


Chapter 16

Assessing the Potential for Tourism Development: Northern Portugal as a Surf Destination

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ABSTRACT

Increasing awareness of the relevance of natural resources for the practice of outdoor leisure and recreation purposes has contributed to the increasing attention upon the assessment and monitoring of the quality of sports spots. As such, evaluating the existing natural conditions and leisure-related infrastructures is crucial, helping public and private stakeholders in decision-making processes. This chapter aims at examining the conditions for surf tourism in the north of Portugal, enabling the monitoring and positioning as an international flagship destination for surf practitioners. This is done through a mixed-methods approach comprising the demand and supply perspectives and supported by an assessment tool developed to evaluate the conditions for the practice of surfing activities within a framework of sustainable tourism development. The relevance of assessing the potential and monitoring of the existing conditions for sport and outdoor activities, namely surf tourism, according to a defined set of attributes, is also discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

The increasing awareness of the relevance of natural resources for the practice of outdoor leisure and recreation activities has contributed to the increase of attention upon the monitoring of the quality of outdoor spots in the context of tourism. Surf tourism (surf tour operators packages including transport, accommodation and food) has come into prominence only in the 1990s (Buckley, 2002a). Nevertheless, surfing consisting of wave surfing, windsurfing, and kite surfing is a growing sports activity within the worldwide adventure outdoor tourism sector, representing 35 million surfers in 2018 (International Surfing Association, 2014).

Schools specialised in surfing activities (bodyboard, surf, kitesurf, windsurf and stand-up paddle) are widespread (Fadda, 2019), and surf tourism has become a significant factor influencing regional economic, social and environmental processes (Buckley, 2002a). At the same time, the number of surf lifestyle entrepreneurs has grown worldwide, contributing to local destination development, namely through surfing festivals, and creating bounds and networks with local communities (Marchant & Motiari, 2011; Ratten, 2018, Valeri, 2021; Valeri and Baggio, 2020a; 2020b; 2020c; 2021; Baggio and Valeri), which are key issues in sustainable approaches to tourism management (Martin & Assenov, 2012; Valeri, 2021).

Clearly, as for other tourism destination in general, surf destinations' competitiveness arises from many factors, which include, at a first level of priority, a sustainable approach to tourism. Sustainable tourism and responsible tourism are multi-dimensional concepts which include environmental protection, economic development, social equity and ecological effects (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003). In order to develop a sustainable tourist destination, and for it to remain competitive and sustainable, it is pertinent to gain insight into the concept of sustainable and responsible tourism from a more holistic perspective, in addition to the assessment of destination competitiveness attributes and the key tourism destination components (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003), which are often complex, subjective and situational natural environment and geographic location, climate, scenery, but also man-made attractions, tourism infrastructure and supporting facilities.

Thus, sustainable tourism development refers to a process which envisages a responsible management process of resources, integrating the natural, cultural and human environments and considers tourism effects on the cultural heritage and traditional elements, and the dynamics of each local community (Chan, 2010). Responsible tourism shifts responsibility towards individual, organizations and businesses. Equally important in attracting people to visit the destination, in a responsible and successful tourism approach, the key element in is planning and governance (Rasdi et al., 2019; Valeri and Fadlon, 2018). Planning at the local community level needs be led by an integrated culture which implies the cooperation of all stakeholders involved in the tourism decision making process (Rasdi, et al. 2019). Moreover, tourist destination needs to define a governance body, including private and public actors/individuals and the local community, which implies a broad shared, participatory, decision-making process (Valeri and Fadlon, 2018). In this context, cooperation and networking can represent an organizational model suitable to develop adaptive socio-economic systems, enabling businesses and communities to face today's complex competitive context (Valeri and Baggio, 2020a; 2020b; 2021; Valeri and Fadlon, 2018).

As acknowledged by Brochado et al. (2018), there is still limited research on surf tourism in Portugal compared to other surfing destinations. As such, assessing the existing natural conditions and leisure-related infrastructures for residents and visitors' fulfilment is crucial in tourist destinations' planning and development processes, leading to better-informed decision-making processes. This chapter aims

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