Como trabalhar para alcançar uma **estratégia única** entre todos os **stakeholders** do destino? O caso do **Centro de Portugal**

How to work for an **integrated multilevel** destination **strategy**? The case of **Centro de Portugal**

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Resumo | O turismo está cada vez mais a evidenciar a sua importância na economia e competitividade dos países. O envolvimento do setor público no planeamento e gestão do turismo de um território é crucial e pode ser efetuado através de diferentes níveis de atuação tais como nível nacional ou regional, por exemplo. Mas por vezes este envolvimento carece de uma estratégia alinhada aquando da definição dos objetivos principais para um território ou dos produtos estratégicos a promover numa determinada região. Este artigo pretende estudar a posição atual na região Centro de Portugal no que toca ao seu alinhamento de estratégias em relação às entidades públicas de âmbito nacional e regional. Através de uma investigação dos seus planos estratégicos, a pesquisa detetou estratégias similares entre as entidades regionais, mas diferentes linhas de pensamento quando comparadas as entidades nacionais e regionais.

Palavras-chave | Turismo, setor público, estratégia dos destinos, Centro de Portugal

Abstract | Tourism is consistently increasing its importance in countries' economies and competitiveness. The involvement of the public sector in tourism planning and management it is crucial for the destination and can be made in different levels such as national or regional. This different levels of public participation can generate a lack of alignment when defining the main objectives for a specific territory or the strategic products to promote in a specific region. This article aims to study the current positon of Centro de Portugal region regarding the alignment of strategies between national and regional public entities. Through an investigation on their strategic plans this research detected similar strategies between the regional entities but different lines of thought when comparing national and regional entities.

Keywords | Tourism, public sector, destination strategy, Centro de Portugal

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1. Introduction

The tourism sector is increasing its importance regarding countries' competitiveness, growth and economic development. It is considered a strategic sector by governments and an 'opportunity' for solving problems related to the balance of payments deficit or job creation. Given the importance of this sector, the intervention and participation of public entities in tourism planning and management is crucial. According to Costa (2012), the public sector in tourism plays a central role as a driving force behind this activity through the creation of conditions for the growth and development of tourism, the provision of basic infrastructure and support equipment that allows the growth and development of this sector in the destinations.

This research seeks to go deeper inside the importance of public sector involvement in tourism and investigate the relations between different governmental levels, in this case national and regional. Using Centro de Portugal region as case study, the public entities from both national and regional scopes with interest in tourism were identified, and their strategic plans analysed in order to understand which policies are being followed and if these organisations have equal or different guidelines for the region.

2. Theoretical framework

There are many reasons for the public sector to be involved in tourism. As a sector who shows respectful growth and high dynamic, even in periods of economic recession and high unemployment, countries are facing tourism as a way to solve their economic problems. The countries' dependency on tourism, the creation of jobs or the contribution for the balance of payments make the economy development as an important factor for public organisations be concerned with tourism (Cooper, Fletcher, Gilbert, & Wanhill, 1998; Costa, 2012; Elliott, 1997; Pearce, 1989). However, this involvement comprehends other types of questions.

The public sector has the responsibility to manage its relations with the tourism industry for the society's well-being and improve the lives of the local communities (Elliott, 1997). This involvement is translated in the mediation of conflicts that could arise from the constant tourism activity and the protection of populations by creating legislation that may decrease the social impact of tourists in the destinations. As part of improving community's well-being, the offer of leisure, recreation and tourism activities, public sector should participate in tourism industry by providing free touristic offers or giving grants to the private sector.

Transportation, infrastructure and environmental factors are also key factors where public sector must be present. The regulation, control and investment in transportation infrastructures made by these organisations (roads, airports and communications) and the protection of the cultural and natural heritage are essential for the practise of tourism and may serve not only the tourists but the local communities.

Taking in account the relevant literature regarding the involvement of public sector in the tourism sector, there are several reasons for its participation: (i) foreign currency funding and its importance for the balance of payments; (ii) job creation and the need to provide education and training; (iii) large and fragmented industry, requiring coordination and marketing development; (iv) maximizing benefits for host communities; (v) equitable distribution of benefits and costs; (vi) construction of the country's image as a tourist destination; (vii) market regulation to protect consumers and prevent unfair competition; (viii) provision of public goods and support infrastructures as part of the tourism product; (ix) protection of tourism resources and the environment; (x) regulation of aspects of social behaviour; (xi) monito-

ring of tourist activity through the collection and treatment of tourist information; (xii) improving economy's competitiveness; (xiii) correct property rights; (xiv) allow decision-makers in the governments to take into account external circumstances; (xv) provide the public benefits available; (xvi) reduce risk and uncertainty; (xvii) support capital-intensive projects; and (xviii) coordinate with private sector (Cooper et al., 1998; Hall & Jenkins, 1995; Jeffries, 2001; Mill & Morrison, 1992; Pearce, 1989; UNWTO, 1998).

This involvement can be achieved in several levels within a country: national, regional or local, each one with their specificities. For this research, it was only taken into account the national and regional public interventions, identifying their "tasks" and responsibilities.

The national level represents the first layer of public intervention in tourism. In this level is formulated the country's policies, specifying which importance is given to the sector regarding the national economy and defining the fundamental goals and the tactic to achieve these objectives (Burkart & Medlik, 1981; UNWTO, 1998). But this level is not only centred in the definition of strategies and guidelines for the country. The national level is also aware of questions like teaching and training professionals, providing companies with funding and financial instruments, regulating the legislation and coordinate the industry, promoting the country, increasing the number of tourists visiting the territory, preserving the environment and heritage and providing statistical information (Baum, 1994; Cooper et al., 1998; Costa, 2001; Lee & Chang, 2008; Pearce, 1989).

The literature analysed points several duties for the National Tourism Organisations (NTO): (i) represent the government; (ii) preparation of the national tourism policy; (iii) coordination between the public and private sector; (iv) coordination of actions developed by regional level organizations; (v) promotion and marketing; (vi) protection of the natural, socio-cultural and patrimonial en-

vironment; (vii) regulation of industry and operators related to tourism; (viii) production and collection of statistical information; (ix) education/training/research; (x) creation of incentive systems; (xi) preparation of a plan identifying the main tourist attractions (brands and sub-brands); (xii) definition of areas of development; (xiii) definition of the main tourist itineraries; (xiv) encourage the creation of infrastructures and equipment to support tourism; (xv) definition of the transportation system and its inter-modal planning; and (xvi) the definition and coordination of play areas (Costa, 2001; Inskeep, 1991; Pearce, 1989; UNWTO, 1998).

According to Costa (2012), the definition of policies and strategies, and the areas of intervention of the public sector in tourism, do not differ much between the national and the regional level. The domains and areas of intervention at both levels of planning are quite similar, differing naturally in the territorial scope of incidence, the level of coverage of the objectives and the measures and lines of action defined, which, for the regional level, are more specific, targeted and operational than those defined at the national level.

The literature points out several reasons for the existence of regional tourism organizations, namely: (i) regional economic development needs (where tourism can make a positive contribution); (ii) the growth of touring vacations that extend through the area to be visited, not limited to a particular location; (iii) the fact that the regions provide a basis for the formulation of coherent tourism products, which can be the subject of integrated and targeted promotion for target market segments; and (iv) raise and enable networking, coordination and cooperation between the several agents and institutional actors, whether national or regional (Armstrong & Taylor, 2000; Breda, Costa, & Costa, 2004; Burkart & Medlik, 1981; Costa, 1996; Jackson & Murphy, 2006; Ohmae, 1995; Richardson, 1973).

Thus, considering the reasons presented, the

public sector actions at the regional level focus on: (i) regional policy; (ii) inter- and intra-regional accessibility; (iii) definition of the type and location of tourist attractions; (iv) definition of areas for tourism development; (v) definition of the typology, abundance and location of tourist accommodation; (vi) analysis and protection of the natural, social and cultural environment; (vii) coordination between the public and private sectors; (viii) regional-based education and training; (ix) marketing and promotion; (x) definition of tourism management and coordination structures (institutional structures); (xi) survey/inventory of resources; and (xii) the definition of strategies to promote and protect the natural and built heritage (Costa, 2001; Inskeep, 1991). Another important reason that justifies the growing importance of the regional level in the tourism sector is related to the articulation and mediation function that tourism public sector entities at regional level have with other areas of government and the articulation between the national and local level. In fact, it is at the regional level, that the policies and strategies defined at national level are operationalized (Costa, 1996; De Araujo & Bramwell, 2002; Dredge & Jenkins, 2003; Inskeep, 1991; Local Government New Zealand, 2004; Pearce, 1989; Whitford, 2009).

3. Methodology

To answer the objectives of this paper, it was analysed the strategies taken by both national and regional entities and confront them to find which common plans these entities share and if there are any disagreement between organisations.

On a national level, it was studied the strategic national plans since 2007 to show the strategy development followed by Turismo de Portugal (TP). When it comes to the regional level, it was studied the present tourism strategies from two different entities: *Commissão de Coordenação e Desenvol-*

vimento Regional do Centro (CCDR-C) responsible to implement the policies in the region related to environment, land-use planning and regional development, promote the coordination between the decentralized regional services and serve as technical support to local authorities and their associations (CCDRC, 2014), and *Turismo do Centro* (TCP) with the mission of developing the Centro region and promote the territory internally, managing the tourism policy defined by the government and other public entities (Turismo Centro de Portugal, 2015).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. National Strategy for Centro de Portugal

The first document analysed was the *Plano Estratégico Nacional do Turismo* (PENT), created by the Portuguese government in 2007, where they identified 10 strategic products to develop in the country. The ambition to Centro region was, until 2015, reach between 2,2 and 2,3 million overnight stays, growing on an average of 7,3% per year, increasing the number of guests 6,2% per year and rising the total incomes 10% every year (Turismo de Portugal, 2007). Alongside, the government also identified the main resources and distinctive factors of the region (figure 1). Taking in account the 10 strategic products for the Portuguese territory, Centro region's core offer should focus on touring and nature tourism complemented by health and well-being tourism, and gastronomy and wine. Oeste sub region, considered a touristic hub, had also Integrated Resort and Housing Tourism in their strategy as a complementary product. Other goals to this tourist hub were the growth of guests and overnight stays, especially the domestic market, and the cross-selling of products and services with Lisbon and Oporto. Oeste was with Serra

da Estrela the two touristic hubs created in the region given their specific and distinctive content of their offer to the international tourists (Turismo de Portugal, 2007).

MAIN RESOURCES

- Fátima
- Temples, Castles and Monuments
- Typical and seaside villages
- Beaches
- Golf courses
- Historic cities and villages
- Mountain ranges (ex: Serra da Estrela)
- Mineral water quality and diversity
- Caves (ex: Mira D'Aire)
- Gastronomy

DISTINCTIVE FACTORS

- Fátima and Coimbra
- Serra da Estrela
- Óbidos, Nazaré and Alcobaça Triangle
- Altantic Ocean relation
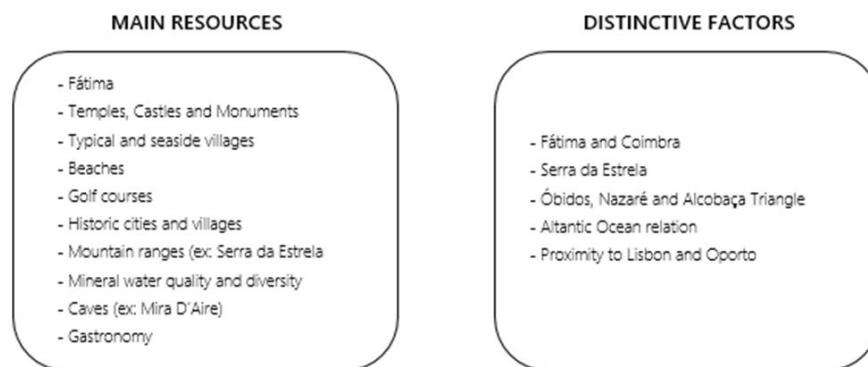- Proximity to Lisbon and Oporto

Figure 1 - Main resources and distinctive factors in Centro region
Source: Based on Turismo de Portugal (2007)

In 2010 was conducted the first review to the document. The forecasts to the region were modified due to the good development demonstrated in the last years. The expected number to 2015 were changed to 2,2 million guests, 4,1 million overnight stays and EUR 224,3 thousand in total incomes (Turismo de Portugal, 2011). A new reassessment was formulated in 2013, creating again new objectives to the region, this time aiming for the 4,2 million overnight stays, 1,8 million of these belonging to foreign guests. These projections were met and exceed, with the preliminary data points to 4,5 million overnight stays in 2015 and 1,9 million foreign tourist passing the night in Centro (Turismo de Portugal, 2013).

The strategy, in comparison with the first document, had a change regarding the importance of some strategic products. Golf and housing tourism lost significance in the region, and the main products were now touring, not only cultural but religious too, health and nature tourism with sun and sea, and food and beverage tourism being complementary products. Nautical tourism was considered an emergent product in the region (Turismo de Portugal, 2013).

In 2014 an all new strategy was designed, following the European Union eight framework programme, Europe 2020. This new programme gave to the country EUR 25 000 million until 2020 to stimulate economic growth and job creation. For the 2014-2020 period, the Portuguese government adjusted the paradigm and choose not to define any development marks to this new tourism strategy and gave conditions to the sector to be more competitive and meet the travellers' demands. The document is written upon five principles: (i) the liberty of initiative to create and offer the best value proposal; (ii) the opening to change, innovation and new market trends; (iii) the collaborative spirit with all the stakeholders and other organization who had interest in tourism; (iv) the knowledge as the best business opportunity to understand what it comes in their way; and (v) people (Turismo de Portugal, 2014a). In this new tourism strategy, TP puts the tourist in the central position, realizing that people only travel when they have the motivation for that, so it is necessary to build products, activities and ex-

periences to meet their motivations (Turismo de Portugal, 2014a). Thus, the country must match the tourists' specific motivations with products and services, taking in account the territory's potential, which will contribute for the overall tourist experience, and, if well conducted, translate in a rewarding encounter, closing the circle, present in figure 2. The national organism suggests that the centre of value chain in tourism must be shifted from accommodation to experience creation (Turismo de Portugal, 2014a), creating conditions to an emerge of authentic, meaningful and genuine experiences, answering the market demands.
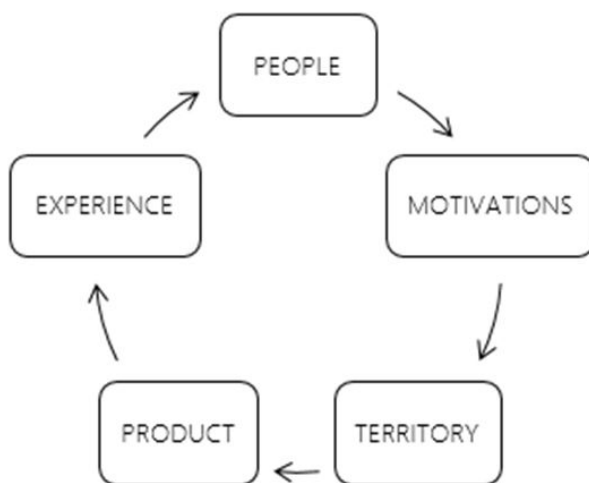

Figure 2 - The creation of experiences and tourist satisfaction circle
Source: Based on Turismo de Portugal (2014a)

This document points a set of factors which these products and experiences should follow: (i) historic, patrimonial and cultural authenticity, (ii) customized offer to specific interests and demands, (iii) innovative and disruptive content relevant to different audiences, (iv) incorporation of technological features and facilities, and (v) social, cultural, economic and environmental sustainability (Turismo de Portugal, 2014a). Betting on experiences is considered by this new strategy as a "weapon" to fight the seasonality (Turismo de Portugal, 2014a). The Portuguese NTO will help companies and businesses creating products and experiences capable of generate demand in the off-season periods.

Centro region is included in this document as a touristic affirmation territory, meaning that represents less than 5% of the overall country demand. The main goal to these territories is to boost the touristic development with the transformation of resources into products and experiences, proceeding posteriorly to their promotion and sale (Turismo de Portugal, 2014a). The action plan for the 2020 strategy identified Centro region main touristic resources, mentioned in the figure 3. TP opted to point the main resources in a broader sense, by only specifying the Fátima and Coimbra cities and choosing terms very generic like castles and monuments to include the maximum of attractions possible. This choice can be seen as a safe option to not be accused of favour any territory in the region, but at the same time, generalizing the offer

can imply the inexistence of an actual and effective policy to this territory or the feeling that the national organism does not know the region when

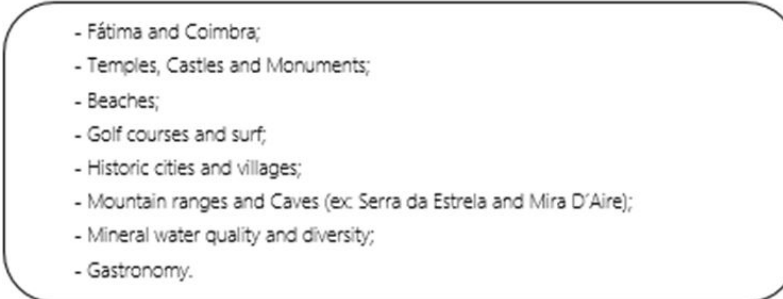it comes to their main points of attractions and main competitive advantages.

- Fátima and Coimbra;
- Temples, Castles and Monuments;
- Beaches;
- Golf courses and surf;
- Historic cities and villages;
- Mountain ranges and Caves (ex: Serra da Estrela and Mira D'Aire);
- Mineral water quality and diversity;
- Gastronomy.

Figure 3 - Main touristic resources in Centro region in 2020 tourism strategy
Source: Based on Turismo de Portugal (2014b).

4.2 Regional Strategy for Centro de Portugal

The first organization to look up when it comes to regional level is CCDR-C. The planning for the region is also made according with the European Union Framework Program Europe 2020 (CCDRC, 2013, 2014a, 2014b). The actual framework program for the region is called Centro 2020 and puts tourism as an economic differentiated factor in relation to other regions, setting eleven goals to achieve until 2020 (figure 4). By analysing these objectives, there are references to the focus on the surf tourism and the niche market of health tourism (e.g. cardiology and organ transplants) and well-being (e.g. hydrotherapy, bioclimatism, physiotherapy). The program also reserves EUR 35 million to increase the number of guests in natural and cultural heritage sites to 255 000 per year and rises the number of overnight stays to a gap between 4,1 and 4,3 million (CCDRC, 2013, 2014a, 2014b).

- State the Centro region as a **sustainable destination**, developing the tourism and the territory together, promoting the territorial cohesion;
- **Develop, qualify and requalify the existing tourism offer**, exploring technology and tourism inclusive nature;
- Bet on **different types of tourism** (health and well-being, religious, nature, cultural, food and beverage, hunting, sports and scientific);
- Be **coherent and reinforce synergies between touristic and regional promotion**, around the positioning designed in the document;
- Catch **new investors and innovative projects**, adapted to the market trends and promote partnerships and networks to create new integrated offers;
- **Solidification of the existing routes**, betting on endogenous resources (e.g. wine), customs and ancient knowledge (e.g. pottery and glass) and cultural production (e.g. writers);
- Consider **new emerging outbound markets** (the Portuguese diaspora, the ERASMUS students and Spain) through targeted campaigns;
- Create a **segmented, careful and selective marketing strategy**, promoting the region in tourism trade shows and national and international events;
- **Create a Tourism Monitoring Centre**, oriented by European Tourist Indicator System for Sustainable Destination Guidelines;
- **Develop and qualify the human resources** through specific training with collaboration with professional schools and universities;
- **Reinforce the regional capacity** to generate **knowledge and investigation, development and innovation** (IDI) in tourism.

Figure 4 - Tourism goal to achieve until 2020 in Centro region
Source: Based on CCDR-C (CCDRC, 2013)

The second regional entity analysed in this research is TCP, responsible by developing the tourism in the region and promote the territory internally. The model followed by this organisation to develop the tourism is to offer to the tourist a singular, emotional and different destination, keeping the authenticity, but customizing the experience to the traveller. Regarding the demand's scope, TCP wants to meet the tourists' needs, who have more free time and want to spend it with outstanding experiences, accessing to all the information through internet and mobile devices. This development is grounded in three vectors: (i) internationalization with special focus in Spain;

(ii) a marketing language more professionalized, segmented and selective; and (iii) research (Turismo Centro de Portugal, 2015).

The marketing strategy followed by this institution is divided in ten actions achievable in three years. The first action is to develop a media campaign allowing the new brand to be positioned based on a best bets map divided in 4 axes: (i) culture, history and heritage; (ii) scientific and technological tourism; (iii) health, nature and well-being; and (iv) housing tourism and lifestyle migration (figure 5) (Turismo Centro de Portugal, 2015).

CULTURE, HISTORY AND HERITAGE

- Distinctive Gastronomy;
- Archaeological interest zones;
- Material and Immaterial heritage;
- Popular events and parties;
- Handcraft and endogenous products;
- Historic landmarks.

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL TOURISM

- International scientific conferences;
- Live science factories;
- Technological property
- Science museums.

HEALTH, NATURE AND WELL-BEING

- Thermal baths and spas;
- Faith and religion;
- Pilgrimage – Saint James path;
- Sports facilities;
- Medical procedures;
- Mountain ranges and hiking;
- Golf;
- Sea and river beaches;
- Surf;
- Water sports and boating.

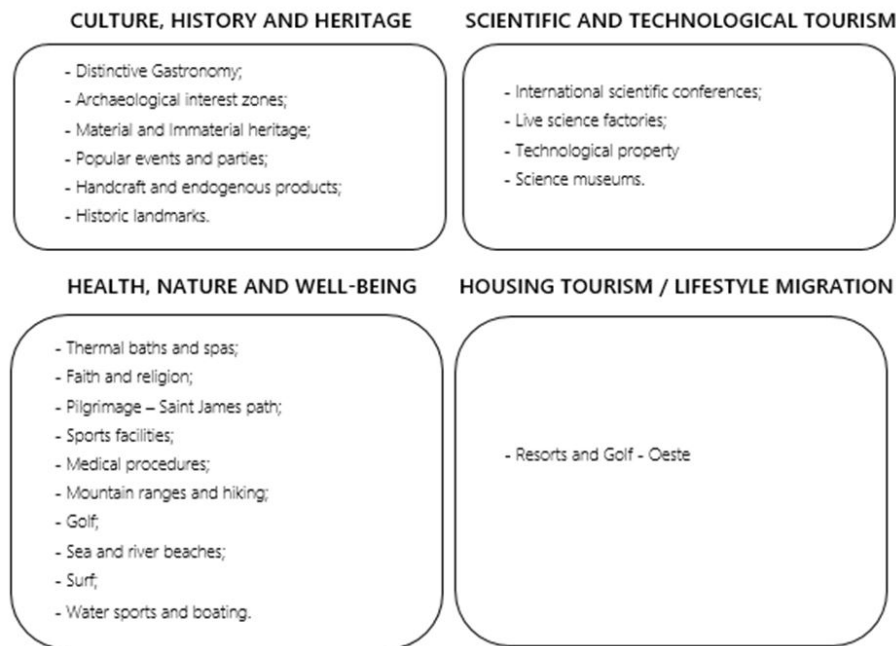**HOUSING TOURISM / LIFESTYLE MIGRATION**

- Resorts and Golf - Oeste

Figure 5 - Positioning of Centro region based on a Best Bets framework
Source: Based on Saur-Amaral *et al.* (2014) and Turismo Centro de Portugal (2015)

The second, third and fourth action are related to the research and segmentation of markets such as Portuguese descendants (action 2), Jewish (action 3) and centre and north European markets (action 4) (Turismo Centro de Portugal, 2015) to identify and develop products, and posteriorly marketing strategies, suitable to these cohorts. The centre and north European markets will be researched to understand the possible interest in acquiring a second or definitive residence in a friendlier weather.

Action five is related with gathering all the stakeholders and creating a network oriented to develop structured products in conformity with the new positioning. For these networks, TCP is counting with research-related entities such as universities and others to develop scientific and technological tourism (action 6). Travel agents and tourists are also called to participate in the process of co-creation and evaluation of products and experiences (action 7) (Turismo Centro de

Portugal, 2015) to ensure personalization, a key factor demanded by travellers.

The last three actions refer to the promotion of relational marketing with the implementation of a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system (action 8), training all the stakeholders involved in the region's promotion to acknowledge the new positioning (action 9) and the attraction of new foreign investors to the territory (action 10) (Turismo Centro de Portugal, 2015).

This new strategy also came with the identification of six market segments, two Portuguese and four Spanish. These cohorts were recognized with potential to intensify the consumption of tourism products, increase the RevPAR, average stay and get new tourists with segmented campaigns using the knowledge acquired in this segmentation (Saur-Amaral, Aragonez, Gouveia, Damas, & Constantino, 2013; Turismo Centro de Portugal, 2015). Among the several items analysed, the authors recognized four types of products

suitable to this segment: (i) cities; (ii) sun/sea; (iii) villages and rural zones; and (iv) monuments and heritage.

Part of the promotion made by TCP and *Agência Regional de Promoção Turística Centro de Portugal* (ARPTCP), entity responsible for promoting the region abroad, is in the promotional website visitcentrodeportugal.com.pt. Analysing the products in their main page (figure 6) with the main products considered by Turismo de Portugal (figure 3) the products are not aligned. Even some of the products in website can be inserted in one category in the main products selected by TP, but clearly there is a gap between the two entities promotion for the region.

- Surf in Centro de Portugal
- Fátima
- Historical Villages
- Viseu
- Serra da Estrela
- Coimbra
- Óbidos
- Batalha
- Castelo Branco
- Alcobaça
- Aveiro

Figure 6 - Main products promoted in the *visitcentrodeportugal.com.pt* website
Source: (Turismo Centro de Portugal & Agência Regional de Promoção Turística Centro de Portugal, 2016)

This divergence between national and regional entities is seen in several items along the strategies. The two entities begin to agree on experiences as the new product to offer to tourists but they differ when pointing the main attractions in the region. They are not completely mismatch but the discrepancies detected shows a lack of communication between these entities, who leads to think that is not exist a multilevel destination strategy. This absence of the same orientation between national and regional entities can lead to developing problems and different communication when promoting the region abroad.

A lack of alignment in the national and regional strategies was identified, however the two regional entities considered in this analysis had very similar approach to strategy to apply in the region suggesting a good interaction between these organisations.

5. Conclusion

The public sector plays a central role in the tourism industry, defining the policies and strategies for the territory and implementing measures and actions that promote its growth and development. The economic importance of tourism for the balance of payments, income and job creation, coupled with the need to create conditions for growth and development of tourism through the provision of basic infrastructure and support equipment justifies the involvement of public sector in tourism.

This research wanted to investigate the alignment of strategies between different levels of public government using Centro de Portugal as a case study, and if these entities work for an integrated multilevel destination strategy. The conclusions led to a negative answer to the aim of this study. Although the regional entities have their strategies aligned, the national and regional entities still differ in some issues, demonstrating a lack of communication regarding exchange of information.

Both national and regional entities agree that

experiences must be the destination's priority offer with authentic content, customized and innovative. These two organisations also consent that the effort to develop the region should be divided by all the stakeholder in the region like for example the private entities, universities and even the tourists in the process of experience co-creation. However, these two public organisms diverge opinions when pointing the regions' main tourist resources and attractions. The NTO opts by a generalisation of places while regional entities go for the identification of specific products and cities. Although the NTO can be seen as only as a broader choice to not eliminate any attraction in the region, if the two parties communicate with the same speech, the other stakeholders would more easily understand the strategy for Centro de Portugal and create a sense of unity between all the organisms. Local entities can be also affected with this disagreement, creating a problem when deciding which guidelines should follow when planning a local policy.

It is recommended an improvement on the communication between these organisations in order to the territory become more productive when putting their strategies and planning in action. Further research should include the local level and evaluate if any of these three levels can create multilevel strategies to lead more tourists to visit the territory, and the study of other regions in the country.

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