



**INNOVATION INOVAÇÃO
MANAGEMENT GESTÃO E
AND EDUCATION EDUCAÇÃO EM
IN TOURISM & TURISMO &
HOSPITALITY HOTELARIA**
APPLIED RESEARCH INVESTIGAÇÃO APLICADA

WITH THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE ISITH 2014
INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON INNOVATION
IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY

INTEGRA AS COMUNICAÇÕES DO ISITH 2014
SIMPÓSIO INTERNACIONAL DE INOVAÇÃO
EM TURISMO E HOTELARIA

COLEÇÃO POLITÉCNICO DA GUARDA



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Prospective methodologies to support Tourism Destinations Management

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ABSTRACT. *The application of prospective methodologies in the management of tourism destinations is recent and it is the result of a growing concern to assess sustainable projects at destinations in planning and tourism development. There isn't an effective planning of tourism with binding character in Portugal, that transform the interventions in destinations through land-use plans in force and the guidelines contained in strategic plans produced with different territorial scales and by different entities, it is important to consider that, in addition to academic studies. These studies allow us to contribute to public management, promoting the effective recognition of their added value in supporting decision-making and sustainable construction at destinations. In this context, the Delphi methodology intends to predict future changes or trends and emerges as an alternative to conventional methods of prospecting. Its application to tourism destinations has contributed to a different interpretation of the characteristics of the destination and processes to be developed, leading to forming a panel that promotes quantitative and qualitative assessments of balanced strategies or projects, allowing to base action logics and assume guidance. In the study applied to the Central mountain range destination, we tried to inquire about existing problems, about the recognition of disruptive interventions, policy addressing / interventions for the management and promotion of the tourism destination, reaching a consensus for decision-making and defining strategies for the territory appropriation through tourism and leisure activities.*

KEYWORDS: *Tourism, Destination Management, Prospective Studies, Delphi Methodology and Mountain*

Introduction

The research and production of accurate information is subject to processes and methodologies whose implementation needs meticulous care and an investigative experience that ensures the accuracy in data collection and analysis. These concerns become critical when trying to listen to stakeholders with distinct characteristics, forms of action and interests in a given area, in order to receive quality information and dispel disruptions in the process and the collection methods used.

The development of analysis and territorial prospective works are a key support to consider strategies with concrete implications in terms of logic and functionality that those areas are confronted with, so all research must be done using appropriate methodologies and critical indicators analysis, which allows a correct diagnosis to leverage proposals or strategies to be implemented.

This work seeks to analyse and establish guidelines for the development of actions that ensures sustainability of results, through a deep understanding of the territorial reality under study, promoting itself as a critical tool for planning tourism destinations. Given the uncertainties we face, resulting from changes in the economic and social context and ways of perceiving destinations and their appropriation, it is crucial to develop an information-gathering process, able to sustain guidelines or action strategies in a participative manner.

The Delphi method was designed with the goal of predicting future changes or trends and emerged as an alternative to conventional methods of prospecting. It aims to establish a prospective research, through an information gathering process by combining the knowledge and experience of experts in various fields in order to generate consensus of opinion on future facts or effects. This methodology was implemented while looking for an insight into the mountain areas in Portugal and in an attempt to systematize a broad range of information that characterizes the mountains of the Central Mountain Range, its problems and also to allow the identification of strategies to be promoted. A panel of experts from various scientific fields was established in order to obtain an approach about the specifics of these territories and its challenges, and establish a model of occupation and proper use of its characteristics, whilst ensuring the enhancement and sustainability of tourism.

Prospective methodologies and public management of tourism destinations

Doubt and uncertainty play a critical role in the management and planning process, which in a sector such as tourism, generates a sense of uncertainty, given the different trends and ways of its use and choices by individuals and groups. Thus, the sceptical dimension of forecast requires the development of methodologies and an increased involvement of partners that enable finding ways and sets, able to promote that the forecast led to the prospect. The planning, as a dynamic process subject to constant review, should increasingly and widely integrate the participation of different stakeholders about their vision of the future, realizing its strategic behaviour. (Godet in Hatem, Fabrice, 1993) The foresight methodologies seek to identify possible sets and the dependent relationship between the way to achieve or promote these sets and the strategy of social stakeholders, as well as the variables, the relationships and dependencies or potential over the development of action strategies. A qualitative and prospective approach assumes that the analytical tools and methodologies employed are developed promoting collaboration and interaction between the different stakeholders involved, recognizing their differences, strategies and interests. It thus becomes so important to develop an organization and coordination between different stakeholders, and their effective involvement / engagement is crucial in order to "legitimize" the given opinions or guidelines. It is essential to take into consideration that the stakeholders' relationship networks have a dynamic and unstable character. If, at a given moment, they have a given configuration, they are formed and can change throughout the analysis of the stakeholders' strategies. If the demand for objectivity is a major concern - we must not forget that decision-making is firstly and foremost a human activity implied by the notion of value and that subjectivity is omnipresent and is its engine." (Bana e Costa, 1993b: 1) - the issue of subjectivity is present in any decision-making process and, particularly, the Prospective methodologies since there is always a large "dose" of subjectivity. On the one hand, the work team has a very high degree of intervention throughout the process, one should not ignore judgements and should be aware that they are not neutral as the process progresses, on the other hand, one should bear in mind the degree of subjectivity of the choices on the part of the stakeholders, their priorities.

The Delphi Method: Concept and Operation in managing Tourism destinations

The Delphi method intends to predict future changes or trends and emerged as an alternative to conventional methods of prospecting. The application of the methodology in the management of tourism destinations is relatively recent and is the result of a growing concern to assess projects or sustainable construction of destinations in the planning and tourism development process. The aims are (kaynak, 1994; Monfort, 1999; Garrod & Fyall 2005; Fernandes, 2010) to:

- Promote a prospective study, through a process of information gathering, combining the knowledge and experience of experts in various fields, promoting a holistic approach of the destination;
- Generate consensus of opinions about facts or future effects on tourism destinations because of the features/products held and demand trends;

- Establish a vision about the tourism destination and representation logics facing the identified contexts;
- Systematize a wide range of information that characterises the destination;
- Identify the strategies to be promoted.

This methodology requires the identification of experts and their involvement in the study, so that they can generate quality information and participate interactively in several rounds, in order to exploit the information obtained, generate consensus or guidelines and collect strategies or options, either by validation of the produced data, or innovative information resulting from knowledge, experience and benchmarking developed. In the study applied to the central mountain range destination, we tried to inquire about existing problems, about the recognition of disruptive interventions, policy addressing / interventions for the management and promotion of the tourism destination, reaching a consensus for decision-making and defining strategies for the territory appropriation through tourism and leisure activities.

The Delphi methodology is, in practical terms, the collection of expert opinions, anonymously, through questionnaires, and by rounds, it allows the analysis and exploitation of results of the information received, so that it can be sent back and modified, in order to achieve consensus. It seeks to achieve the convergence of answers / perceptions about the problems experienced through information targeted feedback that is repeated in successive rounds. The research relies, to a large extent, on personal expectations, taking advantage of the experience and knowledge of the selected experts group, with a multidisciplinary vision that allows to establish goals and interventions. The methodology is applicable when it is necessary to contrast and combine arguments and opinions to reach decisions, hardly taken unilaterally, thus obtaining qualified information from knowledge by the Panel of experts involved in the process. According to Kaynak, 1994; Häder and Häder, 1995; Cuhls, 2005, the fundamental characteristics of this methodology are:

- Group technique that replaces the interaction through a questionnaire that is sent to experts, who interpret and work by themselves, participating from a distance in the discussion and opinion making;
- Prior Selection of the experts, according to their knowledge, prestige and ability to express opinions about the tourism destination or its specifics;
- Feedback controlled by sending the results to the members of the Panel (experts), in order to achieve convergence, that is, starting from the transmitted and considered data, reconsidering or revising it;
- Quantitative treatment of information that allows generating representative answers and that show homogeneity or dispersion of opinions.

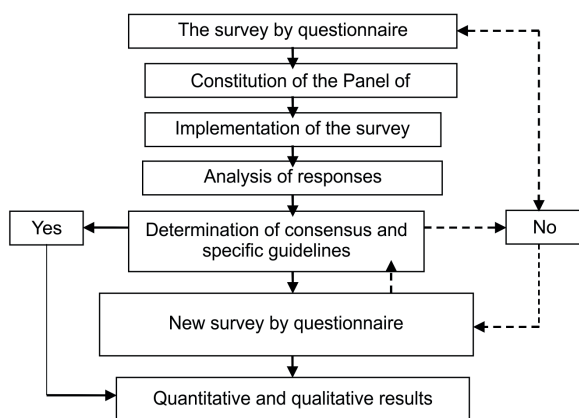


Figure 1- Steps of applying the Delphi methodology

The Delphi study relies on a panel of selected experts, due to their knowledge about the theme, prestige and ability to generate opinions. Thus, the group¹ was composed by university professors; representatives of public institutions linked to agriculture, forestry, tourism and regional development and Presidents of municipalities from the central mountain range.

Its application to tourism destinations has contributed to a different interpretation of the characteristics of the destination and processes to be developed, leading to forming a panel that promotes quantitative and qualitative assessments of balanced strategies or projects, allowing to base action logics and assuming guidance Fernandes (2010). The Delphi study applied in this investigation is based on a panel of 40 experts, selected in view of their knowledge about the topic, prestige and ability to form opinions. The Group was made up of university professors in the areas of geography, economy, tourism and environment; representatives of public institutions linked to agriculture, forestry, tourism and regional development and Presidents of the municipalities of municipalities from the central mountain range. The collaboration consisted of issuing opinions in two stages or rounds of consultation. In many cases a personal contact was made, in order to stimulate participation.

Main results and contributions

These techniques promote a greater innovation and creativity ability in research, because it promotes ideas and action strategies for the group involved in the process of study. With this procedure it is also possible to reach problem identification, information retrieval, detection of disruptive interventions, solving strategies and action plans, in a transversal approach, as a result of the various specialists involved on the management and development of the tourism destination. However, the rigour of research may be conditioned in the face of quick political, social and economic changes, as well as the knowledge that is being produced. In methodological terms it allows to: eliminate personal or group influences; ensure the representation of all opinions; group opinions and guidelines systematically; avoid face-to-face and formal meetings, which means economy and swiftness; filter and specify information; think about the questions in writing; reduce errors and uncertainties in relation to controlled retroaction and allow quantification. The methodology has proved to be of great interest, despite the difficulties at the level of involvement of the experts asked to participate in the research in information retrieval and in building a feedback system that allows us to evaluate trends, diagnose potential and support decisions. To the experts' panel, the management of the mountain range areas should be the responsibility of administrative authorities, including the preference for inter-municipal institutions. Six strategic goals for the promotion and qualification of tourism were identified: Valuation and protection of the environment, natural resources and their functions; Enlargement of the plurifunctionality of the mountain; Promotion of permeability of mountain territory; Planning and management of forest areas; Qualification of the agro-pastoral activities; Promotion of tourism activities highlighting heritage; Encouraging the participation of local communities in tourist planning strategies. It allowed setting six foundations for the structuring of a specific policy: Cultural, patrimonial, and environmental preservation, protecting the structure and operation of the ecosystems and of the landscape; Construction of a development model and specific development of tourism, favouring territorial cohesion; Identification and valuation of resources and local potentials; Involvement of the local stakeholders in preservation policies, in order to enhance and monetize these territories; Investment in vocational education and training in Tourism and Hospitality; Economic stimulation that promotes population growth and services (discrimination according to the local costs).

So, in terms of preservation it is necessary to specify the vocations, specificities and potential of various territories that make up the mountain, in an integrated and participatory manner, allowing, on the one hand, the conservation and safeguarding of elements of greater value and identity and, on the other, develop management and planning activities in the light of specific local features hinged and their potential.

1 In view of the criteria defined, knowledge about the topic, research developed and ability to generate opinions 40 experts were invited, by sending a description of the project, goal and purposes, with an acceptance sheet for the development of research by mail.

At a promotional level, the mountain must build an image of quality and integrity, as a brand associated with its features, developing policies that allow easy access to these regions in material and immaterial terms and increase training in strategic areas. The shortcomings and weaknesses of these economic and social territory must be mitigated through activities that value the specificities and local wealth in a sustainable way, boosting the agro-forest-pastoral system, betting on its quality, certification and designation of origin, strengthening the activities of tourism, recreation and leisure, increasing the offer of hotels and equipment that extends the attraction of the region throughout the year and invest on the qualification of human resources.

Actions/Interventions	
Preservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Definition of vocations, specifics and potential of each mountain area, involving politicians, economic agents and population; -Development of plans to safeguard and promote the endogenous potentialities; -Development of Tourism Charters and its articulation with the planning instruments; -Inventory of heritage and potential resources for tourism -Integration of international networks of preservation and geo conservation of high eco cultural potential territories
Promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Improvement of road infrastructure and tourist signposting; -Promotion of an image of quality and integrity; -Creating infrastructure and equipment for enhancing the quality of life and development of the region; -Promotion of the territory and its features in the area of tourism and leisure; -Certification and designation of origin of production; -Improving access to physical and immaterial infrastructures (networks of information and knowledge); -Promotion of gastronomy and livestock production; -Valuation of hazardous areas and natural resources; -Promotion of innovative accommodation layouts connected to mountain, nature and biodiversity.
Encouragement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Promotion of activities highlighting the specificities and local wealth in a sustainable manner; -Incentives for the establishment of population and economic activities; -Promotion of participation of various local agents -tourism cooperation; -Training of qualified human resources in tourism and hospitality; -Strengthening of recreational and leisure activities with different layouts and products; -Creation of partnerships supported by a digital platform; -Develop a network of cooperation in tourism – articulate stakeholders; -Valuation of the agro-forest-pastoral system in the mountain areas; -Encouragement of scientific research and the potential of this natural laboratory on the mountain.
Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Increase the participation of communities, economic agents, and institutional partners; -Development of projects adapted to the physical and socio-economic realities, in a participatory and inclusive manner; -Involve the educational institutions and the centres of R&D in the construction of strategies for tourism; -Promote the link between mountain spaces at a European level and with proactive, collaborative networks.

Table 3 - Strategies and actions for the Central Mountain Range destination management

There is a unanimous recognition of the mountains as eco-cultural references for the awareness of the ecological degradation and the promotion of environmental values. This attitude is based on natural recovery, in the existence of traditional systems of organization and territorial management, the preservation of strategic water reservoirs, forest and biodiversity, which enhance an ecological conscience and have a didactic function. The maintenance of the integrity and difference, faced with a global socio-economic model, is an asset for its development, to the extent that the growing trend of consumption standardization and the environmental and cultural deterioration, leads to the promotion of territories whose authenticities are preserved. In this regard, the valuation of the identity and specific characteristics of these territories involves their differentiation faced with areas with a high intensity of transformation and socio-economic appropriation, increasing its competitiveness and quality. There is, thus, the

exponentiation of the specificities and singularities, which should constitute the identification reference at the level of territorial marketing as a way to promote the territory, its resources and productions.

Success is dependent on the degree of involvement of the group and of the depth of the opinions, due to generating a system of “qualitative” group information gathering (though it may have quantitative dimensions) that wishes to be a “fundraiser” of brains (picking the brains), this aspect has proved critical in the quality of the results to be obtained and in terms of information processing, which when not properly planned can lead to disturbing situations of information and the means involved (.1999 Landeta; Godet, 1997; Garrod and Fyall, 2005), such as:

- It may result in the dilution of opinions of the real experts in the group;
- It requires a great rigour in the preparation of the issues and its interpretation;
- It makes the anonymity of experts difficult;
- It conditions the effectiveness of the research process, if delays happen when sending the responses in the developed rounds;
- Possibility that the group is not rigorous or does not share the whole information;
- Estimates are not in line with reality.

Since there isn't effective tourism planning with binding character in Portugal, transforming the interventions in destinations through land-use plans in force and the guidelines contained in strategic plans produced with different territorial scales and by different entities. It is important to consider it, in addition to academic studies, where they have been applied, transposing their contributions to public management and the effective recognition of their capital gains in supporting decision-making and the sustained construction of the destination.

Conclusion

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The increasing complexity of the operation of socioeconomic systems, the changes resulting from the behaviours and interests of the various stakeholders present and the dynamics that tourism has in its typologies, participants and formats of resources uses imply that the used methodologies are developed promoting collaboration and interaction between the different parties involved, recognizing their differences, strategies. The participation in a coordinated manner and interaction ability, proves to be of great importance against the doubts and questions that the destinations arise when making a decision or listing strategies and performance actions.

The Delphi methodology proves to be of great interest as a tool of prospective studies, despite the difficulties at the level of involvement of experts asked to participate in the investigation, which resulted in many cases, in a waiver concerning the integration in the research, a long period of data gathering, given the delay in sending the surveys. This technique promotes a greater innovation ability and research creativity, because it is based on the possibility to generate ideas and action strategies for the group involved in the study process without physical presence, which can be optimized in terms of time and costs through Information and Communication Technology (ICT). It allows access to relevant information to support decisions, knowing the experts' perspectives and promoting consensus sets. In a context of great dynamics and innovation, as is tourism, destinations must try to find support tools that sustain the decision and allow to assess projects, initiatives and strategies, through quality information collection, contributions or perceptions of specialists to enable supporting decisions and actions to be undertaken or equate the logic of action.

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