

# Towards an Understanding of **Discursive Practices** in **Tourism Planning**: A Cross-Disciplinary Approach

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**Keywords** | Discourse Analysis, Corpus Linguistics, Tourism Plans, Regional Plans, Sustainable Development.

**Objectives** | This paper aims at discussing recurrent trends in tourism planning derived from regional land-use planning and concerning sustainable development *versus* the tourism growth context. It also aims at providing a diachronic comparison between legal texts, on the one hand regional plans, and on the other tourism plans, which is an issue of utmost relevance for the redesign of the forthcoming regulations in the new regional plans for Portugal.

**Methodology** | Following a previous analysis of two regional plans, the one for the Algarve region (PROTAL) and the one for the Metropolitan Area of Lisbon (PROTAML), two tourism plans, the one for Madeira (POTMADEIRA) and the one for Douro (PDTVD), are compared within a cross-disciplinary framework.

This entails, among other domains, territory planning / tourism plans and linguistics, such as discourse analysis, semantics and syntax, not to mention the use of more common techniques in computational linguistics as the ones involving *corpus-driven* approaches (Baker, 2006).

The selection of the corpus of legal texts follows several external criteria (Sinclair, 2004), namely: *i.* broader territorial scope, overlooking specificities unlikely to be compared; *ii.* production by multidisciplinary teams, including legal experts, granting (Alves Correia, 1993) higher quality standards to the rules issued; *iii.* limited production by a few public-administration agencies, which allows for a better control of variables, like urban descriptors, as well as linguistic and discursive choices, constrained by “normativities” (Blommaert, 2005 in Baker, 2006) shared in complementary discourse communities of territory and tourism planning. As for the external criteria, these derive from the examination of the communicative function of regulations, whereas the internal criteria reflect details of the language of the texts.

The first part of this paper focuses on a selection of linguistic and discursive choices, via computer analysis of, notably, lexical modals, modal verbs, adjectives and relevant structures which are singled out given their unexpected occurrence in legal texts of this type. Some considerations on methodological aspects are briefly made in the second section. This is followed by the presentation of case studies coupled with a discussion of exploratory data.

**Main results and contributions** | Main findings, drawing both on exploratory data and methods from computational linguistics, point towards increasing levels of subjectivity in regional planning; yet the same cannot be stated in the tourism domain. Two major fields, namely linguistics (i.e., corpus linguistics and discourse analysis) and tourism planning within a territorial approach, flash out, on more quantitative empirical methods, how language in regulations is used. More than a

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focus on how language mediates professional activities, this cross-disciplinary approach is intended to engage researchers “in what constitutes professional practice and knowledge representations from the insiders’ perspective”, to borrow from Sarangi’s words (2001).

Comparative analysis of the evolution of both type of regulations makes it possible to flash out relevant benefits towards a better knowledge and deeper awareness of:

- the history of formal systems in tourism planning derived from regional land-use planning;
- readability and impact of legal instruments and social compromise;
- the technical nature of legal language;
- the discursive cline both in administrative documents and urban plans;
- the linguistic interpretation of legal texts;
- the development of legal language in comparison to the one used in regional plans and tourism plans.

**Limitations** | A wider and more representative corpus needs to be analysed so as to further an understanding of both type of regulations, as it involves domains related to the environmental, ecological, social and tourism discourse, inherent to a policy based on sustainable development. Reducing the subjectivity on the discourse level is likely to reinforce a change towards sustainable development.

**Conclusions** | The interpretive process as the one adopted in this study, activated by the interaction of the segmental, supra-segmental and textual levels, evidences the multimodal nature of the regulations of these four plans, albeit more relevant in the two regional land plans.

By addressing regulatory issues through linguistic evidence, as an affordance to understanding professional legal texts and resorting to corpus tools, this approach is likely to offer (Bhatia, 1998: 102) a “better idea of the communicative purpose(s)” utterances are meant to serve and the constraints met while drafting them.