

Nautical Tourism in Medio Tejo (Portugal): the *wakeboard* activity

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Abstract | Nautical tourism is a growing product in Portugal, following a long tradition related to aquatic products. The wakeboard activity gained important visibility, especially due to the first world championship, in 2017, on the Zêzere river. The study now presented focuses mainly on the importance of valuing river-water resources and the Zêzere river, through wakeboard activity, for the consolidation of an efficient tourism product in the dynamic promotion of tourist and cultural attractiveness. For this purpose, as a methodology, a questionnaire survey was applied in areas of the Zêzere river equipped with a cable park, to understand the importance of wakeboarding in the development of river tourism in the territory. This study aims to enrich the knowledge of the wakeboard activity integrated into the nautical tourist product of the Medio Tejo. The results point to a growing trend in demand for this activity by residents and tourists, who combine leisure with knowledge of the heritage resources (material and immaterial) of this territory. The appreciation of the activity can lead local agents and actors to know and invest in the territory, making wakeboarding an activity of great economic, social, cultural, and environmental importance, contributing to the promotion and development of this territory.

Keywords | Nautical tourism, wakeboard, tourist product, heritage, sustainable development

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1. Introduction

The importance of water resources for the practice of tourist activities, such as rivers, is fundamental for the development and consolidation of a tourism product. (Lopes & Simões, 2022). Nautical tourism emerges as an important driving force for a territory, potentially increasing demand through the enhancement of tourist attractions. Rivers are natural resources that have always qualified Portugal and are linked to various economic activities, particularly those related to tourism, which benefits from their proximity to the river (Lopes et al., 2021).

The appeal of water resources for leisure tourism activities is largely related to the evolution of societies' connection to water and technology that has contributed to the construction of dams, water control, electricity production, and navigability (Botelho et al., 2022).

The growing interest in the water resource, as is the example of rivers, has progressed in terms of both environmental sustainability and greater adherence to nautical tourism. The navigability of rivers has been increasingly used by tourists from all over the world (Macleod, 2002). The enhancement of the landscape of riverside and maritime areas constitutes one of the most relevant and visible axes of qualification interventions in contemporary times.

The intervention of planning and management instruments related to water-river resources is fundamental to their preservation and territorial tourist attractiveness. This study, which focuses on nautical tourism in the Medio Tejo (Portugal), is important to understand the development of tourism since it is an active component of the culture, heritage, landscape, and economy of the territory itself. The largest wakeboard station in the world, located in the Center region of the country (Portugal), is part of the nautical tourist activity and aims to promote tourism in the region (Duarte, 2017).

The river and its enhancement for the practice of wakeboard in the Medio Tejo region are essential for the sustainable management of the territory. The appropriation of this river resource and the wakeboard activity is favorable to the strategic action of territorial attractiveness. Wakeboard in Portugal was a project launched in 2015, putting the Medio Tejo region on the map of the biggest wakeboard circuits in the world. In an extension of about 30 km, in Albufeira de Castelo de Bode, the first wakeboard resort in the world was created with the implementation of five cable parks, in five river beaches: Fernandaires (Vila de Rei), Lago Azul (Ferreira do Zêzere), Aldeia do Mato, (Abrantes), Trízio (Sertã) and Praia dos Montes (Tomar). Emphasis on the municipalities of Abrantes, Ferreira do Zêzere, Sertã, Tomar and Vila de Rei, the Medio Tejo Intermunicipal Community, Turismo do Centro, and the "Portuguese Association of Wakeboard and Wakeskate" (APWW), which joined forces to promote this nautical tourism through wakeboard.

The practice of wakeboard on the Zêzere river is centered on the attractiveness of the Castelo de Bode dam. This dam forms part of a reservoir that extends over 60km, allowing the practice of various water activities, including wakeboard under analysis in this study.

Nautical tourism undoubtedly presents itself as an engine of tourist development in the territory, due not only to the wakeboard activity but also to the cultural, heritage, landscape, economic, social, and environmental diversity that it represents. The river-water resource for this wakeboard modality has played a key role in the dynamics of the territory.

This factor contributes to enhancing the safeguarding and enhancement of the waterway, cultural heritage, and all infrastructure related to nautical tourism.

There is a multiplicity of valences that benefit the tourist sector (Prideaux & Cooper, 2010), even non-maritime aquatic environments (Nunes

et al., 2016), highlighting, in this context, the importance of the river as a water resource for an anchored tourist attraction territorially in nautical tourism. Water activity such as wakeboard, as a water sports modality, is carried out in many parts of the world, assuming an important character in the promotion of tourist destinations where the modality takes place. The reason is that this type of tourist activity involves different types of parallel nautical activities.

The remarkable growth and popularity of wakeboard led to an increase in interest in the study of this subject. The Portuguese Association of Wakeboard and Wakeskate (APWW), as an affiliate of the Portuguese Powerboat Federation (FPM), promotes and directs the practice of wakeboard, wakeskate and wakesurf sports in Portugal. The Portuguese Powerboat Federation has been a member of the Union Internationale Motonautique (UIM) since 1964. The entity that oversees motorized water sports worldwide, accredited by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), and also an effective member of the General Association of International Sports Federations (GAISF). In Portugal, the FPM oversees five modalities: Powerboating, Aquabike (Jet-Ski and Runabout), Nautical Skiing, Wakeboard, and Radio Controlled.

At the national level, the FPM is affiliated with the Portuguese Olympic Committee (POC) and the Portuguese Sports Confederation (PSC). The interest in the practice of wakeboard appears to be an aquatic sport in effective growth, favorable to the tourist development of the territory. Based on the study by Govers et al. (2007), it is understood, on the one hand, that tourists generally have vague perceptions about different destinations based on their own personal knowledge and on details provided by common sources of tourist information, such as advertising and media. On the other hand, there is an influence of these perceptions directly on the image of the destination (Bonn et al., 2005).

Recreational nautical tourism has the advan-

tage of being able to be practiced in waterways away from the coast, an area where there is normally a greater concentration of tourists. In this sense, more projects or programs aimed at nautical tourism have been welcome but require solutions and management models that are different from mass tourism.

Furthermore, in terms of competitiveness in destinations, nautical tourism requires different levels of investment. The most competitive destinations require investments to promote and develop tourist attractions and products to improve the positioning of tourism companies in international markets (Santos, Castanho & Meyer, 2022).

The growing existence of an interest in tourist products in destinations contributes to the improvement of existing tourist areas and strengthens the resources of destinations that were little frequented by tourists (Carrasco, 2001). In this sense, it is understood that this study on nautical tourism, specifically on the aquatic activity of wakeboard, could contribute to a dense knowledge of this type of tourism, providing a vision on how to strategically plan and manage this tourist sector, promoting the practice of wakeboard in the Medio Tejo as a form of sustainable territorial development.

2. Literature Review - brief considerations

2.1. Nautical Tourism

Nautical tourism presents itself as an activity linked to the presence of water, whether in rivers, lakes, or ponds, and these resources are linked to nautical practices. The various activities that include boat trips, water sports, and leisure and adventure activities, covering various water levels (rivers, canals, lakes, ponds, and reservoirs), refer to nautical tourism (Nunes et al., 2016). It is therefore directly related to the use of boats for re-

creational purposes and water activities (Damien, 2001).

Some authors point out that nautical tourism applies to the context of holidays in contact with water, allowing the realization of nautical activities in free time (Martorell, 2000), others associate nautical tourism with coastal tourism and relate them to leisure and sports activities developed in the water (Carrasco, 2001), as well as the nautical market divided into maritime and terrestrial systems (Kasum et al., 2011).

In this sense, nautical tourism characterizes tourists who relate to water, whether by sea or river, and their tourist activity can integrate the marina or the port, focusing especially on an activity that provides leisure (Gračan et al., 2018), which in addition to recreational navigation can also include own or rented boats, accommodation, fishing, diving, underwater photography (Pavel-Musteata & Simon, 2020). It is characterized by a strong tourist component based on sea vessels and ports (Gračan et al., 2018). Other considerations on nautical tourism are presented as activities carried out in nautical tourism ports or outside them using pleasure, sports, and entertainment vessels (Lukovic & Gržetic, 2007).

On this basis of understanding, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 1999), refers to nautical tourism as the practice of sports in the aquatic environment in the context of vacations, allowing the tourist the nautical activity of leisure and also the appreciation of nature. As it is considered an opportunity for the development of the territory, nautical tourism, and water activities in general, it has aroused growing interest.

Thus, nautical tourism can be attributed to a sum of activities and multifunctional relationships that originate from the use of vessels or other infrastructure linked to nautical and tourist activities, for the purpose of recreation, sport, and entertainment (Lukovic & Gržetic, 2007). To be seen as such, it must contain three interconnected elements: the waterway, the companies, and

the landscape (Woessner, 2006), which can have a favorable multiplier effect, as it can guarantee its operation all year round and the return on capital invested (Kovačić, 2010). In addition, it can contribute to the revitalization of existing resources, to attract new markets, and to the consequent mitigation of seasonality and increase in business volume (Zamith, 2012). Rivers are an important tourist resource, as they provide recreational opportunities, scenery with natural landscapes, and leisure potential (Prideaux & Cooper, 2010).

It appears that there are several considerations by some authors about nautical tourism, all of them integrating common dynamics. Inferring the importance and development of this segment for the enhancement of the territory, which may come from investments that allow its promotion for the purposes of attractiveness and tourist development.

The use of rivers for tourism purposes lacks infrastructure for economic activation through the creation of restaurants, hotels, and other services that include tourist and cultural visitation of the territory. In fact, all the dynamics and surroundings of this type of tourism make it with characteristics observed through the motivations of the tourists who choose it. Any tourist and cultural destination must be able to provide tourist satisfaction with the trip and loyalty to the tourist destination (Yoon & Uysal, 2005).

The role of nautical tourism is crucial, not only about economic growth, the national and international politics involved, sustainable development, and the world market. But also, for its preponderant role in activating heritage, in linking water activities with land activities (material and immaterial heritage, culture, history, handicrafts, landscape), from a sustainable perspective. Also due to the contribution of sociocultural factors related to the preservation and recovery of traditions, infrastructures, and heritage values that otherwise could fall into oblivion (Marques et al., 2021).

Through the analysis of the best practices of

the more developed nautical regions, they should understand the potential contribution of nautical tourism to local development and the need for a cooperative and systemic approach with local stakeholders, to encourage the sustainable development of nautical destinations and companies. Industry players should also increase their knowledge about the characteristics of nautical tourists, to identify the structure of the market segment and provide more personalized services (Spinelli & Benevolo, 2022).

Nautical tourism has impacts at the territorial level, as the interaction of tourists with local populations ends up promoting the cultural and creative diversity of the territory. It also contributes to the awareness of local populations for the typology of nautical tourism, which increases the desire to understand the dynamics underlying the practice of nautical activities (Lopes, 2022).

In the context of territorial competitiveness, nautical tourism can offer advantages as an aggregating element of various activities that involve endogenous resources for the promotion of the territory through a tourist dynamic that develops the territorial economy.

In fact, the heritage and landscape richness found in river-water resources, that is, along water lines and rivers, acquire a tourist potential that must be used in the context of nautical tourism to boost the economy and sustainability of the territory(s).

2.2. Water sport: wakeboard

Water tourist activities related to aquatic sports are a sector that has undergone a huge expansion drive in recent decades. The concept of aquatic activities encompasses all the modalities that develop in the aquatic environment, as a means of recreation and leisure in aquatic environments. These various modalities mobilize high structural, financial, and human resources, having

a transversal impact throughout society, including the economy, and in particular in the tourism sector. Sporting events, in this context, are also producers of social change as they have an impact on the social environment in which they are developed.

In this case, specifically, wakeboard has been growing significantly on a global scale in recent years. Wakeboard is a water sport practiced on a board, in which the practitioner holds a cable and is pulled by a boat or an electrical system (cable system), being able to maneuver the board in order to circumvent existing floating obstacles for this purpose. Portugal is an excellent destination for practitioners of this sport.

Wakeboard has been particularly popular in the Center region of Portugal, on the Zêzere river, and more specifically on the five river beaches prepared in terms of infrastructure for the practice of this water activity.

The growth and popularity of wakeboard are the result of an intense network of partners that seek to obtain more intense and meaningful tourist experiences interconnected with the territory.

With the development of aquatic sports, the territory becomes even more attractive for the practice of different sports, namely wakeboard. This development could lead to specific and targeted sports tourism in the territory, increasing visibility and enhancing the tourist attractions of the Medio Tejo, promoting tourism throughout the year, reducing the financial deficit present in the winter months, and significantly increasing the capture of new resources for the territory.

The experience of tourist products can be enriched with nautical activities, helping to differentiate the offer and to reduce seasonality, maximizing the potential of tourist destinations (Estevens, 2005). The tourist projection can be reinforced through nautical activities, which become a key element in the revaluation of territories (de la Cruz et al., 2020).

Strategic planning is also fundamental in the

process of developing tourism products, implying a change that requires, above all, a forward-looking attitude, focused on the future (Vieira, 2007). It seeks to identify and solve problems, create alternative strategies, reducing uncertainty about the future and resistance to change (Hannagan & Bennett, 2007).

The presence of tourists in tourist destinations where nautical activities take place responds to different motivations. Institutional investment is needed to provide the river with the necessary infrastructure to improve its navigability. Strategic planning carried out properly can contribute to the development of several advantageous activities for the tourist destination.

3. Material and Methods

The research for this study was carried out in areas surrounding the location of five cables park, located on the river beaches belonging to five municipalities of the Medio Tejo (Tomar, Ferreira do Zêzere, Vila de Rei, Sertã, and Abrantes), geographically located in the Center of Portugal. For the purposes of this study, a questionnaire based on the Likert scale was designed to be applied by means of a survey of the five river beaches where the five cables park for the practice of wakeboard are located.

The questionnaire was divided into four sections. The first contains the sociodemographic characterization of residents, such as gender, age, and nationality. The second, connecting residents to wakeboard activities on the five river beaches where cable parks exist for this practice. Where it was questioned how many times the resident had attended events or practiced wakeboard.

Another section was directed to the perception of the importance of wakeboard in the territory and whether this perception affected residents in

relation to routine changes that the practice of wakeboard or events related to wakeboard could bring to residents. The last section also tried to understand the importance of wakeboard from the perspective of residents for local development about job creation, increased consumption of local products, and attracting new investments to the territory.

4. Results

In a total sample of 232 results, it was found that about half of the respondents are male (53.9%) and 46.1% are female, with an average age situated at 34 years old, with the youngest respondent being 15 years old and the oldest is 80 years old (Figure 1).

The predominant nationality is Portuguese (98.3%), the remainder being divided into four different nationalities, namely, one Englishman, one Spanish, one French, and one Swiss. The collection of this sample was distributed in the following places: 13.8% Aldeia do Mato, 17.2% Ferreira do Zêzere, 23.3% Sertã, 16.4% Vila de Rei, and Tomar with 29.3%. The youngest respondents have higher qualifications, while the ages between genders show similar values, with the female gender marking out the maximum and minimum age of the sample (Figure 2).

Residents' connection to existing wakeboard activities in the place where they live is still somewhat scarce. This conclusion is drawn from the analysis where it is observed that except for Sertã and Ferreira do Zêzere (by a very small margin), the option of "never time" regarding the practice of this wakeboard modality is always higher than the others (Figure 3). Of the five locations covered by the study, only the population of Ferreira do Zêzere unequivocally indicated that wakeboard is important for local development.

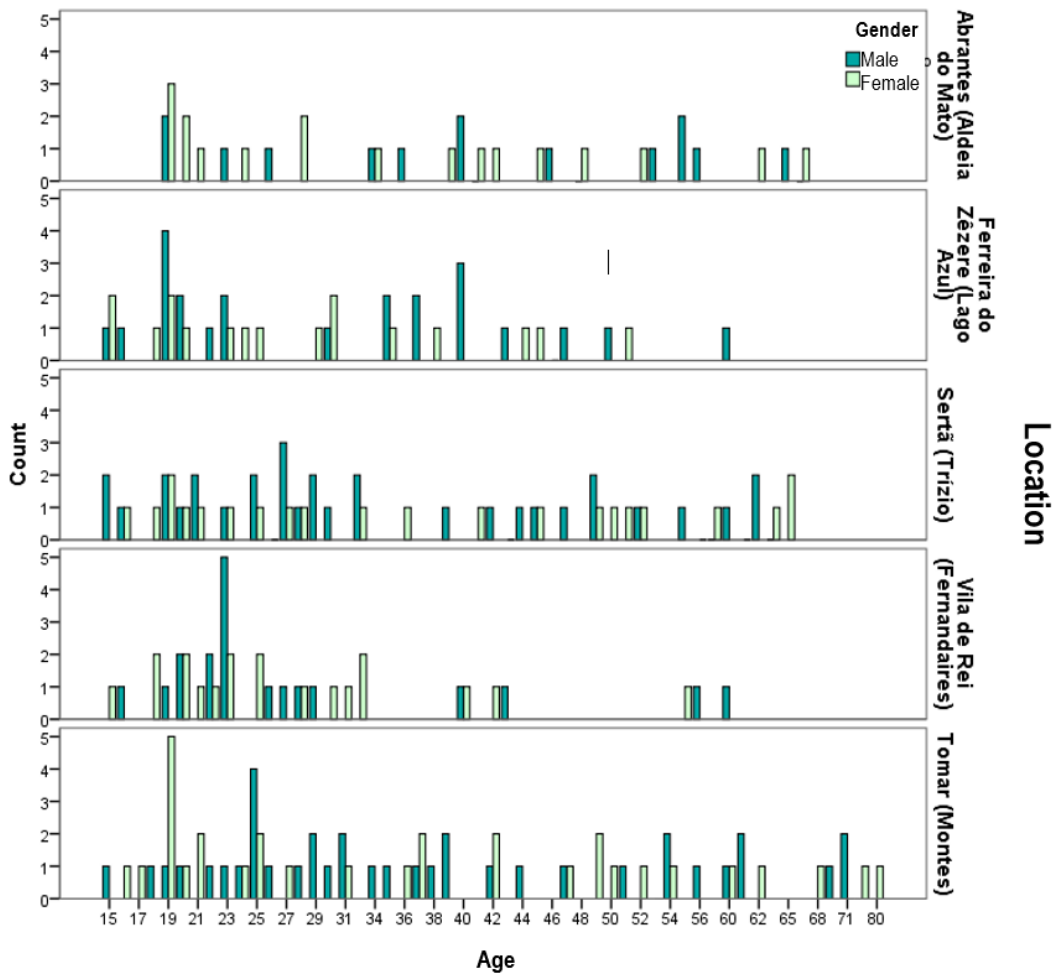


Figure 1 | Distribution by location, gender, and age
Source: Own elaboration

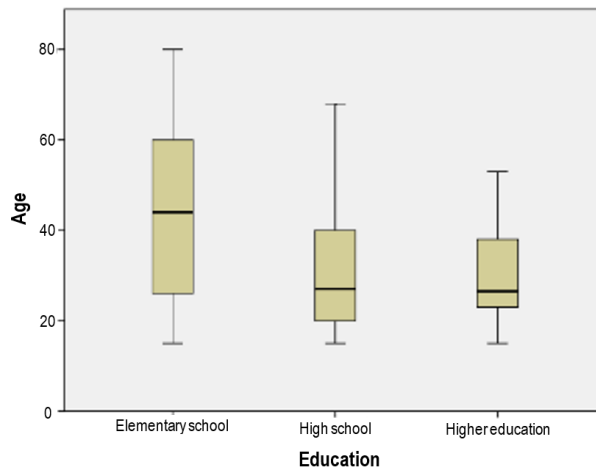


Figure 2 | Age and education
Source: Own elaboration

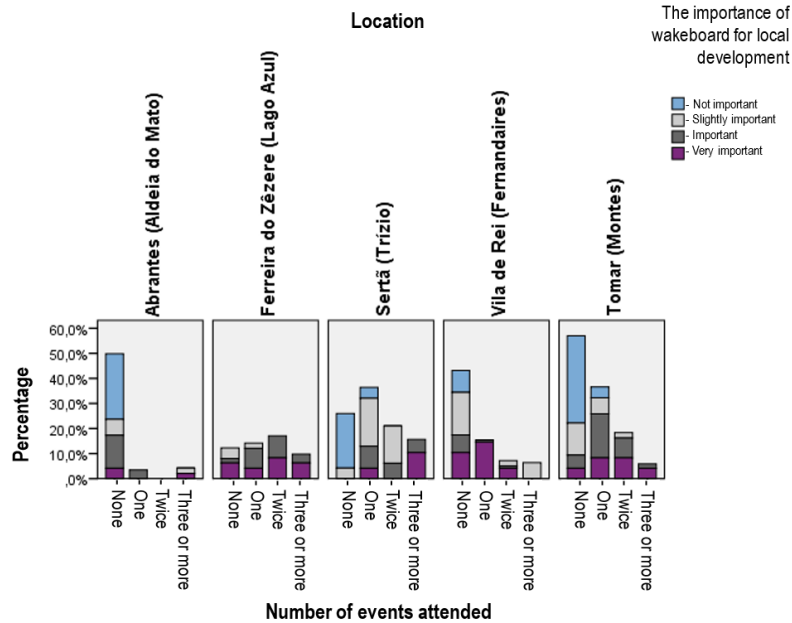


Figure 3 | Importance of wakeboard for local development
Source: Own elaboration

Most of the individuals who responded do not consider that this is important, and they have never watched this modality either. Specifically at the level of local development, and about job creation, increased consumption of local products, and attraction of new investments to the territory (Figure 4), all are above the 2.5 ratings, except for 3 such as “environmental pollution”, “decharacterization and loss of local identity”, and “decreased security”.

This situation reveals that the awareness of the population and its training about tourist activity is still a gap.

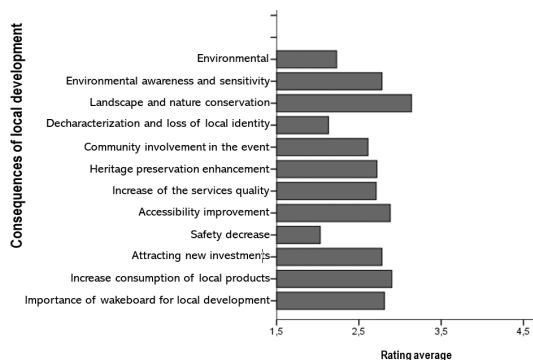


Figure 4 | Consequences of local development boosted by wakeboard
Source: Own elaboration

The association of events (especially these mass events) generates feelings of insecurity in populations that are not qualified to receive visitors. And of course, without a policy of intervention and quick action in terms of hygiene (pollution) and safety (physical and chemical), this result will naturally exist.

In this analysis, answers were also crossed about the “changes in the daily routine” of the residents and the impact of wakeboard on the local development.

It can also be seen that those who refer that wakeboard has a great impact on their routine are exactly those who indicate that it is an “important” and “very important” activity for local development (Figure 5).

The vast majority consider that wakeboard brings relevant changes and that they are important. A small percentage considers that the impact of wakeboard on their daily routine is of little relevance for the development of these river areas.

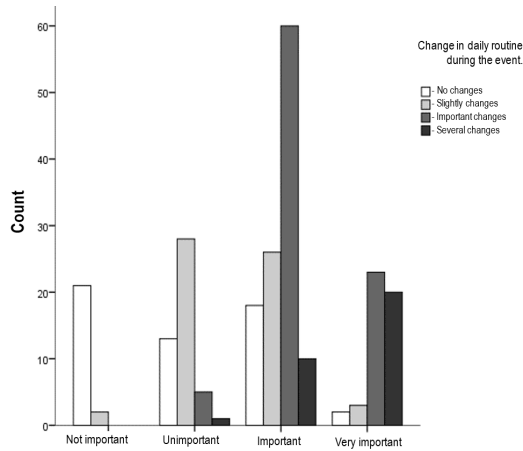


Figure 5 | Individual impact/collective advantage
Source: Own elaboration

5. Discussion

Considering that this exploratory study was the first of its kind on this topic in this specific area, it is possible to confirm that the results are in line with expectations. Since there is no theoretical reference that could be replicated under these conditions, as the basis of this work, we set out with the intention of making it as comprehensive as possible and of a broad spectrum, so that conclusions can be drawn from here that will improve the next study that will be carried out. is already in preparation.

However, as a future line of discussion, it can be reaffirmed that nautical tourism has become a very sought-after tourist segment, and therefore the nautical industry has quickly taken some measures to promote this type of tourism by associating it with rooted cultural and tourist products in cultural and natural heritage resources. It means that for companies in the nautical sector, there is a high opportunity to also explore the water activity of wakeboard.

The issue of residents' connection to the river and their adherence to trying out water sports is

small, but through the promotion of this practice combined with the enhancement of existing resources in the locality, it can be easily overcome. Promotion strategies for communities and residents in favor of local development will be necessary in a more evident way, emphasizing the benefits that may exist therefrom.

The quantitative analysis of this study demonstrated that events related to the river, above all, the wakeboard modality, lead to relevant positive changes for the place, indicating that it is an important activity for local development.

In this sense, actions to raise awareness and encourage job creation, increase consumption of local products, and attract new investments to the territory, including the organization of events, should also be the motto of local authorities.

They will be able to direct their local development action plans towards raising awareness among the population, including training and qualifying residents on the importance of developing tourist activity.

One might try to explain furthermore the underlying factor that might be responsible for the verified answers to our inquiry.

Taking the questions that were presented as a Likert scale, and performing a factor analysis in principal components, as a technique to reduce the number of involved dimensions (Figure 6).

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy.			.849
Bartlett's Sphericity Test	Aprox. chi-squared	867,290	
	d.f.	66	
	Sig.	<,001	

Figure 6 | KMO e Bartlett tests
Source: Own elaboration

The analysis presented is suited (Figure 7), since KMO test of adequacy and the Bartlett test of sphericity are in accordance with what is expected, i.e., KMO above 0,6 and significance level below the usual 5% significance level.

Variance explained

Component	Initial eigenvalues			Sums of extraction of loads squared			Rotation Sums of Loads Squared		
	Total	% variance	% cumulative	Total	% variance	% cumulative	Total	% variance	% cumulative
1	4,432	36,937	36,937	4,432	36,937	36,937	3,854	32,119	32,119
2	1,574	13,116	50,052	1,574	13,116	50,052	1,607	13,390	45,509
3	1,016	8,465	58,517	1,016	8,465	58,517	1,561	13,008	58,517
4	,882	7,348	65,865						
5	,762	6,352	72,217						
6	,656	5,470	77,686						
7	,553	4,611	82,297						
8	,538	4,482	86,779						
9	,518	4,319	91,098						
10	,419	3,488	94,586						
11	,341	2,839	97,425						
12	,309	2,575	100,000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component analysis.

Figure 7 | Total variance explained
Source: Own elaboration

Performing the factor analysis in principal components, we can see that almost 60% of the variance is explained by 3 components (Figure 8).

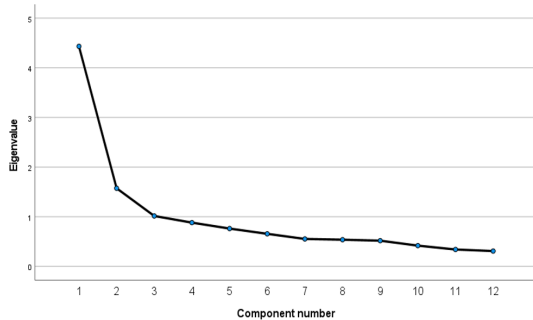


Figure 8 | Scree plot
Source: Own elaboration

These underlying factors are identified as follows, according to the rotated component matrix (Figure 9 and Table 1).

The factors now identified are in accordance with what was expected in empirical observation. Factor 1 is directly related to economic issues, and their importance for local development; Factor 2 can be identified as awareness of environmental issues and landscapes; Factor 3, is related to security and local identity (afraid of losing its identity).

These are the underlying components that are the basis for the answers that were obtained. Furthermore, when studying the effects of the wakeboard event, these factors should be addressed and taken into consideration.

Rotated component matrix^a

	Component		
	1	2	3
Increased consumption of local products	,813	,087	-,023
Attraction of new investments	,727	,264	-,053
Decreased security	-,175	,108	,679
Improvement of accessibility	,736	,222	-,069
Increased quality of services	,727	,232	,046
Valuing heritage preservation	,646	,239	,139
Community involvement in the event	,725	-,048	,002
Mischaracterization and loss of local identity	,187	-,122	,730
Dissemination of landscapes and nature conservation	,180	,880	-,123
Environmental awareness and awareness	,413	,721	,013
Environmental pollution	-,046	-,088	,687
Importance of Wakeboard for local development	,618	,199	-,222

Extraction Method: Principal Component analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Figure 9 | Rotated matrix
Source: Own elaboration

Table 1 | Factor analysis components

Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased consumption of local products • Attraction of new investments • Improvement of accessibility • Increased quality of services • Valuing heritage preservation • Community involvement in the event • Importance of wakeboard for local development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dissemination of landscapes and nature conservation • Environmental awareness and awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreased security • Mischaracterization and loss of local identity • Environmental pollution

Source: Own elaboration

6. Conclusion

This study was significant for the perception of the importance of wakeboard as an aquatic modality for the development of the fluvial water resource of the territory. The results point to a growing trend in demand for this activity by residents and tourists who combine leisure with knowledge of the heritage resources of this territory.

The study showed that nautical tourism requires four essential requirements to be successful: 1) territorial location marked by a waterfront, 2) existence of good natural conditions, 3) a good offer of accommodation, and 4) a reasonable offer of services catering and complementary services in the surrounding areas. Only through these conditions can a territory be transformed into a nautical tourist destination.

The results of this study point to the need to include the promotion of wakeboard as a factor in promoting tourism in Portugal, since it stands out as an activity with an interesting sporting dimension, within the scope of the tourist offer and the international promotion of the territory and its competitive advantages.

In addition, the existing sports in the territory contribute to the cultural and landscape promotion of the territory, being an opportunity to attract new visitors and diversify the offer of destinations through a strategic tourism product for the region.

It is important to point out that to boost nautical tourism it is necessary to invest in infrastructure and equipment, as well as in the preservation of the natural attractiveness of the territory. The appreciation of river tourism activity can encourage local agents to know and invest in the territory, making the nautical tourism product through wakeboarding an activity of great cultural, economic, social, and environmental importance, contributing to the promotion and development of the territory.

This study opens the door to a new line of investigation that can and should be improved and improved with each new process, allowing the improvement of tourism development strategies, and contributing to the promotion of wakeboard as a modality of expansion in Castelo de Bode and in the Medio Tejo. It is an opportunity to explore new opportunities and expand the territory's reach as a tourist destination.

It is important to note that the success of nautical tourism is the result of a collaborative effort between government entities, private companies, and the local community. The promotion of wakeboard as an option for leisure and sport can be a key factor for the economic and social development of the region, attracting new visitors and investments to the territory.

7. Study limitations and additional research

This is an exploratory statistical study that will serve as an initial anchor for the creation of a more elaborate and concrete study considering the defined and analyzed variables.

Future studies may want to focus on measuring the perceptions and attitudes of participants in the water sport of wakeboard in these five cable park spaces. Therefore, a future study can be carried out to understand how the attractiveness of destinations can be increased, and what measures can be taken to develop nautical tourism in all seasons of the year.

Therefore, future research should also examine the existing interconnection with the cultural heritage (material and immaterial) of the localities.

Finally, further investigations into the existing connections between destination image and tourist motivation should be a priority, it would be particularly interesting to understand the dimensions of the behavior of tourists in general who travel to the territory to practice wakeboard and how they take advantage of the resource hydro-fluvial in the context of nautical tourism.

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