Life cycle of a tourist destination: The importance of development and sustainability

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Abstract
Are development, competitiveness and sustainability decisive factors to enter the real lifecycle of a tourist destination?

The literature review confirms that this is true. Only after the planning and development are guaranteed through competitiveness and sustainability, one can enter into the real lifecycle of a tourist destination.

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Introduction
An increasing number of entrepreneurs are focusing their attention towards the discovery of new tourist destinations, taking advantage of locations with tourism potential, in order to create new activities, work opportunities and to undertake local and regional development.

This work aims at finding the main elements to be considered in the development, competitiveness and sustainability of a tourist destination, in order to understand the lifecycle of the destination.

Tourism promotes the development between different industries, as it has a multiplier effect of investment and demand/supply growth. The growth of tourism thus enables the reduction of regional differences and the improvement in the quality of life of the local population.

While talking about tourism, we are not only discussing about the physical space where the leisure activity takes place; but it also includes the cultural, historical, social and economic ambiances, and involves a large number of stakeholders.

Developing the tourism sector implies the development of the human aspect, together with the natural resources, exploited in a sustainable way, in order to create an attractive ambiance for visitors and a structural one for the population.

Methodology
We analyzed several research articles published between 2003 and 2016, about the infrastructures of Oporto city, in order to find answers to the initial question.

Literature review is one of the most frequently used ways to transfer information, directed towards specialists and non-specialists; it enables the merger in an article, of the existing knowledge.
about a specific theme, the comparison between different sources of information and thus the identification of lacunae in the study in order to foment research into new areas.

So, in order to answer the set objectives, the methodology here consists in the literature review about: the development of a tourist destination; the competitiveness and sustainability of a tourist destination; and the lifecycle of a tourist destination.

**Development of a tourist destination**

Tourism, as per Santos & Hanaoka (2015), promotes the development between different industrial sectors, as it has a multiplier effect at investment and growth levels, as far as demand and supply are concerned. It is an activity that provides excellent results for the development and territorial planning. The development of a region, in order to be successful, must take into consideration the regional/local issues with the public policies in order to increase the possibilities of obtaining a solid level of growth.

The regional development concept is linked to a new cohesion policy, between cities and regions, under an economic perspective, considering the existence of a cultural tie-up (Santos & Hanaoka, 2015).

The Portuguese case shows that tourism is gaining prominence in several different economic sectors, with exceptional results in the economic growth, generating new jobs and bringing in foreign exchange. Tourism growth enables the reduction of regional differences and the improvement in the quality of life of the population (Santos & Hanaoka, 2015).

While talking about tourism, one does not only discuss the physical space where the leisure activity takes place, but also the cultural, historical, social and economic ambiances, that involve a large number of interested parties. The communities have both responsibilities and rights. Tourism, by nature, benefits everyone (public and private sector), thus promoting an integrated development. This relationship calls for joint actions for the development of localities, creating what is known as a “tourist network”, as per Santos & Hanaoka (2015) that works for a common interest, captivating tourists, prompting them to visit the place to know it, consume in it and invest in the city, region or country.

It is important to remember that tourism is not the only economic activity, even though it is very profitable; nevertheless, it can create several problems if it is not properly managed, or if the main concern is only profit, it can lead to environmental, local community or traditions destruction, if one of its main focuses, development and growth of sustainable regions is forgotten (Portuguez, Seabra & Queiroz, 2012).

For many years, tourism was kept aside by both governments and society in general, as no one recognized its economic and social importance. This view has drastically changed now that both governments and societies have understood the importance of tourism at an economic level (Estevão & Nunes, 2015).

Often, some regions get developed due to tourism and are able to re-direct natural, historical and cultural resources to less developed regions, in order to attain a level of development that would not otherwise have been attained (Estevão & Nunes, 2015).

Developing the tourism sector implies developing a tourist destination, capable of attracting and sustaining the charges that such attraction can generate in the future (Estevão & Nunes, 2015). This means developing the human aspect, together with the natural resources in a sustainable way, in order to create a welcoming ambiance for the visitors, so that they feel in tune with a different scenery from what they are used to. Development will surely lead to competitiveness and sustainability in tourism.

**Competitiveness and sustainability of a tourist destination**

Competitiveness has become a key concept in the tourism industry. As per Estevão & Nunes (2015), this relation is based on the capacity of goods and services that a destination can provide its visitors that tend to be superior to those offered by the competition. The competitiveness of a tourist destination involves many factors, such as the natural and artificial environments, and the resident
population’s willingness and capacity to receive tourists. This results from a set of natural and human factors created as a destination resource, and by the capacity that tourist companies have to attract visitors and increase their spending on goods and services, plus in providing unforgettable experiences in a sustainable way (Estevão & Nunes, 2015).

As per Hanai (2012), sustainable tourism meets the needs and desires of tourists and the region, while protecting the natural resources and maintaining the local cultural integrity. Thus collective responsibility is promoted while the tourists’ satisfaction is ensured. The principles of sustained development lie in the preservation of the natural, historic and cultural heritage, as well as a proper planning and management of the tourism activity, in order to satisfy the demand and make a more equitable distribution of tourism benefits amongst the entire society.

Sustainable development answers to the current needs without damaging the future, is a process of continuous alteration that is preoccupied with the balance between the exploitation of resources, orientation of investments and the application of techniques and development of partnerships in order to enforce the social and economic potential of a region. However, there is no ideal sustainable development model, once the social-economic and ecologic factors vary. The aim should always be to find out a balance between humans and natural resources (Caretto & Lima, 2006).

The sustenance principles must be the main objective of any tourist destination, whatever its lifecycle, and should not only be associated to certain tourist typologies, like ecotourism or rural tourism (Hanai, 2012).

Hanai (2003) recognizes that sustainable tourism development must be applied in all its forms, in every type of destination. The concept of sustainable development of tourism has been present now for several years, though it is still a more of a theoretical concept than an operational one. To simplify the understanding of different levels of sustainability from the operational point of view, it is common to use the lifecycle model for tourist destinations.

The lifecycle of a tourist destination

The lifecycle model for tourist destinations, proposed by Butler, in 1980, has been gaining increasing attention from investigators in the area of tourism, as well as from planning professionals. The main idea of this model is to identify in which stage of development is a certain tourist destination, based on six stages (Falcão & Gómez, 2012).

The primary idea of this cycle lies in the principle that tourist activity has a limited growth potential and it must be respected, so that the destination must have conditions to maintain its attractiveness and durability. Such as products, the destination’s lifecycles also show a growth curve. And this curve indicates a slow initial growth, followed by rapid development, at the top of the cycle, followed by a much slower growth and a probable decline (Falcão & Gómez, 2012).

The first phase of the cycle, discovery or exploitation, is where the destination has a reduced number of visitors, and these are attracted by the authenticity of the place, natural, cultural or physical resources. The destination may not have installations or tourist infrastructure and the tourism impact is literally inexistent. In the second phase, growth/development/involvement, there is a remarkable growth in the number and frequency of tourists, the first few tourist installations aimed specifically at the visitors are built, there is some promotion undertaken to attract clients and the number of tourists starts matching or exceeding the number of residents. This happens due to the efforts of tourist destination promotion and with this, more problems arise such as the decline in involvement and local control, built attractions exceeding original natural and cultural attractions, etc. (Falcão & Gómez, 2012).

The success/consolidation phase is that one where the load levels of the destination have been achieved, the rate of growth of tourist arrivals increases, the economy starts depending mainly on tourism, there is an effort to enlarge the high season and expand the markets for the visitors benefit at

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2 https://geographyfieldwork.com/ButlerModel.htm
3 The six stages of development of a tourist destination as per Butler (1980) are: Discovery, Growth/Development, Success, Problem/Stagnation and Rejuvenation/Decline.
the destination; an increasing feeling of discontent starts growing in the hearts of residents towards tourism and related activities, mainly those residents who are not involved in the process (Falcão & Gómez, 2012).

In the problem/stagnation phase, there are negative environmental and economic impacts, the destiny runs out of fashion, attracting now mainly tourists from organized masses, who do make repeated visits that help maintain the number of visitors to the place. With decline, there is a reduction in the number of visitors and in the benefits obtained from tourism; the destination is no longer competitive, compared with other locations. It is a market that survives on weekends or excursion trips, the tourist infrastructures start being substituted by others not related to the activity gradually, as the destination starts abandoning tourism as the main economic activity. In short, the tourism function starts getting lost (Falcão & Gómez, 2012).

The end of the cycle is marked by the stagnation/post-stagnation phase. In this phase, a set of five options of outcomes and strategies/management decisions that can be adopted as per Falcão & Gómez (2012) are:

- Re-development (by expansion and renewed growth)
- Small modifications and adjustment of capacity levels, while protecting continuously the existing resources (by reduced growth rate)
- Adjustment at every level of capacity (by stabilizing the number of visitors)
- Over-utilization of existing resources, no substitution of old installations, reduction in competitiveness (resulting in decline)
- Catastrophic events, war, diseases, etc (resulting in immediate decline)

Not every destination follows these steps, however, Butler (1980) defends that these stages would be followed generally as a tendency by most destinations (Falcão & Gómez, 2012).

This model shows the need for strategic planning, so that the destination is able to achieve a sustained development at a medium or long term period, to avoid the risk of entering into decline. In other words, the planning and development of a tourist destination is only possible if its competitiveness and sustainability are guaranteed; only after that, it can be said that the destination has entered into a normal lifecycle.

Conclusion

Tourism is seen as an efficient economic activity for the development of economically unfavorable destinations, whether by geographical isolation, whether by the lack of own economic resources. The tourism activity presents several advantages such as the incentive to create employment, preservation of natural and patrimonial resources and the creation of revenue through the provision of additional and related services.

The concept of destination sustainability should always be present in the strategic plan of the region, while respecting and incorporating the ethical principles of sustained development. This will permit the continuity of the destination while maintaining the initially set quality patterns. It is essential to involve the local resident population and public and private bodies in the elaboration of procedures and indicators for the sustainability analysis.

The attraction, singularity and quality of a destination are essential for it to maintain a competitive edge in the market; it is necessary to be attentive to the competition’s offers, mainly the direct competitors, so that our offer remains in the highlights.

We can conclude that the development of a tourist destination is only possible if made through competitiveness and sustainability and only after that it can be said that the destination has entered a normal lifecycle.
Bibliography