

Managing outdoor tourism: Designing a quality index system

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Keywords | Outdoor tourism, Quality index, Methodological framework, Delphi technique

Objectives | This study aims to propose a tool (quality index) for assessing the potential for outdoor tourism, based on evaluating the quality of existing conditions in a given location. This assessment builds on previous research that developed an Outdoor Tourism Assessment Matrix (OTAM) (Silva et al., 2021) comprising a set of attributes for ten outdoor activities, establishing the different categories and the relative weight of each in the overall assessment.

Methodology | A Delphi technique was employed to develop the quality index for outdoor tourism. The panel comprised fourteen experts, well acquainted with the ten outdoor activities being studied and the conditions that need to be in place for optimal practice, namely canoeing, canyoning, climbing, fishing, hiking, mountain biking/downhill, paragliding, rafting, surfing, and wildlife observation. The data collection took place between May and October 2020 through individual online interviews (given the pandemic situation at the time), and after two anonymous rounds of inquiries aiming at converging the responses, the consensus level was gathered.

Main Results and Contributions | Three dimensions of attributes were defined: the qualifiers, including the attributes that are critical for managing outdoor tourism activities, and all Delphi experts recognised their role as minimum conditions for engaging visitors to the territory where these activities take place; the subjective, as those attributes that are dependent of the personal motivations and expertise of practitioners; and the intensifiers, including those attributes that are not fundamental but add value to the tourist experience when in place. The weighting of the qualifier and subjective dimensions depends mainly on the type of outdoor activities, whereas the weighting of the intensifier dimension (10%) is transversal to all outdoor activities under analysis. Additionally, for each dimension and outdoor activity, different attributes were defined with varying weightings within each dimension. The proposed quality index will allow comparisons between different outdoor tourist destinations that comprise the ten activities investigated, as well as comparisons over time, through longitudinal studies.

Limitations | The number of experts for some outdoor activities could have been more significant to obtain a more critical reflection on the weightings assigned to each dimension; future research is considered to validate the proposed index further by applying it on a case study context.

Conclusions | The index is an essential tool for DMOs and other organisations intervening in evaluating and planning the development of sites for outdoor tourism, presenting a precise diagnosis of their positioning. The value of this tool also lies in the fact that it shows which attributes are considered subjective because they depend on the taste or level of performance (handicap) of each practitioner (who may be more amateur or professional), facilitating the definition of more accurate market campaigns, aiming at specific target markets. In addition, the index specifies which attributes are not essential or fundamental for the place to be perceived as adequate for the practice of a given activity but are considered as enhancers because they add value to the overall perception of quality by visitors.

References

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