

Public participation as a process of social innovation and its contribution to tourism planning

ANA MOITA FRANCISCO * [anamoitafrancisco@ua.pt]

CARLOS RODRIGUES ** [cjose@ua.pt]

FILIPA BRANDÃO *** [filipa.brandao@ua.pt]

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Objectives | | With this research, it is intended to advance knowledge about public participation in tourism planning processes and to develop a conceptual model that contributes to the emergence of synergies between local community and tourism planning, aiming to integrate communities through social innovation. The research question guiding this research is:

How can public participation, as a process of social innovation, contribute to tourism planning?

The general objective underlying the research is to propose the development of a conceptual model of tourism planning, based on public participation, which contributes to maximizing the potential of the territories and their identity.

Specifically, it is aimed to:

1. Analyze the concept of innovation, especially in its social dimension, and understand its role in tourism planning processes.
2. Understand how public participation can contribute to the development of territories, ensuring economic, social and environmental benefits for the local community.
3. Identify the main barriers and facilitating factors for public participation in the various stages of tourism planning.

Methodology | The work plan is based on two fundamental dimensions: a comprehensive bibliographical review focusing on social innovation, public participation and tourism planning, and a case study to be developed in a given territory. The literature review will provide the basis for a theoretical-conceptual framework focusing on the topic of public participation while considered as social innovation within planning processes and the challenges that this participation raises. This literature review will be combined

* **Tourism PhD Student**, University of Aveiro.

** **PhD in Social Sciences**, University of Aveiro. **Director** of the Department of Social Sciences, Politics and Territory of the University of Aveiro. *Member* of GOVCOPP.

*** **PhD in Tourism**, University of Aveiro. **Invited Assistant Professor** of the Department of Economics, Management, Industrial Engineering and Tourism of the University of Aveiro. **Member** of GOVCOPP

with knowledge derived from relevant national and international experiences, to be collected through bibliographic analysis and contacts with research networks. This will provide the basis that will support the construction of a conceptual model of inclusive planning. The case study will have the referred conceptual model as a reference for its development and, besides contributing to fine-tune the model itself, it will provide the necessary knowledge to assess barriers and challenges and, above all, to advance with leading proposals.

Currently, this research is in the literature review stage, in order to, improve knowledge regarding the topics under study, namely social innovation, public participation and tourism planning, as well as to answer the research question. This state of the art review is being carried out through the analysis of scientific articles, review articles and conference papers through databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, B-On and the Scientific Repository of Open Access of Portugal (RCAAP). It will be based on this bibliographic review that the conceptual model of planning will be defined.

The case study will be based on the analysis of three experiences of tourism planning in which there has been some involvement of the local communities and tourist agents. To conduct this study, the criteria of analysis of the experiences will be defined, detailed in a protocol of analysis based on the proposed conceptual model. The data collection phase follows, according to different data collection techniques. Through documentary analysis, the selection and collection of information about the experiences to be analysed will be made, using various sources, such as studies, projects, reports, meetings and statistics, among others. It is also planned to carry out interviews with those responsible for structuring, implementing and operationalizing the experiences considered in the scope of this case study, in order to identify adopted methodologies, namely the involvement of the local community and tourist agents in both the study phases and implementation.

In order to analyse the territories where the experiments are taking place, a statistical indicators analysis is also required, envisaged to characterize these areas, particularly in their demographic, economic and, more specifically, tourist dimensions. The next stage is data treatment using the WebQDA software. Follows a phase of conceptual assessment of the initial model, in which, in view of the obtained results with the case study, the final model will be fine-tuned.

Main Results and Contributions | The main contribution of this research will be to understand how can public participation, as a process of social innovation, contribute to tourism planning. This will be accomplished through an evaluation of how local agents and communities are involved in tourism planning and how relevant this involvement is. In this way, it is intended to create knowledge on the fundamental topics of the study (social innovation in tourism and public participation) and to develop a benchmark analysis that allows creating synergies between public participation and planning processes, aiming at integrating communities through social innovation. Simultaneously, it will be identified and prioritized the main barriers and facilitating factors for public participation in tourism planning.

As tourism is continuously becoming a panacea, it is essential to know how public participation can contribute to qualify tourism as the solution and contribute to the economic growth and quality of life of the population, the valorization of territories and the preservation of resources.

In this way, the aim of this work is to design a framework for organizations to implement effective measures and strategies for the participation of local communities, such as their awareness and mobilization in favor of tourism, the involvement of companies and organizations in the creation of tourism products with endogenous characteristics and the valorization of those products that contribute to the effective

development of the territories. At a conceptual level, it is intended to create knowledge about the areas under study, namely on public participation as a process of social innovation.

Limitations | The main study limitation is the adoption of a case study methodology, in the sense that the conclusions will be drawn based on the selection of three experiences of tourism planning. To try to overcome this limitation we will try to choose three diverse cases, with different locations, characteristics and interviewees that bring different perspectives on the objects of analysis. Also, the lack of quantitative and qualitative information on tourism innovation can be limitative since it does not allow to compare the obtained results.

Conclusions | The proposed study is structured in order to answer to the focal objective of this research, which consists in developing a conceptual model of tourism planning, emphasizing public participation and innovation, contributing to maximize the potential of tourism territories and their identity. The intention is to create theoretical knowledge about social innovation in tourism and public participation, as well as to propose a conceptual model that allows organizations to have a set of tools that contribute to the involvement and participation of local communities in tourism planning.