

Chapter 15

Sense and Sensibility in Housing Tourism: Uncovering Patterns of Behavior

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ABSTRACT

This text aims to discuss the motivations of housing tourism (TH) guests and the strategies used by hosts to meet their specific needs. The methodology used in data collection and analysis was classic grounded theory (CGT). The data were collected through 53 interviews undertaken with owners of HT units in Portugal. This chapter argues that HT customers are divided mainly into two types: 'sensitive' and 'insensitive' guests. The sensitive guest has cultural concerns, favours the role of the host in valuing the accommodation, and identifies with the values conveyed by the house. Likewise, he is aware of the differentiation of this category in relation to mass accommodation when he books it. The guest who is insensitive to the hospitality exploration modality (HEM) requires the formalisation of the accommodation option, prefers autonomy over customisation, and demands facilities typical of mass tourism (as they are incompatible with the functionality of the house).

INTRODUCTION

All over the world there has been an accelerated urbanisation process. This phenomenon - which is not new - has occurred at a pace unprecedented in History. In fact, nowadays, more than half of the world population lives in cities (United Nations, 2017). Although these changes are happening more rapidly in the African and Asian continents, Europe - and Portugal – has not been immune to this trend either.

Nevertheless, in Portugal, the urbanisation phenomenon emerged later than in Central and Northern European countries (Marques, 2003). This phenomenon, among us, had its paroxysm last century, dur-

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ing the 60s. (Rosas, 1998). The basis of this population growth in coastal urban centres was rural labour force that came in search of better living conditions.

In recent decades, however, the attraction cities had on rural population seems to be fading in Europe. This phenomenon is due to the less attractive conditions of urban life, in other words, traffic congestion, pollution, stress, lack of green spaces and loss of authenticity in daily life (Sharpley & Sharpley, 1997). In fact, choosing to live in a rural environment may also be motivated by teleworking flexibility, the search of a greater quality of life or the setting “of new activities outside the built-up urban areas” (Cunha, 2017, p. 114).

This situation has led to a gradual increase in flows between urban and rural areas (Marques, 2003). The process of returning to the countryside is called neo-ruralism and began in the 1970s in France and in other European countries (Candiotto, 2010).

In Portugal, rural tourism was initially restricted to an elite who moved from the big cities to their secondary residences, which had once been the house where their ancestors first lived. This movement increased mainly during the summer or harvest season (Menezes, 2000).

More recently, the practice of rural tourism has been attracting more and more people of the middle class. Unlike the aristocratic elite to which we have alluded above, this section of society has no country houses. According to Silva (2009), the expansion of tourism practices in Portugal has benefited from the reduction of working hours, the increase in living standards and the improvement of communication and transport routes – similarly to what happens in the rest of Europe (Cánoves, Villarino, Priestley & Blanco, 2004). In fact, the countryside attraction the urban middle class feel is rooted in bucolic tradition. Kastenholz et al. (2013) explain that the rise in the search for different tourist experiences in rural environment is due to the fact that these customers have a higher level of education, are more experienced in the art of travel, show a growing interest in preserving the cultural heritage, seek authenticity and reveal an acute environmental awareness.

This research will contribute to shed light on the profile of the people opting for HT units, providing relevant information on their behaviour, both to the owners and to the partner entities, in order to increase the quality of this type of tourism and its revenues.

This text will also explore the main characteristics of the contemporary rural tourist and will try to explain the key motivations behind the choice of low-density areas as holiday destinations.

The main empirical contribution provided here is the distinction between two types of HT customers - called sensitive and insensitive - which will lead to a more effective segmentation of this market niche.

This customer classification emerged from the long process of the data analysis extracted from 53 non-structured interviews administered to owners of HT units located both in the north and south of mainland Portugal, as well as on the Azores islands (Braga, 2016). The data treatment methodology adopted was Classical Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967 [2008]; Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1998). This social research strategy led to the development of an original theory around the main concern of HT house owners.

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Rural areas have several “pull motivations” related to their capacity to attract tourist demand (Martínez-Roget, Tavares Moutela & Estévez Núñez, 2015, p. 72). According to Fakeye and Crompton quoted by

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