

Perceptions of residents and of other local and regional stakeholders regarding tourism development and their potential contribution to the creation of new tourism experiences in Boticas

Perceções dos residentes e de outros **stakeholders** locais e regionais sobre o desenvolvimento turístico e o seu potencial contributo para a **criação** de novas **experiências turísticas** em Boticas

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Objectives | The primary goal of this paper is to capture resident perceptions, as well as the perceptions of other local and regional stakeholder regarding the tourism attributes of their territory and the perceived impacts of tourism development in Boticas, a municipality located in the north-eastern region of Portugal. Additionally, we envisage better understanding whether residents are available to contribute to supplying new tourist opportunities with a more active and creative experience. Consequently, this paper will:

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- i. Assess Boticas stakeholder perceptions (i.e., residents, local and regional actors) of the implementation of a collaborative and integrated strategy for local tourism development and the viability of taking an active role in the supply of new tourism experiences;
- ii. Contribute to a more participative and sustainable tourism development program in the Boticas municipality and of the neighbouring municipalities to empower this new tourism destination;
- iii. Contribute to the creation and improvement of new tourist experiences and enhance the welfare of the Boticas local community through tourism.

Methodology and data analysis | To achieve the proposed aims of this investigation, a survey was distributed to Boticas residents. From the 737 questionnaires distributed between January and May 2016, 453 (62%) were returned. The questionnaire was adapted from previous surveys that assessed resident perceptions of tourism development to include Boticas specific characteristics (Jurowski & Gursoy, 2004; Látková & Vogt, 2012; Kim, Uysal, & Sirgy, 2013; Vareiro, Remoaldo, & Cadima Ribeiro, 2013; Styliadis, Biran, Sit, & Szivas, 2014; Styliadis, 2016). The survey was four pages long, consisted of 23 questions and was divided into five sections: 1. the global image of the municipality; 2. the perceptions of municipality tourism attributes; 3. the opinions of tourism development in the municipality; 4. participation in tourism activities; and 5. personal information. To complement the information provided by the survey, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 22 local agents and 3 regional agents (public and private) in the tourism activities field between July and September of 2016. Descriptive and factor analyses, using the principal component analysis, were used in the empirical approach concerning resident perceptions.

Results | Residents were found to believe that their territory is endowed with relevant tourism attributes and had a favourable image of the tourism potential of the municipality (average score of 3.88 on a Likert scale of five points, where 5 is the most favourable image). The residents underlined the attractive landscape, the existence of relevant historical sites and the sense of security felt in Boticas. Public transportation, road infrastructure and public services were less favourably perceived. Concerning tourism attributes, residents felt a sense of belonging to their territory (mean score of 4 on the same Likert scale). The attributes they valued most were gastronomy, events and festivities. They generally classified the expected economic impacts of tourism as positive (average score close to 4). Jobs and the generation of income from the local economy were the primary expected economic impacts. The cost of living was perceived as a possible negative effect. The socio-cultural impacts were evaluated positively (most rated with scores close to 4). The opportunity given to visitors of enjoying the local culture and handicrafts, profiting from the recreational opportunities and the available facilities were mentioned by the residents. They also positively assessed the potential of a cultural exchange associated with being exposed to different cultures. Keeping in mind the embryonic status of Boticas in the tourism market, these results and the evaluations should be regarded carefully. That is, they are primarily the result of the opinions of individuals (residents) in terms of what tourists seek and their expected behaviour, rather than the product of a practical experience or deep reflection on the issue. Nevertheless, the empirical results attained are in line with those of other studies performed in Portugal and elsewhere. This implies that resident perceptions of the image of their territories are usually quite favourable. In addition, they tend to evaluate the economic

impacts of tourism development positively.

The local and regional agents interviewed expressed their belief that tourism is a key industry for enhancing the development of Boticas and the Alto Tâmega sub-region. An increase of tourists into the territory could improve the craftworks dynamism, as well as other traditional activities. Private tour operators would have to play a key role in attaining these results.

Limitations | This investigation constitutes the first contribution of establishing a tourism strategy in the Boticas municipality. As such, the study and strategy proposals suggested must be viewed as exploratory approaches to the issue. A more thorough analysis can provide more consistent results and allow for a deeper understanding of the policy recommendations. Gender differences in wages, age groups, professions or the place of residence must be considered to acquire a better understanding of resident perceptions on the tourism attributes and the impacts of tourism development.

The absence of information about tourists, especially their motivations and profile, raises constraints on the strategy to adopt it. That is, the strategy must obtain support on the tourism attributes of the territory and the motivations of potential tourists. In this way, there is a need to better understand the visitor perceptions of the attributes of the territory. This information can be used to infer whether visitor perceptions fit that of resident and local and regional stakeholder perceptions. Consequently, we could not link the Boticas tourism attributes with tourist motivations and expectations. As mentioned previously, we are convinced that the residents, as well as the local and regional agents, are not able to develop a clear strategy on the profile of the destination that they should establish. Aware of that missing link, a survey is being implemented to national and international tourists that are currently visiting the Boticas municipality.

Conclusions | Our results reveal that residents perceived tourism as an opportunity to enhance the development of the municipality of the Boticas. That being said, they have doubts as to whether they would personally benefit from tourism. Since the municipality is not yet a major tourist destination, these results have to be considered carefully, in the sense that they may be linked to strong (unrealistic) expectations of the economic potential of their territory in relation to tourism development (Brida, Osti, & Faccioli, 2011). Moreover, considering the multitude of attributes perceived as having tourism potential, and keeping in mind the average rates and ranking attained, we wonder if the high rates are primarily due to residents' self-esteem and commitment to their territory, rather than to its intrinsic tourism potential. In the same way, we wonder if the results attained, with regard to the expected impacts of tourism on the territory and on its population, are mostly based on resident ideas of what tourists seek and their expected behaviour, rather than on practical experience or a deep reflection on the issue.

Overall, the results from the local and regional stakeholders were similar to those from the residents' survey. The local and regional stakeholders perceived nature as the most important tourist asset of the Boticas; this was followed by gastronomy and the local culture.

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