INTELLECTUAL OUTPUT 4
Case Study IO4- Tourism

Tourism in Alto Alentejo: Nature Tourism

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Key words: Nature tourism, Alto Alentejo, Natural Park, Rural tourism.

1. Summary

Tourism can be considered a basic strategic axis to the Portuguese sustainable development. The Alto Alentejo has an important Natural Park, São Mamede Mountain, which should contribute more to the tourist development of the four municipalities bordering it.

It has sufficient tourist infrastructures and the training of the personnel that attends to the demand of tourism of nature that little by little will be increased in these areas with so low density of population and with the potentiality of these protected areas must be improved.

These territories also reflect a balance between nature and human action, in order to maintain that balance, it is required to keep a sustainable dimension on the development of economic activities.

Strategies should pursue the rational use and protection of all-natural resources throughout the country to enable their enjoyment by future generations (explicit reference to sustainable development).

The municipalities bordering the natural park have tourist infrastructures with indicators that are higher than the Portuguese average (number of establishments and Lodging capacity per inhabitant). The objective to be improved is not to increase the number of days of stay, but to extend the periods of visits to the whole year and encourage the growth of visits by foreigners.

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Co-funded by the
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of the European Union

2. Introduction

Tourism can be considered a fundamental strategic axis to the Portuguese sustainable development. These last few years there has been a substantial increase in the number of investments in sectors not related to "Sun-Beach"; these investments are mainly located in the inner parts of the country with low population density, which is the general case of Alentejo (Salvador, 2011)

Natural resources are essential elements of the tourism product and critical drivers of attractiveness for a destination. Countries with a large number of natural heritage sites, a high degree of biodiversity, and a network of natural assets, formal and informal, can promote these attractions as part of a tourism competitiveness strategy.

Some resources are more fragile than others, and demand management or protection involves costs and requires a commitment to balanced development alongside complementary policies on biodiversity, infrastructure, transport, skills, cultural education, service quality, and sustainable development.

Tourism is one of the most critical sectors in the Portuguese economy, but the Alentejo region represents only 2.9% of the total, (INE, 2017). Despite a considerable growth in the last few years, this region maintains a low attraction potential, and this tourism is oriented towards the internal market and has the lowest hotel capacity of all Portuguese regions (Rural Tourism, TER)[1]. (Salvador, 2011)

When it comes to nature tourism, it is obvious the existence of a strong relationship with the rural tourism infrastructures and the Parks and Reserves to be a value-added resource that deserves to be included in the "National Tourist Supply," the existence of an extensive network of parks and natural reserves.

Strategies should pursuit the rational use and protection of all-natural resources throughout the country to enable their enjoyment by future generations (explicit reference to sustainable development).

The Portuguese Institute for Nature Conservation and Biodiversity (ICNB) defines "Natural Parks" as "national interest areas containing natural and semi-humanized landscapes and consistent examples of the integration of human activities and nature, which shows samples of a natural region." (Salvador, 2011)

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[1] Portuguese definition for Tourism in Rural Space – includes country houses, village tourism, agro tourism, rural tourism, house tourism, rural hotels, camping, holiday camps/colonies and youth hostels.
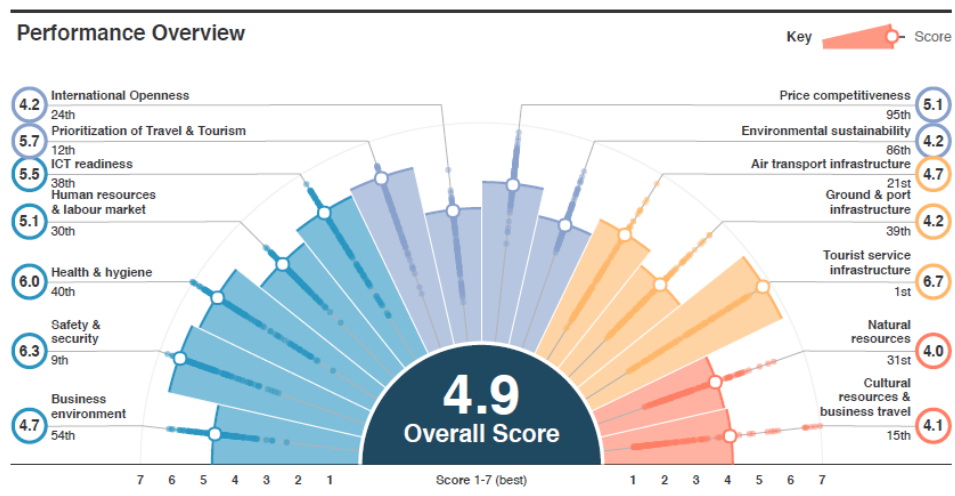
Natural Reserves are "areas for the protection of flora and fauna," fully integrated in demarcated areas for protection within the protected areas, "to maintain the natural processes in an undisturbed state." (Salvador, 2011)

The World Economic Forum engaged leaders in travel and tourism to carry out an in-depth analysis of the travel and tourism competitiveness of 140 economies and measures the set of factors and policies that enable the sustainable development of T&T.

Portugal is the 12th most competitive country in the world in tourism, and achieves unprecedented results: for the first time it ranks first in the tourism services infrastructure (6,7over 7), the 5th in the quality of tourism infrastructure (6.1 over 7) and 12th in the global ranking (4.9 over 7) (figure 1)

The report includes country indicators from the World Tourism Organization and World Travel Council (2019).

Figure 1: Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index 2019 edition

Sources: World Economic Forum

3. Aims

In this case study, we want to give answers to the following questions related to tourism policies and strategy:

- Does nature tourism have a high growth potential in the Alto Alentejo?

- Does it have infrastructure in line with present and possibly future demand for this type of tourism?

- What are the weaknesses and opportunities that this type of tourism presents for this century?

- What new strategies were put in place to try and achieve sustainable tourism?

4. Method

Based on the case study categories identified by Yin (1984) and McDonough (1997), the methodology will be exploratory, descriptive, and interpretative.

A study will be prior fieldwork, and smallscale data collection will be conducted before the research questions and hypotheses are proposed. The descriptive case studies may be in a narrative form, and it aims to interpret the data by developing conceptual categories, supporting or challenging the assumptions made regarding them.

Explanatory case studies aim to answer 'how' or 'why' questions with little control on behalf of the researcher over the occurrence of events. This type of case study focuses on phenomena within the contexts of real-life situations.

The leading indicators used are:

- Hotel, local accommodation, and rural tourism establishments.

- Lodging capacity: Hotel, local accommodation and rural tourism

- Net rate: Guest per inhabitant, Average stay in the establishment (nights), Average stay of foreign guests, Proportion of guests from foreign countries, Bed occupancy net rate.

- Lodging income: Total (thousand euros), Total per inhabitants (euros), Lodging per night (euros), Hotel establishments (thousand euros), Local accommodation (thousand euros) and Rural tourism and Housing tourism (thousand euros).

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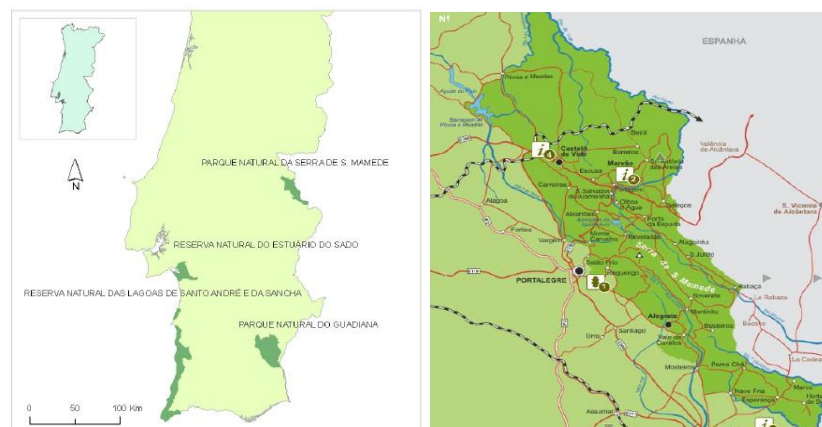of the European Union

5. Results

The vast expanse of Alentejo, one of the largest regions in Europe, has a protected natural wealth in many Natural Areas, enjoying remarkable landscape diversity, making this region an ideal place to enjoy the most a wide range of Active Tourism.

Outdoors, enjoying the water or snow, there are many activities to do in the region. Interesting suggestions for encouraging doing equestrian trails, hiking and biking, also, to embark on the adventure fun parks or surprised by the stunning landscape of Alentejo. We argue that Alentejo offers a unique potentiality to the development of the so-called "nature tourism." This type of tourist supply is considered to have a strong growth potential, mainly due to the European market behavior (Tourism National Strategic Plan (PENT, 2007), tourism travel and the nature of touring and cultural landscape.

The Alentejo has natural areas which, due to their low population density, can play an essential role in preserving biodiversity. The various plans of Nature Tourism in Reserves and Parks highlight the natural features as the significant potential for this type of tourism: geographical location and natural environment (in which we can include the landscape); historical and cultural heritage; fairs; festivals and pilgrimages; sun and beach; nature watch; walking and sports of nature; thematic routes; museums; crafts, food and wine; and last but not the least, tourist accommodation (Salvador, 2011).

The Alto Alentejo counts with Natural Park of São Mamede Mountain (PNSSM). Created in 1989 by ICNB, the São Mamede Mountain Natural Park integrates four municipalities (Marvão, Castelo de Vide, Portalegre and Arronches) over a total area of 55.524 ha. (ICNB, 2009).

Figure 2. Natural Park of São Mamede Mountain (PNSSM)

Source: ICNB 2009

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In order to discover the many treasures of this protected area, the Park proposes five pedestrian trails, utilizing which it is possible to appreciate the varied vegetation and observe rare birds of prey such as the vulture, kite, or Bonelli eagle - the symbol of the Park. With a bit of luck, you might see a wild boar or deer that are now returning to the Serra de São Mamede, after an effort made to reconstitute their habitats (visitportugal).

Portalegre's region offers a kaleidoscope of activities, among which you are sure to find the right one for you (Virtual Portugal). A hike through the Serra de São Mamede along footpaths marked out and provided with information is a real privilege. Trips by off-road or four-wheel motorcycles provide full scope for the spirit of adventure that lives within us all. Horse rides are another possibility at many rural tourism centers and the Elvas Riding Centre.

An explanatory video can be seen at the following address.

Sources: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=puXh0kOjYvs

The analysis of the results that help us to know the hotel and accommodation infrastructures that the towns bordering the park have, and the statistical data compared to the rest of the region and the national average are the following:

- It is particularly important for the compatibility between human activities and ecosystems dynamics. Concerning the number of tourist units offered in this area, Marvão has 21 lodgement units, Castelo de Vide and Portalegre 14, and the municipality of Arronches, three establishments (Table 1).

In terms of the number of tourist establishments per 1000 inhabitants, both the region and the four municipalities exceed the national average, with Marvao well above these with 6.6 followed by Castelo de Vide with 4.6 tourist units compared to 0.5 of the Portuguese average, 0.7 of the Alentejo and 1.0 of the Alto Alentejo.

Table 1. Hotel, local accommodation and rural tourism establishments

	Total Establishments	Establishm. per 10,000 inhabitant	Hotel	Local Accomm.	Rural and Housing tourism	Population
Portugal	**4,805**	**0.5**	**1,669**	**1,831**	**1,305**	**10,309,573**
Alentejo	**499**	**0.7**	**116**	**115**	**268**	**718,087**
Alto Alentejo	**107**	**1.0**	**25**	**15**	**67**	**108,588**
Arronches	3	**1.0**	1	0	2	2,952
Castelo Vide	14	**4.6**	4	0	10	3,058
Marvão	21	**6.6**	3	1	17	3,173
Portalegre	14	**0.6**	3	2	9	22,922

Sources: INE, I.P., Statistics Portugal, Tourism Statistics. Portugal, 2017

- In terms of accommodation capacity per 1000 inhabitants, they also exceed Marvão by almost seven times and Castelo de Vide by almost five times the Portuguese and Alto Alentejo average. While Portalegre is slightly lower and Arronches equally, but more significant is its negative difference (table 2)

Table 2. Lodging capacity

	Total	Total per 1000 inhabitant	Hotel	Local Accomm.	Rural and Housing tourism
Portugal	**380,818**	**37**	**302,491**	**55,796**	**22,531**
Alentejo	**22,779**	**32**	**12,390**	**3,901**	**6,488**
Alto Alentejo	**4,274**	**39**	**1,994**	**765**	**1,515**
Arronches	78	**26**	40	0	38
Castelo Vide	544	**178**	395	0	149
Marvão	813	**256**	170	3	640
Portalegre	801	**35**	129	9	663

Sources: INE, I.P., Statistics Portugal, Tourism Statistics. Portugal, 2017

- The number of users of these establishments per inhabitant in Marvão and Castelo de Vide is three times higher than the Portuguese average, but Alto Alentejo in general and Portalegre and Arronches in particular, are far below this. On the other hand, there are a series of lower indicators for these four municipalities, and for Alto Alentejo in general, concerning the Portuguese average (table 3): The number of nights of average stay (Portugal 2.8 versus 1.5 and 2. 1 of the bordering municipalities); the average number of days foreigners stay and the proportion of these about the total number of users is even more significant the negative difference of Alto Alentejo with the Portuguese average; and the percentage of occupancy, well below fifty

percent (Portugal 46% compared to 21% in Alto Alentejo and between 11% and 20% of these municipalities).

Table 3. Net rate

	Guest per inhabitant	Average stay in the establishment (nights)	Average stay of foreign guests	Proportion of guests from foreign countries	Bed occupancy net rate
Portugal	**2.1**	**2.8**	**3.3**	**59.1**	**46.4**
Alentejo	**1.6**	**1.8**	**1.9**	**31.6**	**27.3**
Alto Alentejo	**1.6**	**1.7**	**1.7**	**23.3**	**20.8**
Arronches	1.0	1.6	1.5	16.9	17.0
Castelo Vide	6.4	2.1	1.9	24.7	20.6
Marvão	6.8	1.5	1.4	44.6	11.6
Portalegre	0.7	1.6	1.7	19.5	12.4

Sources: INE, I.P., Statistics Portugal, Tourism Statistics. Portugal, 2017

Concerning tourist income, it should be noted that income per night is in line with the Portuguese average, exceeding 30 euros per night, but about the number of inhabitants it is approximately half the Portuguese average (table 4).

Table 4. Lodging income

	Total (thousand euros)	Total per inhabitnat (euros)	Lodging per nights (euros)	Hotel establishments (thousand euros)	Local accomm. (thousand euros)	Rural tourism and Housing tourism (thousand euros)
Portugal	**2,264,556**	**107**	**38**	**2,036,641**	**170,040**	**57,875**
Alentejo	**80,018**	**68**	**37**	**56,813**	**7,053**	**16,153**
Alto Alentejo	**10,525**	**61**	**35**	**7,631**	**447**	**2,447**
Arronches	233	78	49	120		113
Castelo Vide	789	40	19	624		165
Marvão	1,104	51	33	612	21	471
Portalegre	776	46	30	423	46	307

Sources: INE, I.P., Statistics Portugal, Tourism Statistics. Portugal, 2017

6. Discussion

Tourism can be considered a fundamental strategic axis to the Portuguese sustainable development; these last few years, there has been a steady increase in the number of investments in the inner parts of the country with low population density, which is the general case of Alentejo. (Salvador, 2011).

The choice of Alto Alentejo as the case study took into consideration elements such as the existence of a vital park and natural reserve, and these offer a potentiality to the development of the so-called "nature tourism."

The tourist region of Alentejo ranks in first place in the number of overnight stays in the Rural Tourism (TER) at a national level. The TER investments, with a pattern of location in areas of low density, justify a long-standing affinity with Nature Tourism.

The development of nature tourism in these region is made possible by the existence of a large number of units of tourism in rural areas, providing the possibility of Alentejo is the state of your typical tourist accommodation units, the proportion of registered foreign guests come to be high, and Increased national awareness (European and world) against the importance of preserving the environment, induces the extension of the market segment of tourism travel and the nature of touring and cultural landscape.

But it counts on the existence of some constraints in the development of tourism product: Smalls companies with little competitive ability; Risk of environmental degradation; Low qualifications of the labor-tourism; and Little awareness of the existence of natural.

7. Conclusions and Recommendation

The municipalities bordering the natural park have tourist infrastructures with indicators that are higher than the Portuguese average (number of establishments and Lodging capacity per inhabitant), which is why their preparation to receive tourists is appreciated beyond those who seek their rich cultural heritage.

The number of tourist users per inhabitant is much higher than the Portuguese average, while the number of days of average stay is approximately half, with a similar percentage of occupancy. Therefore, the objective to be improved is not to increase the number of days of stay, which is always tricky when it is not the sun and beach tourism, but to extend the periods of visits to the whole year and encourage the growth of visits by foreigners.

In pursuing this balanced approach, priorities for action include: Ensuring that tourism is subject to careful planning and development controls in sensitive areas; setting and implementing good practice guidelines for tourism operations, developing and implementing improved measurement of the environmental impacts of tourism; paying particular attention to the significant

potential offered by national parks and other protected areas as locations for high quality sustainable tourism; seeking ways of raising more direct support for conservation from tourism businesses and tourists; and Involving travellers and local communities in conservation activities.

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