


Chapter 4

Inland and Island Tourism, Contrasting Geographies Touching Each Other: Azores, a Peripheral Archipelago

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ABSTRACT

Despite being opposite geographic regions, inland territories and small islands have very much in common in terms of economic and social constraints. Based on the case study of the Azores archipelago, the limitations and opportunities for tourism development in the small oceanic islands are analysed. This study is supported by empirical research involving the application of questionnaires to the main tourism stakeholders in the archipelago. The results lead to the conclusion that in the case of the group of small temperate islands, tourism has progressively asserted itself as strategic for the local economy, but the application of a sustainable development model must be considered as these territories are generally highly vulnerable, both environmentally and socially.

INTRODUCTION

The main phases of tourism growth have mainly been supported by mass tourism and, more recently, by short breaks, primarily in urban spaces or on the coast (Cooper, 2012). The massification of these territories and the diversification of demand have created opportunities for the development of many other destinations and segments of tourism (Richards, 2017). In a context characterized by demand diversification and high competitiveness, the promotion of authenticity, uniqueness and differentiation has contributed to the development of tourism in low-density peripheral territories, namely inland and island regions (Hall, 2010; Page, 2015).

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-7339-6.ch004

This chapter focuses on the case study of tourism in the Azores archipelago. It seeks to contribute to an understanding of this reality so that similarities, bridges, and possible strategies may be followed by other destinations located inland, the other geographical extreme of islands.

In Portugal, the inland and islands territories, present several similarities, both regarding their social and economic constraints, as well as the importance of tourism as an engine and opportunity for the revitalization of these regions. The country is marked by important territorial asymmetries, in terms of spatial distribution of resources, opportunities and income, with inland regions and, in particular the Azores, as areas most affected by the risk of poverty (European Commission, 2019).

This study includes an empirical study supported by a survey, applied in 2012 to 8 tourism stakeholders in the region: i) Regional government (N=20); ii) Local government (N=39); iii) Local experts and researchers in tourism and regional planning (N=22); iv) Tourism and environmental non-governmental organizations (NGO) (N=36); v) Travel and tourism agencies (N=16); vi) Tourism recreation companies (N=59); vii) Tourist guides (N=43), and; viii) Tourist accommodation (N=67). In total, 302 validated answers were obtained, corresponding to a response rate of 54.5% of the operating universe, and a margin of error of 3.81% for a 95% confidence level. The survey was applied in both face to face and online formats.

The statistical data processing included measures of centrality and dispersion, and the variable *type of stakeholder* was considered independent, using the Kruskal-Wallis test and the “Mann-Whitney U” technique to analyse whether there were statistically significant differences.

The questionnaire was organised into three dimensions: i) potential and current tourism development; ii) tourism planning; and iii) sustainable tourism development. For many variables, the Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree / not important) to 5 (strongly agree / very important) was used.

Tourists and resident stakeholder groups were not considered, as periodic questionnaires are applied to these groups in the region, however in order to gauge their opinion, data from the “Tourist Satisfaction Visiting the Azores 2019” (OTA, 2021) and the “Survey of Residents on Tourism in the Azores 2018” were used (SREA, 2019).

The empirical research on tourism in the Azores is complemented with a literature review on low-density peripheral territories and the economy on small islands territories. This allows meeting the main objective of the chapter, which is to present the bases for developing a model for these territories supported by the tourism sector, highlighting aspects that can be shared with inland regions.

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Lagging Regions and Low-Density Territories

The reduction of regional inequalities and the promotion of territorial cohesion are essential strategies in the context of planning and sustainable development. Initially GDP per capita was practically the only criterion for assessing the level of regional development. Later, other variables began to be considered, such as the Human Development Index, constructed under the United Nations Development Program. At the regional level, other criteria have also been considered, such as accessibility, population density, demographic structure, geographical position, and size of the local economy.

Currently, despite continuing to be based on poor “low-income” areas, the classification of lagging regions has come to be associated with other concepts such as: peripheral, sparse, inland, and low-density (Pilati & Hunter, 2020). This association is justified by the fact that difficulties in terms of accessibil-

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