

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

SERVICE QUALITY IN PORTUGUESE SPORT TOURISM COMPANIES

*Pedro Bento**

Instituto Politécnico de Beja. Portugal
pbento@ipbeja.pt
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3826-4357>

*Luis Murta**

Instituto Politécnico de Beja. Portugal
lmurta@ipbeja.pt
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4395-2664>

*Jesús Sáez-Padilla***

Universidad de Huelva
jesus.saez@dempc.uhu.es
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7717-2121>

INTRODUCTION

This article refers to a recent tourism sector, denominated in several European countries, as Active Tourism (Beedie, Hudson, 2003, Arcos, 2004, Cunha, 2006, Carvalhinho, 2011, Mediavilla et al., 2014). In Portugal, this sector has grown in recent years, where studies pointed to the importance of discovering unique places, through tourism and sports activities, highlighting the very playful nature of this type of experience (García, 2001).

Associated with this growth, some problems began to arise, resulting from the lack of regulation that existed, mainly at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The access to this type of activity and the creation of companies in the sector, was not accompanied by large economic and physical structures, in addition the level of specific training was low and administrative and government support were scarce. All these factors give rise to the urgency of studying and researching this sector better, trying to identify the parameters and determining factors that determine the quality of the services demanded by companies in the area. Next, we present the HEVA questionnaire adapted to the Portuguese language, as well as the results achieved, through the answers of 183 Portuguese active tourism companies.

HEVA QUESTIONNAIRE

The HEVA questionnaire (Bento et al., 2017), allows obtaining the data of the active tourism companies respondents. for later analysis of their quality. Its structure and contents

were adapted and validated for the Portuguese language. The translation and adaptation of the elements present in each parameter were elaborated taking into account the addressees, as well as the treatment and formal validity of questions (Heinemann, 2008). The questionnaire is divided into 3 sections. In the first section, we find basic information about the general profile of companies (where it is registered, number of partners, available activities, etc.).

In the second question section 7 multidimensional parameters are present, with 10 items each, which can be answered on a Likert scale of 5 points, from 1 (unimportant) to 5 (very important), and another scale of Gutman (Yes or no), which is answered according to the implementation, or not, of each item in the management of the company.

The multidimensional parameters are: Company, “Key” Activity, Material Resources, Safety, Environment, Human Resources and Client. In this block, the score of the answers can go from 70 to 350 points, taking account all the elements of the 7 multidimensional parameters.

In the third and last section, supplementary questions are written to know the opinion of the person in charge of the company, in relation to the aspects that he believes his clients consider most important. It is divided into 15 items (Courtesy, Customer, Attractive Activities, Response Capacity, Conservation of the Environmental, Service Effectiveness, Facilities, Cleanliness, Guarantee of Service Quality, Complementary Products, Professionalism, Punctuality, Product Satisfaction, Security and Complaint Handling), inserted in the same Likert scale explained above. The maximum score that can be obtained is 75 points and a minimum of 15 points.

METHODOLOGY

The questionnaire was sent to the companies, through the “Google Drive” platform. In this way, the companies were contacted, sending the document online, during the period of the year where there is less work, especially between November and March (winter time). We send and collect information, in a temporary space of 4 months.

For the analysis of the results, we studied the specialized literature (Fonseca, 2008, Maroco, 2011), we used the techniques that best fit our study and in accordance with the objectives of our investigation. For the descriptive analysis, we develop frequency tables, representing corresponding percentages and absolute frequencies. We evaluated the statistical parameters of central tendency and dispersion, using different types of graphs, ensuring the clearest representation of the data, for a better interpretation.

RESULTS

This study involved 183 Portuguese active tourism companies registered in the Tourism of Portugal IP, through the RNAAT platform (National Registry of Active Tourism Companies). Answered the questionnaire, companies from eighteen regions of Portugal. The Faro province with thirty-five companies (19.1%), followed by Lisbon with 24 (13.1%) and Porto with twenty three (12.6%) were the regions most represented in this study.

Most of the companies opted to develop their services in a closer environment, near their headquarters, managing and organizing activities and services without making large movements. However, there are also many companies that move from north to south of the country (25.7%), boosting their activities / services in a more national context (table 1). We also highlight the internationalization of thirty-four companies, demonstrating the importance and value of the work developed. Regarding the results related to the work period developed throughout the year, we verified that the majority of active tourism companies (n = 144), develop their activity during the 12 months of the year (78.7%). Only 12% work 6 months a year and 5 companies (2.7%) say they carry out their activity for only 4 months.

Reporting to the “Key” Activity, the results fifteen different items, which shows differentiation of solutions in the Portuguese active tourism area. Thirty-six companies (20%) mention circuits and tours as their most sought after activity. Next, 17% have the multiactivities as a reference for their clients. Hiking and water sports (canoeing and diving) also present some relevance in the present investigation.

The human resources result in this study, confirm the existence of ninety companies (49.2%) have one worker and sixty-six companies (36.1%) have two permanent workers in their work. Only four companies (2.2%) have four permanent workers and only one (0.5%) has five workers of that type.

The discontinuous workers, the reality is very similar, being that 42.1% of the sample affirms that not have any collaborator in these conditions. Forty-three of the companies (23.5%) have one and only twenty (4%) have four or more discontinuous workers. In the case of temporary workers, 88.5% of the sample has between zero and five workers in these conditions, while 59% have two or fewer workers. It is also observed that nine companies (4.9%) have 10 or more temporary workers.

Multidimensional parameters results

At this point, we proceeded to the descriptive analysis of the results of the multidimensional parameters and complementary questions, according to the answers given by the companies. The item most valued by the companies in each of the multidimensional parameters, observed through the percentage of positive responses (% yes) and the attributed importance, expressed through the average value of the answers (through a Likert scale).

We highlight the high importance given by the active tourism responsible to the items 3.7 “*Know the specific and current regulations that regulate this activity*” (“Key” Activity parameter); 4.3 “*Replace the material by deterioration*”(Material Resources parameter); 5.7 “*Own, those responsible for the activity, other security elements* (Security parameter); 6.1 “*Know the environmental regulations in terms of space*” (Environment parameter) and 8.7 “*Inform and identify the services offered*” (Client parameter).

In the supplementary questions of the HEVA questionnaire, we verify that the “Customer” (4.86), the “Professionalism” (4.85), the “Product Satisfaction” (4.79), the “Courtesy” (4.75) and “Service Effectiveness “ (4.66), were the itens considered most important in this study.

CONCLUSIONS

The objective of this investigation was describing the profile of Portuguese active tourism companies and the perception of entrepreneurs, on the quality of the services they produce. With the application of the HEVA questionnaire (Bento et al, 2017), we highlight the following conclusions:

- The recent growth of this sector in Portugal, where companies are managed by one or two entrepreneurs and offer up to 10 activities / products to the market. They develop their activity during the twelve months of the year.

- Those responsible for active tourism companies in Portugal participating in the study, consider it very important to develop reliable tools, capable of measuring customer satisfaction - an important factor in improving the services provided by these types of companies.

- The Portuguese active tourism companies demonstrate a constant concern in the communication with the client, all the inherent characteristics of the activity, in particular with regard to the aspects of management and minimization of risks.

- Possessing and demonstrating the technical requirements for carrying out activities, as well as knowing and mastering all the specific regulatory aspects (for example, equipment, safety, difficulty levels, etc.) of each of them, is an important factor for the majority of the companies surveyed.

- The exchange of information with customers, as well as the placement of specific demands to carry out activities, are essential factors of safety and quality, according to the Portuguese companies surveyed.

- Regarding aspects of the “Natural Environment”, most companies consider it unimportant to inform the environmental authorities in relation to their activities when they take place in delimited or regulated spaces (for example, Natural Parks).

- The main factor that determines the success of the activities / services provided in the active tourism sector is, according to the Portuguese entrepreneurs surveyed, the valorization and specialization of their human resources.

- The management and motivation of human resources is an essential piece to exist quality in the services provided. Thus, in the vast majority of the companies surveyed, there is a low turnover of personnel.

- They also consider that their clients attach great importance to the way in which they are conducted, from the purchase to the realization of the activity, to the professionalism and efficiency demonstrated throughout the process, resulting in a satisfaction with the product (s). According to them, if you neglect any of the aspects and attitudes mentioned above, it can easily result in a loss of customers and services.