

Analysing the development of sustainable tourism in the Porto and Northern Portugal tourism region

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Objectives | Tourism is widely recognized as a driver of development in numerous nations. In Portugal's context, it stands as a pivotal economic sector that has experienced remarkable growth in recent years (Lopes & Soares, 2017). In this sense, and following the guidelines of international agencies, it is necessary for tourism to adopt a new and holistic paradigm in sustainable tourism development plans (ETC, 2021).

According to Baidal (2001) the approach to sustainable tourism must take into account: i) Recognizing the holistic and interconnected nature of factors across various dimensions - economic, environmental, social, cultural, political, and technological - directly impacting development, and embracing a multidisciplinary planning approach; ii) Striking a balance between policy considerations and the technical-scientific aspects of planning, which serve as a primary catalyst for fostering social engagement; iii) Adapting to diverse socio-economic and political contexts, varying territorial scales, and distinct environmental characteristics; iv) Placing emphasis on the local level, where development challenges are identified and where the principles of sustainability, such as Local Agenda 21, can be effectively put into action; v) Implementing long-term strategies and actions that consider the well-being of future generations, while enhancing the ability to identify, reconcile, and unite stakeholders; vi) Encouraging planners to be more cognizant and dedicated to the planning process, enabling them to better identify stakeholders, harmonize their interests, and promote consensus.

Based on the holistic paradigm mentioned, this research aims to analyse the plans for tourism development in the Porto and Northern Portugal region. The first approach is to identify the tourism development plans and the second approach is to identify the associated dimensions and issues related with sustainable development considered in these plans.

Effective planning is crucial in achieving equilibrium between economic objectives and the necessity of safeguarding and improving tourism destinations. It functions as a vital instrument for aligning the economic advantages of tourism with sustainable methods that guarantee the enduring appeal and sustainability of these destinations (Costa, 2020). By integrating strategic planning, destinations

can maximise their potential for growth and economic development while protecting their natural and cultural assets.

Methodology | Based on the objective of the study, a qualitative methodology was adopted for analysing and identify tourism development plans drawn up by public bodies, the CCDR-N and the Regional Tourism Authority of Porto and Northern Portugal. The data collected was organised into dimensions and sub-dimensions of the sustainable tourism development.

Main Results and Contributions | The results show that, in 2007, the definition of tourism products for the Porto and Northern Portugal region served as a catalyst for the organisation of the territory into a tourist destination, which was subsequently adopted by the Northern Portugal Regional Coordination and Development Commission (CCDR-N) in 2008, created the first global tourism development strategy for the northern region of Portugal, the "Regional Tourism Agenda", comprising a systemic vision of the region's tourism system, which was followed by territorial development plans. The plan addresses the sustainability of the territory as an objective and mentions some initiatives and actions to realise the goal. This was followed by new documents that adapted European and national objectives and guidelines to the region. It was also found that the plans include sustainable development objectives, with the metrics presented focussing on economic growth.

The work contributes to identifying the dimensions and issues of sustainability presented in the plans and presenting guidelines for the presentation of economic development metrics.

Limitations | A limitation of the study is the lack of comparison with another region of Portugal which, from the perspective of public policies and growth of tourism supply, would provide interesting inputs on the strategies implemented in each region. Another limitation is the qualitative methodology existing data and tourism development plans without incorporating opinions or perspectives of industry stakeholders. This omission of stakeholder input may limit the study's comprehensiveness and overlook valuable insights from key players in the tourism sector.

Conclusions | The study demonstrates the importance of drawing up development plans in line with the objectives of sustainable development. It was found that the plans consider the recommendations of Baidal (2001) particularly in recognising a holistic vision of the characteristics that make up the territory, and that technical and scientific recommendations have been integrated into the drafting of the plans, particularly in the different economic contexts. It was found that the plans are made up of objectives and strategies, but in terms of metrics to understand the real impact of the plans, these are incipient or are presented as economic growth metrics rather than economic

development metrics. In view of what has been analysed, there is still a long way to go to include economic development in tourism development plans in the Porto and Northern Portugal region.

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