

Heritage, Museums and Identity: The path of “Caminhos da História”

Património, Museus e Identidade: “Caminhos da História”

MARISA P. DE BRITO * [brito.m@nhtv.nl]

CECÍLIA ROSA ** [cecilia.rosa@caminhosdahistoria.com]

EUNICE R. LOPES *** [eunicelopes@ipt.pt]

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Objectives | The interpretation of heritage is a process of communication between heritage and the visitor so that meaning and value are created. This is an alternative to cultural tourism reproduction models and it presents itself as a distinctive and competitive approach in the context of tourism development. An authentic interpretation of the heritage enhances the value of the monument and the experience of the visitor (Herbert, 1995). In fact, tourism practices entice visitors to reinvent the territory, the "tourist place," with the uniqueness, the identity, the emotional connection and the way it is visited, takes on new meanings. This article aims to approach the topic of cultural tourism in Portugal through a case study of a travel agent. In this article we bring insights based on a case study *Caminhos da História* – a small tour operator company offering guided tours in the city of Tomar, in Portugal, and its region. The city of Tomar is home of the UNESCO World Heritage Convent of Christ – and *Caminhos da História* offers tours to explore the culture and history of the Templar's Order, offering therefore several packages of single or multiple days, including the Knights Templar Experience. These packages are available for the domestic tourist in Portuguese but also for the international market in several languages. As a case study we take a holistic approach touching several aspects such as the value of natural and cultural landscape and the importance of its interpretation in a personalized context. This study brings forward insights useful for small tours operators. We extract key lessons from *Caminhos da História* in growing without sacrificing quality.

Methodology | Methodologically, the research approach was as follows: a) In-depth case study: a small Portuguese tour operator *Caminhos da História*; 2) Literature review: (cultural) tourism/tour operators

* **PhD in Management** by the Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands. **Senior Lecturer** at Academy of Leisure, NHTV- University of Applied Sciences, Breda, the Netherlands.

** **Master in Tourism** by the Polytechnic Institute of Tomar, Portugal. **Tour guide** at Caminhos da História, Tomar, Portugal

*** **Post-Doctorate student** in Tourism at the University of Aveiro. **Postgraduate Course** in Tourism at the University of Aveiro and **PhD** in Anthropology, Politics, Images of Culture and Museology from Universidade Nova de Lisboa. **Professor** at the Polytechnic Institute of Tomar, Tomar, Portugal and **member** of the research units CRIA (FCSH-UNL) and GOVCOPP (UA).

and entrepreneurship/start-ups; 3) Secondary data: regarding the development of Tourism in Portugal, the city of Tomar, and *Caminhos da História*; 4) Primary data: in-depth interview with the owner of the tour operator and mini-survey with customers.

Main Results and Contributions | 1) *Caminhos da História*, Lda. is a small tour operator established in 2011. It was registered as a Touristic Recreation company, under the Portuguese law. Located in Tomar, offering tours in the city and region. 2) It specializes in thematic cultural and historic tours. The Tours are based on the history of Portugal, the heritage legacy, religious and medieval military orders and cultural tradition. 3) The type of tourist of *Caminhos da História* falls mainly in the following 2 categories: purposeful Cultural Tourists and Sightseeing cultural tourists. 4) It offers basically 2 types of products: streamlined tours and Tailor-made tours. It also has shown opportunistic behavior, e.g. the launching of “Behind Da Vinci Code” on the 10th-year anniversary of ‘Da Vinci Code’- the book. *Caminhos da História* has a) Partnership at local, regional, national and international level; b) Partnerships for knowledge, regional cultural, and business development; c) At national level, there is a key partnership with the CP – the Portuguese Railways; d) At international level: contracts with agencies working with foreign tourism are key to spread demand across the year/winter months (because national tourists visit the city mainly from Spring to Autumn).

Limitations | The main limitation is the a single case study in a specific context, Portugal. Though the longitudinal analysis offered rich insights, transferability of results to e.g. other regions or countries should take into account the specificity of the context. Future work should seek to articulate and test the transferability of the findings.

Conclusions | Through the combination of the interview’s thematic analysis, the customer’s surveys, and secondary data, we can derive a few lessons. In order to grow and without sacrificing quality, *Caminhos da História* laid out the following stepping stones: High Quality of Service; Establishing Strategic and New Relationships; Taking advantage of gaps in the market: absence of operators in the international market; Adding to the cultural/social/creative capital of the city/region (pro-bono); Being able to jump at opportunities: e.g. impromptu guided-visits. The following five factors emerge therefore as crucial for small tour operators to grow on quality while entering new markets: 1) quality from the start; 2) Knowing the Ecosystem: deep knowledge of the ins and outs of the institutional /regulatory/financial ecosystem; 3) Operating in multi-level networks: partnerships with public and private sector at multiple level (local, regional, national); 4) Clear value proposition: differentiation of pro-bono, volunteering, business; 5) Investing in the cultural/social/creative capital of the city/region. The above are in itself practical lessons for small tour operators. Yet, and as seen by the path taken by *Caminhos da História*, success takes time.

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