

Turismo de Lagos no Alqueva: uma linha do tempo entre 2002 e 2023

Lake tourism in Alqueva: a timeline from 2002 till 2023

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Objectives | A number of well-known tourism destinations around the world are based on lakes as their main attraction. Although it is still difficult to determine the economic significance of lakes, lake tourism has been recognized as a relevant subfield of tourism studies. It is important to note that lakes are open water bodies, dams or reservoirs which might represent a valuable resource for a variety of human activities. In addition, lakes might also become an important resource for tourism development, based on their landscape features, flora, fauna and cultural attractions. Lakes offer a naturally defined core resource for tourism development (Hall and Härkönen, 2006). This is in fact a term that tends to be categorized by the location of the lake. For that reason, lake tourism is also grounded in creating unique experiences, strongly based on sensations, emotions and feelings that help to create memories associated with the lake itself (Rodrigues, 2015; Rodrigues, Correia & Kozak, 2017; Rodrigues, 2023). Alqueva Lake with 250 km² of surface, located in Portugal, is a unique case study for exploring the concept of lake-destination areas due to its recent development as a tourism destination. While Alqueva Lake has experienced tourism growth in recent years, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding of the timeline and key milestones that have shaped the evolution of tourism development in this area. Establishing a clear timeline for the evolution of tourism development at Alqueva Lake is crucial for identifying the factors that have facilitated or hindered its growth as a lake-destination area. Therefore, this work aims to: (i) discuss the concept and main characteristics of lake-destination areas applied to a particular lake in Portugal, Alqueva Lake; (ii) to establish a timeline for the evolution of tourism development at Alqueva Lake; (iii) to present and describe some examples of well-organized tourism products related to several types of tourism, such as wine tourism, nature tourism, astrotourism, cultural tourism or nautical tourism that are being developed around Alqueva Lake, adding value to the lake tourism experience; and finally (iii) based on a literature review of lake tourism, to introduce and briefly discuss important issues concerning Alqueva Lake as a future lake-destination area.

Methodology | In order to reach the proposed goals a multistage methodology will be applied, based on different data collected from different technics: (i) a linear timeline with the important historical events related to the management of the lake which have occurred from 2002 till 2023 will be undertaken in order to have a clear picture about the chronological arrangement of important events related to management of Alqueva Lake. The goal is to contribute more effectively to a better understanding of the Alqueva Lake present days; (ii) an observation grid will be conducted to support the analysis of typologies of tourism, types of tourism products and companies that offer well organized tourism products at the Alqueva Lake, based on the analysis of websites; (iii) analysis of some examples of tourism experiences surrounding the Alqueva Lake will be undertaken, in order to extract important elements of tourism product engineering and, (iv) some semi-structured interviews will be undertaken to some important stakeholders in the Alqueva Lake.

Mains results and contributions | There seems to be no doubt that Alqueva is at the very beginning of the life-cycle as a lake-destination area. This is an ongoing study and does not have concrete results to present. However, some reflections can be presented at this moment. Firstly, an integrated lake management approach should be implemented since lakes are complex destination systems (Cooper, 2006). Coordination is essential in all types of destinations, but even more with lakes as open systems. The vulnerability of lakes, which represent fragile eco-systems, the multiple uses of lakes, and the level of complexity of coordinating all the different stakeholders involved in the destination, demands a holistic view of the lake. Given the difficulty of managing Alqueva Lake as a single entity due to the fact that this reservoir did not exist until 2002 and now a new situation has arisen, crossing different territorial boundaries; in the near future it will be useful to implement a specific authority consisting of representatives from the different public sector agents involved in the management of the lake. Additionally, a partnership task force could emerge with public, and private sector and the community that could provide strategic advice and recommendations in the creation, monitoring and review of policies for developing and managing Alqueva Lake and any issues related to its future. In addition, tourism at lakes takes place in the surrounding area of the lake and not exclusively on the lake itself (Hall and Härkönen, 2006). Naturally, linked to the definition of lake tourism is the idea that there is a geographical entity with particular environmental characteristics. This feature is, probably more evident at natural lakes which have always existed in a particular place than artificially created lakes. Given the background of Alqueva as a new lake that has existed only since 2002, one of the central discussions is the need for a clear delimitation of the territorial boundaries of Alqueva as a lake-destination area.

Limitations | This is an ongoing work that includes several stages in terms of methodology. At this stage, a review of the state of the art about the development of tourism at Alqueva Lake will be undertaken. There are no limitations to consider for now.

Conclusions | As a relatively new lake-destination area, Alqueva Lake presents an opportunity to examine the evolution of tourism development from its inception, providing a unique case study for understanding the challenges and opportunities associated with such initiatives. Alqueva Lake, with its unique natural and cultural attractions, has garnered attention as a potential lake-destination area, but its true potential remains unexplored. By examining the trajectory of Alqueva Lake's tourism development over the past two decades, this study can provide valuable insights into the long-term sustainability and resilience of lake-destination areas, contributing to the broader understanding of this emerging tourism concept.

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