

# Co-creating the rural tourism experience: a case study of a rural tourism accommodation in the Viseu Dão-Lafões Region

Cocriação da **experiência turística sustentável**: o estudo de caso de uma unidade de alojamento na Região Viseu Dão-Lafões

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**Keywords** | Rural Tourism, co-creation, accommodation, supply, networks, Viseu Dão-Lafões

**Objectives** | Rural tourism has been observed as a factor that can induce rural development and contribute to the diversification of activities in rural areas. At the same time, the activity can also contribute to the satisfaction of an, especially urban, tourist market, increasingly demanding and looking for new and authentic experiences. This idea reflects, on the one hand, the importance of an innovative attitude in rural tourism provision. On the other hand, it highlights the importance of offering co-creative experiences. The co-creative experience is related to the search of the promised paradise, that is, the search for peace, tranquility, emotions and sensations, often found in rural areas (Kastenholz, 2014). Indeed, there is a growing interest amongst visitors to know the tradition and culture of the rural community - ancestral agricultural practices, local products and, gastronomy, handicraft, local heritage and many other resources and know-how.

Apart from nature and rurality that attract tourists (Cristóvão, 2002) and in spite of some notable efforts in presenting new experience opportunities, most supply is not yet ready to answer the new demand (Cristóvão, Tibério & Abreu, 2008). Indeed, offers that induce an authentic and memorable experience in tourists are less frequent, with the majority of promoters of rural tourism adopting rather passive, less innovative attitudes (Pato, 2012).

A noteworthy exceptional example of innovation is an accommodation unit located in the Viseu Dão-Lafões Region, more precisely, in one of the most peripheral and inland communities of the region (municipality of Mangualde, village of Gandufe). Therefore, in a region that does not hold the same tourism potential as other regions of the country (such as the neighboring Douro region), and which is not as well known, the author investigated: What are the reasons for the great success of this lodging unit of rural tourism? At the same time, it is asked: What benefits can follow for the tourism lodging itself and for the entire community?

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**Methodology** | This work uses a case study approach. Being qualitative in nature, it allows to investigate the phenomenon more deeply, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2009). On the other hand, the case study implies the use of diverse information sources. In this case a semi-structured interview was used. The guideline for the interview was based on the literature review about co-creation the rural tourism experience. In order to identify the main discourse of the promoter of the unit, the interview was tap-recorded, transcribed and subject to content analysis. This content analysis involved the categorisation and systematisation of discourse of the accommodation's promoter.

Documental analysis, was a systematic procedure for reviewing and analysing documents printed or not (Bowen, 2009), was based on electronic documents about the initiative, on articles from newspapers and online comments (on Tripadvisor, booking.com and social networks and others). These documents were examined and interpreted in order to obtain meaning, gain understanding, and develop knowledge.

**Main Results and Contributions** | This study is important because, on the one hands, it reinforces the work of other studies (e.g. Kastenholz, Carneiro, Marques & Lima, 2012; Kastenholz, 2014), with regards to the co-creative experience in rural tourism. On the other hand, it elucidates an exceptional example of entrepreneurship with a family character in rural tourism. Indeed, results show that behind the strategy followed by the supplier of the venture is a great desire to succeed, win and do something different. The capacity of accommodation is growing, and at this moment the unit already offers three houses (one adapted for people with reduced mobility) as well as a suite. The uniqueness, genuineness and quality of the offer provided since 2013 has already conferred the unit the Tripadvisor certificate of excellence and a current rating of 9.4 (on a scale of 0 to 10) granted by Booking.com. Since tourists do not just live on bread and wine, i.e. accommodation and food, the promoter of the venture has established a set of partnerships and networks with other local actors. This refers to the networks established with a regional spa, a regional sweets producer, a regional wine producer and the local population itself, as well as many other links and networks established in the village and region. Unique, as well, is the organic production of some products made available to the tourists, the animal farm (*quinta da bicharada*) - with chickens, rabbits, goats, dogs and cats - and the biological pool in the garden.

**Conclusions and limitations** | From a micro point of view, we conclude that the offer of different and memorable experiences amongst rural tourists leads, on the one hand, to the success of the lodging unit, and on the other hand to high levels of satisfaction by exceeding the expectations of the tourists. From a more macro point of view, with the creation of links with other local stakeholders, this same offer leads to the locality and region where the unit is located. In terms of limitations, due to the lack of time and financial resources to carry out the research, not all desirable information could be collected. It is necessary to complement the data information gathered from the supplier of the tourism lodging with other local actors, namely the agents of local businesses and the community itself, as was done in the ORTE project (Kastenholz, Eusébio, Figueiredo, Carneiro & Lima (Coordinators), 2014). Therefore, it would be interesting to complement this analysis with information collected from the mentioned stakeholders in the future.

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