below the value that had been attributed. The next table gives notice of the obtained results, detaching the values that surpassed the expectations.

Table 4. Correspondence between the sensations / experiences most valued in holidays and lived during the stay in the region (tourist destination)

| Sensations and / or experiences | Evaluate in holidays (e) | Lived in the tourist destination (t) | Satisfaction Indicator $\Phi=(t/e)100$ |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| | Nº answers | Nº answers | |
| environment, pure air, land, green | 12 | 33 | 275,00 |
| welcome, service, hospitality | 7 | 19 | 271,43 |
| casualness, easiness, relaxation | 39 | 86 | 220,51 |
| gastronomy, to eat well | 12 | 19 | 158,33 |
| contact with nature, natural beauty, landscapes | 30 | 47 | 156,67 |
| inheritance, culture, history | 15 | 19 | 126,67 |
| leisure, to sleep, do nothing | 5 | 6 | 120,00 |
| Sun, hot, good weather | 21 | 20 | 95,24 |
| friendship, family | 19 | 18 | 94,74 |
| peace, calm, tranquillity | 96 | 90 | 93,75 |
| silence, reading, introspection, reflection, observation | 15 | 14 | 93,33 |
| new experiences, novelty, difference, discovery | 46 | 42 | 91,30 |
| amusement, joy, pleasure, happiness | 44 | 32 | 72,73 |
| walks, sports, healthy life | 10 | 7 | 70,00 |
| local way of life, interaction with local population | 12 | 7 | 58,33 |
| adventure, joy of living, open mind, curiosity | 15 | 8 | 53,33 |
| space, escape, balance, change, routine break | 10 | 5 | 50,00 |
| comfort, security | 7 | 3 | 42,86 |
| freedom, release | 61 | 22 | 36,07 |
| to travel, to walk, to know, knowledge | 58 | 20 | 34,48 |
| water | 12 | 4 | 33,33 |

Source: own elaboration

When ranking the satisfaction indicator, we can notice that only aspects like the environment, the hospitality, relaxation, gastronomy, contact with nature and natural beauty, the cultural inheritance and “do nothing” exceeded the expectations. The other items have a satisfaction indicator below 100, which means that even if the visitors had found in the region what they wanted not all the expectations were fulfilled.

Moreover, we explicitly asked the respondents if the overall expectation about the tourist destination had (or had not) found echo in the reality. Although the results were in generally good (the "quite" and "very" clearly outweigh the less positive

responses), would be desirable that the hypothesis of response 3 (medium) had a lower weight (31,3%).

Table 5. Descriptive measures and frequency of compliance with expectations of the tourist destination

| | Nothing | Little | Medium | Quite | Very | n/a | Mean | Median | Mode | Standard Deviation |
|--|---------|--------|--------|-------|-------|------|------|--------|------|--------------------|
| To what extent your expectations about this region were met? | 0% | 2,3% | 31,3% | 35,0% | 29,0% | 2,3% | 3,98 | 4,00 | 4,00 | 0,89 |

Source: own elaboration

There was no significant difference in terms of nationality, sex, age, marital status, education and household income of the inquired tourists in relation to how they evaluated the performance of the tourist destination regarding their expectations, as it can be seen in the next table.

Table 6. Detection of differences statistically significant by gender, nationality, marital status, educational, age and income of respondents

| Variable | T Test | | | ANOVA | | |
|-----------------------------|--------|-----|-------|-------|----|-------|
| | T | df | Sig. | T | df | Sig. |
| Gender | -0,227 | 215 | 0,821 | | | |
| Nationality | | | | 1,001 | 5 | 0,418 |
| Age | | | | 0,792 | 5 | 0,557 |
| Marital status | | | | 1,268 | 3 | 0,286 |
| Education | | | | 0,461 | 4 | 0,765 |
| Monthly income of household | | | | 0,875 | 4 | 0,480 |

Source: own elaboration

At this time it is important to remind that we aimed to evaluate not only the tourism performance of the destination through its tourist demand, but also to identify the elements of supply that demand consider more important to come to this destination.

Thus, a number of elements were evaluated in terms of importance and also in terms of satisfaction at the level of accommodation, food and restaurants, transport and physical accessibility, access to information, and also at the level of resources and attractions of this tourist destination. For each level of analysis the above mentioned statistical tests were applied and several significant differences were detected. As it is not possible to present all the obtained results in the context of this paper, we intend to resume the principal findings aggregating all the used variables accordingly to the functional and symbolic contents present on the four dimensions of assessment (“Facilitation of the Stay”, “Mediation of the Services”, “Facilitation of the Movement” and “Mediation of the Destination”), used by Gyimóthy (2000: 173) in her theoretical model called “A customer-oriented model of service provider assessment” and from which, following this author it is possible to assess the performance of a destination at the optics of its tourist demand.

Before presenting the results it is important to note that it was applied the coefficient alpha of Cronbach for the analysis of internal consistency among items within each of the four dimensions of evaluation of the tourist destination as well as the whole of those dimensions. The results, presented in the following table, ensure the reliability¹⁴ of the scale used.

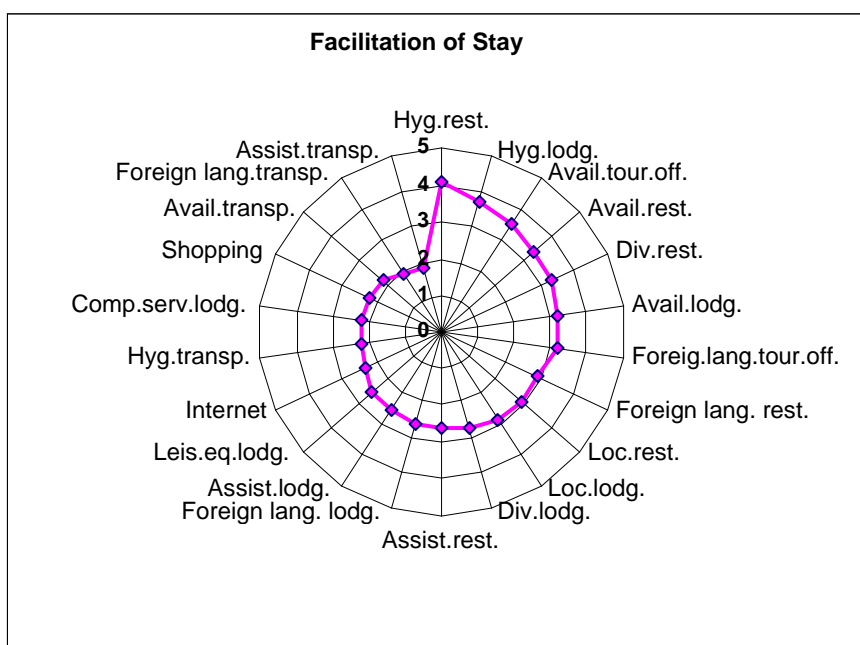
Table 7 – Internal consistency analysis by applying the Coefficient Alfa of Cronbach

| | Coefficient alpha | Coefficient alpha standardized |
|---|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Facilitation of the Stay (22 itens) | 0,9108 | 0,9107 |
| Mediation of services (29 itens) | 0,9263 | 0,9305 |
| Facilitation of the Movement (21 itens) | 0,9209 | 0,9218 |
| Mediation of the Destination (43 itens) | 0,9585 | 0,0604 |
| Whole of the 4 dimensions (115 itens) | 0,9767 | 0,9784 |

Source: own elaboration

The figures below display the ranking of the average levels of importance¹⁵ attributed by the tourists to the several items that compose the functional and the symbolic contents of the multiple roles which are demanded to the tourist services and to the tourist destination itself as well. The first figure (figure1), called "Facilitation of Stay" using the terminology of Gyimóthy (2000), is correspondent to the functional content of various services related to the stay.

Figure 1. Average values of importance assigned to variables of the dimension "Facilitation of Stay" (functional content)



¹⁴ A coefficient alpha of 0,85 as enough for judging the reliability of an attitude scale (Félix Martins, 2000: 265).

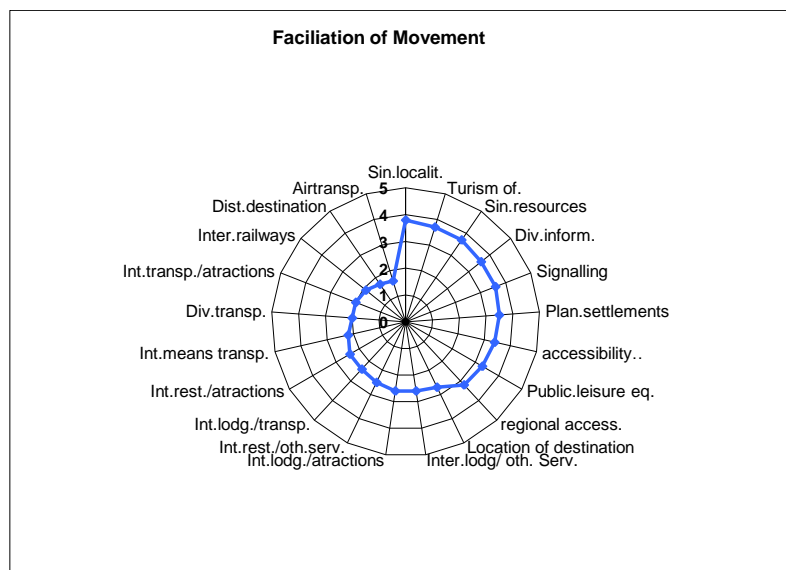
¹⁵ The degrees of importance were measured through a Likert scale, with graduations from 1 to 5, where 1 is "nothing important", 2 "somewhat important", 3 "important", 4 "very important" and 5 "extremely important". The 0 corresponds to "without opinion".

Source: own elaboration

This dimension aims to translate the range of services related to the satisfaction of the tangible and intangible needs (such as food, shelter, safety, communication, etc.), of the tourist and their family while guests of the destination, emphasizing the functional contents of the various services. In this context, our respondents consider as most important, in descending order, the hygiene [in restaurants (hyg.rest.) and in lodging (hyg.lodg.)]; the willingness to solve problems related to stay by the tourism offices (avail.tour.off.) and restaurants (avail.rest.); the variety of restaurants (div.rest.); the willingness to solve problems related to stay by the accommodations (avail.lodg.); knowledge of foreign languages by staff working at tourism offices (foreign lang.tour.off.) and at restaurants (foreign lang.rest.); and the location of restaurants (loc.rest.) and accommodation (loc.aloj.). The remaining items are considered of little importance.

At the level of the dimension "Facilitation of Movement," (figure2) which includes a number of factors that facilitate the movement and the access to sites, resources and attractions of the tourist destination, it is not surprising that our respondents have given the utmost importance to signalling (sin. localities; sin. resources) as well as to the tourism offices. Also the diversity of information sources about the region (div.inform.), the signalling, the planning of settlements and localities, the inter counties accessibilities and its safety, the existence of public spaces and equipments for entertainment, the inter-regional connections, the interconnection of the various services (int.lodg/oth.serv; int.lodg/atracions; int.rest/oth.serv; int.lodg/.transp;int.rest/atracions; int.means of transp.) are considered important to facilitate the movement and access for visitors.

Figure 2 - Average values of importance assigned to variables of the dimension “Facilitation of the Movement” (functional content)

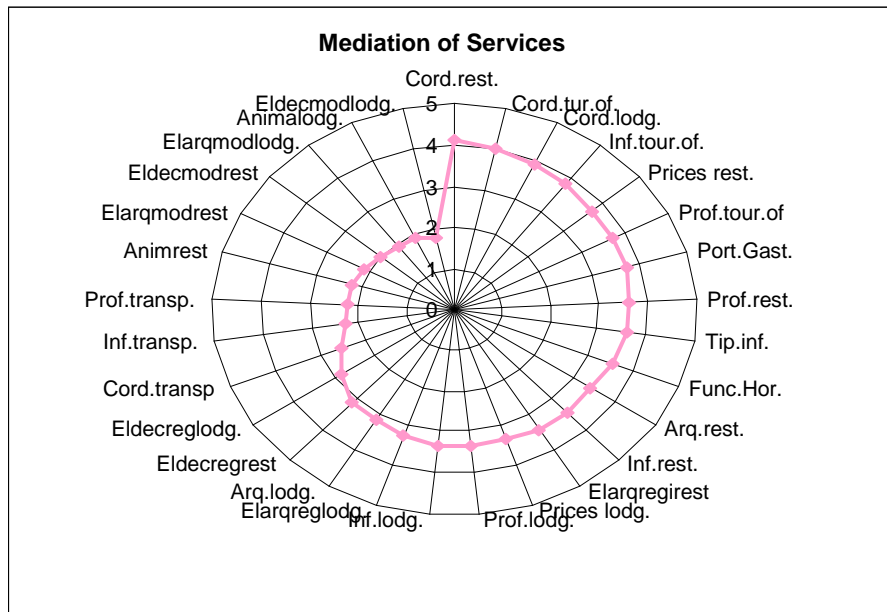


Source: own elaboration

Another dimension is reflected in the expression "Mediation of Services", since the performance of the tourist services is reflecting, in some way, the performance of various types of services in the destination; hence the connotation with the symbolic content of the enjoyed services. Figure 3 summarizes the views of our interviewees about the importance they attach to the variables that reflect these issues.

The cordiality is undoubtedly the aspect of greater importance to the elements of our sample either at the restaurants (cord.rest.), the tourism offices (cord.tour.of) or the accommodation (cord.lodg.). It is also interesting to note that our respondents attach great importance to the degree of information about the region, either by the tourism offices (inf.tour.of.) or by restaurants (inf.rest) and accommodation (inf.lodg.) and also the ways the information is given (tip.inf.) in tourism offices. The typical Portuguese cuisine, the professionalism at the level of various services (prof.rest; prof.tour.of.; prof.lodg.), the operating hours of services and tourist attractions, the scenic environment of the architecture of the restaurants (arq.rest) and accommodation (arq.lodg) and the use of regional architectural elements (elarqlodg; elarqrest.) and the use of regional decorative elements (eldecreglodg; eldecregrest) are also important for our sample. Moreover, their perception about the level of prices at the restaurants and accommodation is also considered important.

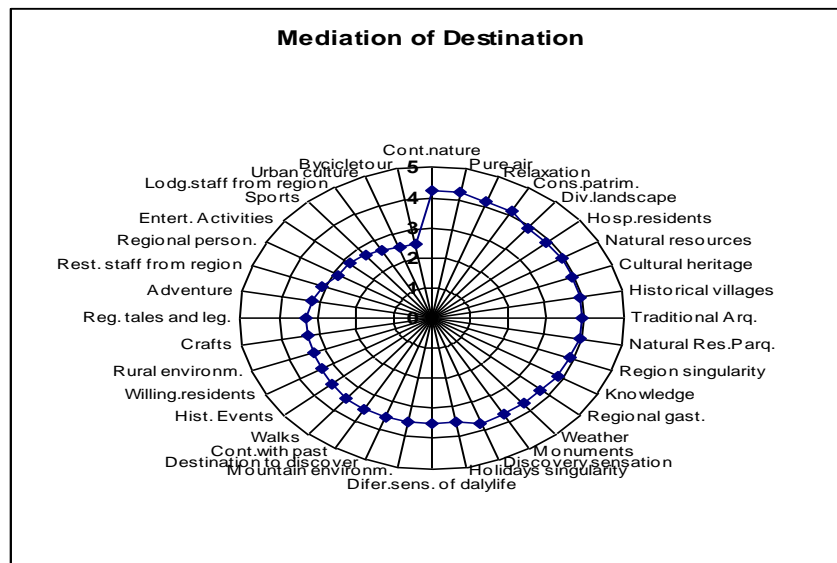
Figure 3. Average values of importance assigned to variables of the dimension “Mediation of the Services” (symbolic content)



Source: own elaboration

The fourth dimension, "Mediation of Destination", is related to the tangible and intangible aspects of the destination which are likely to make the destination representative or ambassador of the region where it is inserted. Figure 4 reflects the importance attached by respondents to the natural, cultural and human resources of the region. Thus no wonder that the uniqueness of the region and of the holidays, and the demand for different sensations, are very important for the tourists who visited the region under study.

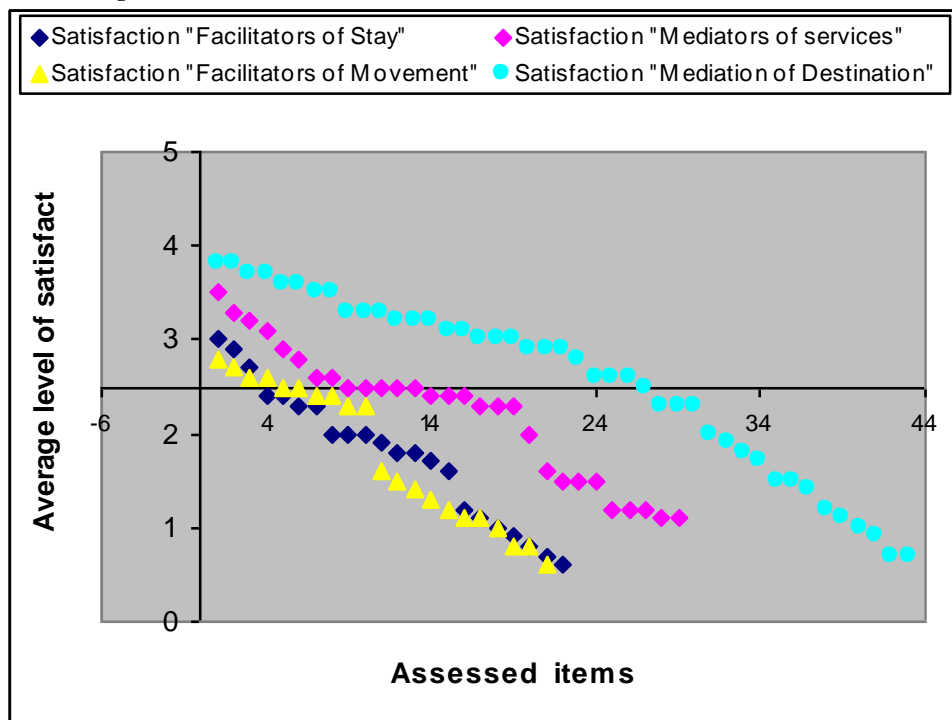
Figure 4. Average values of importance assigned to variables of the dimension “Mediation of the Destination” (symbolic content)



Source: own elaboration

After the importance attributed by the tourists to the several functional and symbolic contents of the tourist service providers, it was analysed the corresponding obtained levels of satisfaction, as a form of assessing the tourist offer of the destination. After calculating the average level of satisfaction associated to each one of the items and the different items grouped in accordance with the four dimensions defined in the model of Gyimóthy (2000), we concluded that it was essentially the symbolic aspects of Mediation / ambassadors of the services and of the destination (hospitality, gastronomy, natural resources and the cultural and inheritance, etc) that satisfied more the tourists, since the functional contents obtained a lower average level of satisfaction, as figure 5 illustrates.

Figure 5. Evaluation of the tourist destination in terms of tourist demand



Source: own elaboration

If we think that those symbolic contents are the ones that underlie the identity of the region, so we can say the more the identity is strength, the more the difference is a outcome of the region and the more is a motivation for visitors to come.

We consider therefore that the development of the tourist destination based on the region differentiation and assuming an integrated offer of experiences, may contribute to their sustainability and the sustainability of the region where it is anchored (in case, the Beira Interior). Figure 6 intends to translate this relationship.

Figure 6. Regional Expression of tourism development

| | Low | High | |
|---|--|---|------------|
| Sustainable Regional Development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Undifferentiated strategies - Imitation - Uncharacterized - Homogenization - Few opportunities of change | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Specific resources - Identity - Differentiated strategies - Cooperation - Learning - Innovation - Changing opportunities | Innovation |
| Sustainable Tourist Development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Traditional tourism - Mass tourism - Reduced concept of tourism and of tourist - Homogenization - Reduced diversity of the supply - Uncharacterized | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alternative tourism - Integrated offer of experiences - Exceptionality of the tourist consumption - Tourist suppliers as facilitators and ambassadors of the tourist destination - Specific resources - Cooperation - Learning - Differentiation | Innovation |
| | Low | High | |

Source: own elaboration

It is considered that the results of this study contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between tourism development and regional development. On the other hand, seeks to contribute to the design of a model of tourism development for the Beira Interior, especially because tourism is present in the development strategies of almost all (if not all) policymakers of the region. And at this level, the first suggestion: more connection and cooperation between research centres and the centres of political decision so that the resulting synergies have positive impacts in the areas of action.

5. Conclusions

As stated by Richard & Wilson (2006: 1216) “One of the major problems that places face in a competitive global environment is how to maintain, develop and utilise their distinctiveness. The development of distinctiveness, which used to be part of a ‘natural’ process of spatial differentiation, is now often a process that is managed to produce distinctive experiences for consumers.” Accordingly to these authors (*op.cit.*, 2006: 1219) “the concept of creative tourism can be a way to meet a need from tourists to develop a more active and longer lasting form of experience, while for the destination it provides an opportunity to embed experiences in the locality. [...] In essence, the

creative tourist is the prototypical ‘prosumer’, engaged in a combination of skilled consumption and skilled production”.

While producers of creative tourism, (*op.cit.*, 2006: 1218) “the onus is on the tourists themselves to actively learn about their surroundings and apply that knowledge in order to develop their own skills”. But while consumers the tourists demand a multiple role to the tourism offer which constitute a great challenge to the industry and to the all destination. Besides responding to the multiple requisites, the tourism suppliers are also evaluated by a great number of expectations, even the ones related to the development of the skills of the tourist while producers. As Richard & Wilson states (2006: 1220) “(...) It is therefore increasingly important to provide tourists with the raw materials from which to construct their own narratives”.

Facing the obtained results, we can say that tourist destinations will eventually act as “radar” since it sends “signals” of the reality of the region and of the kind of supplied experiences and at the same time it is capturing the reflection of these signals in the kind of tourists and tourism that can or may attract. Hence, a destination, whatever it is, has all the interest in consider the benefits of tourism through the way they are perceived and experienced by the demand. That is, should take into account that the tourists not only assess the existing supply of services and attractions, how they are offered and who offers them, but also the experiences that the destination is capable to construct. Involving the tourists in that construction this kind of experiences can be not only a way of self-development for the creative tourists (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), but also a way to promote a “more direct interaction between tourists and the local population (...) turning the local into the essential source of expertise that the tourist is seeking, reversing the usual power relationships of the host–guest encounter (Richard & Wilson, 2006).

Based on the results obtained, it is suggested that this study be replicated in other regions, being also interesting to compare the results between the hinterland and coastal areas traditionally demanded by tourists. It is also suggested the enlargement of the study, incorporating various stakeholders, such as various tour operators, local people and the public sector, focusing on the existing or potential networks of cooperation and complementarities.

References

- Crevoisier O., 2001, L'approche par les milieux innovateurs: état des lieux et perspectives in *Revue d'economie regionale et urbaine n°1*, pp. 135-166
- Félix Martins, J., 2000, *Attitudes of residents towards tourism in Madeira*, University of Surrey, Surrey
- Gyimóthy, Szilvia, 2000, *The quality of visitor experience. A case study in peripheral areas of Europe*, Anglia Polytechnic University, Bornholm, Denmark
- Jennings, 2006, Perspectives on Quality Tourism Experiences: An Introduction, in Jennings, Gayle and Nickerson, Norma (eds) *Quality Tourism Experience*, Elsevier, USA, pp.1-21
- Manso, J.R. Pires, 1996, *Estatística Descritiva e Previsão, 2ª Ed.*, Universidade da Beira Interior, Covilhã
- Millard and Christensen, 2004, *Regional Identity in the Information Society, BISER Domain Report No. 4* [http://www.biser-eu.com/10%20Domains%20Report/BISER_Regional_Identity_fnl_r.pdf], (Site accessed 04 April 2006).
- Paasi, Anssi, 2001, Europe as a social process s and discourse: considerations of place, boundaries and identity, *European Urban and Regional Studies* 8(1), pp.7-28
- Pestana, M. H. & Gageiro, J. N., 2000, *Análise de dados para ciências sociais - a complementaridade do SPSS, 3ª Edição*, Edições Silabo, Lisboa
- Ploner, J, 2005, Tourism and the Aesthetization of Backwardness—New Symbolic Orders of Regional Identity in Alpine Austria: The case of the Hohe Tauern National Park', paper presented to *Regional Studies Association International Conference*, University of Aalborg, Denmark
- Richards and Wilson, 2006, Developing creativity in tourist experiences: A solution to the serial reproduction of culture? *Tourism Management* 27 (2006) pp.1209–1223
- Ryan, C., 1997, *The tourist experience: A new introduction*, Cassell, London
- Santos, C. A. (2004). Framing Portugal: Representational dynamics, *Annals of Tourism Research*, 31(1), 122–138.
- Silva, João Albino; Mendes, Júlio Costa e Guerreiro, Manuela, 2001, *Construção de Indicadores de Avaliação da Qualidade no Turismo*, Ed. Direcção Geral do Turismo, Lisboa
- Trochim, William M., 2006, *The research methods knowledge base, 2nd edition*, [<http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/>] (Site accessed 20 October 2006).
- Vaz, Margarida, 2005, *Expressão Regional do Desenvolvimento Turístico*, Universidade da Beira Interior, Covilhã

Veal, A. J., 1992, *Research methods for leisure and tourism. A practical guide*. London: Longman/Ilam Leisure Management Series, London

Vieira, J. M., 1997, *A Economia do Turismo em Portugal*, Dom Quixote, Lisboa