Oporto city as a tourist destination

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Abstract

A tourist destination has significant local and regional importance, even giving international visibility to a destination. We discuss here whether Oporto city has such an infrastructure to become one of the best European tourist destinations.

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Introduction

It is intended to know if Oporto is a tourist destination or not. For that, we studied the importance of tourism, the characteristics of a tourist destination, the characteristics of Oporto city, in order to answer our initial question.

Methodology

We analyzed several scientific articles, published between 2010 and 2016, about the importance of tourism and the characteristics of a tourist destination, as well as those of the Oporto city, to respond to the initial question.

The Importance of Tourism

Tourism, as a phenomenon of extreme value, not only economical, but also environmental, political and socio-cultural, is no more experienced only as a focus of leisure, but also as a strongly relevant occurrence for the local communities (Marujo, 2008). Thus, tourism helps in the development and growth of the region, with strong impact on the economy.

As per OMT (2014), tourism is the combination of the trip to the selected destination, the services availed of as products to satisfy the needs of the tourist and the activities performed during the stay at the destination.

Tourist Destination

A tourist destination should have some conditions that satisfy the needs of tourists that select it as a destination. These conditions will always be the focus of attraction, fixation and even the reason for extension of the stay time of the visitors (Coelho, 2010).

1 Oporto is the second largest city of Portugal.
Local government bodies play a fundamental role in the betterment and maintenance of the competitive nature of a destination. Several elements of tourism products should be oriented in a dynamic and integrated way. Basic resources (environmental or cultural), services (habitations, commodities, health, leisure) and governance (public services, infrastructure and public utilities) are key characteristics of a destination (Johnston, 2001).

Another important factor is the destination image, based on characteristics and specific values that the consumer considers to be important (Bansal & Eiselt, 2004). Besides the main visit reasons, the complementary elements and the image of the destination, there are also the human resources, transportation quality, events and other happenings at the destination. (Coelho, 2010).

As per Baptista (1965), the best way to have a positive feedback about a tourist destination is to bank on the quality of the tourist stay, for if he is satisfied, most probably he will return and even recommend the destination. The author also states some more factors like comfort, lodging, service efficiency, hospitality level, high level of hygiene, beautiful landscapes and monuments, and every kind of contact with people with whom the tourist interacts as factors that influence satisfaction. Investment on quality of the tourist destination should be part of the local political development agenda. The management of tourist destinations involves tourism marketing strategies, in order to build a strong image that is in accordance with the expectations and needs of the target public. So, it is important to know the tastes and tendencies of the visitors; analyze the supply and demand and study the main motivations of the tourists (Coelho, 2010).

The success of tourist destinations started being influenced by their competitiveness, as is the case of Oporto city.

**Oporto as a Tourist Destination**

The city of our days, the Greater Oporto region, is a multi-municipality metropolis that depicts characteristics of a distinctly developed city. It is basically a residential, business and study place (Fernandes, 2003).

The northern region, where Oporto is located, is a region that is segregated in terms of physical and socio-economical terms, due to the vast availability of products and resources that can build a strong image of the city due to its high tourism potential (Coelho, 2010).

Taking into consideration the results presented by the European Consumers Choice (2012), the region of Oporto and northern Portugal is growing as a tourist destination. Thus, it can be said that tourism is a growing sector in Portugal, more specifically in Oporto city, that was voted the best European destination in 2012, ahead of nineteen other European cities.

Oporto gives a strong competition to other European destinations and offers a vast array of cultural, monumental and historical heritage offer that has a great potential to attract tourism, such as the Port wine caves, the historical centre (UNESCO World Heritage), Saint Francis church, Clérigos tower, and places of contemporaneous architecture as is the case of Casa da Música. The international recognition of the city is mainly due to the regional cuisine and the vast range of wines. Nevertheless, the tourist information posts in the city are still not enough in numbers to cater to the tourist flow. In the last few years, the Municipal Corporation of Oporto together with the Turismo do Porto e Norte, is investing strongly in order to rectify these shortcomings. Several interactive shops have been established throughout the city and various promotional activities undertaken abroad to bring in more awareness about the city. Regarding recreational tourism, Oporto offers a calendar of animation events, folklore feasts, musical fests, theatre, cinema and dance. As far as business tourism is
concerned, Oporto has several infrastructures and equipment for conducting meetings and events, congress centers, hotels, castles, convents and palaces (Azevedo, 2010).

The tourism flow has been growing exponentially in the last few years, so the development of tourist products that can provide the city an important place in the national and international tourism market is of utmost importance. It is also a must to develop the Oporto brand and the application of marketing techniques that can promote the destination itself and the competitive nature of the city as an attractive tourist destination, while taking advantage of any opportunities or challenges that may arise (Daniel, 2010).

From the demand point of view, several tourist segments can be defined based on the reasons for the visit and the interest of the tourists, by developing a strategy that analyzes the profile of the tourist, the type of transportation means used by him and the prices of the supply and demand. The country’s location, its accessibility, safety, cultural and historical heritage, hospitality, quality of the beaches, adaptability, among other factors, are presented as competitive advantages of the tourism sector in Oporto city. It offers an optimum quality-price combination, authentic cultural and historical heritage, leisure activities and vast diversity in cuisine and in wines (Azevedo, 2010).

As per the 2015 data of the Oporto tourism association, 2014 was the best year for the region in tourism terms. There were 2.6 million sleepovers of foreigners between January and October. China, Poland, Russia, Ireland and India selected Oporto as a choice destination. The word of mouth was guaranteed as a means of message about the fame of Oporto city (Loureiro, 2011).

IPDT (Instituto de Planeamento e Desenvolvimento do Turismo), together with Francisco Sá Carneiro airport (Oporto airport) and with Entidade Regional de Turismo do Porto e Norte de Portugal, conducted a study of the tourist profile of visitors to Oporto and north Portugal in the first quarter of 2010, with the help of an individual questionnaire at the boarding lounge of the airport. As per this study, tourists that visited the region during this period were mainly leisure tourists, vacationers or were in to visit friends/family. For those that came in for business tourism, the main motive of visit was a meeting or conference. The Oporto tourism sector has been showing a healthy growth pattern owing to the increase in the number of visitors that use the airport. Regarding airlines, 33% of the leisure tourists selected Ryanair, 29% opted for TAP, 12% for Lufthansa and 10% for Easyjet. However, 57% of business tourists selected TAP, 19% opted for Lufthansa and 14% for Iberia. The main feeder markets were France, Spain, Brazil, Belgium and Germany. Finally, the interviewed tourists showed intentions of returning and recommending the destination, being overall quite satisfied with it. The development of Oporto is complemented by promotions, international projections and development policies to support events and tourist attractions (IPDT, 2010).

Conclusion
Oporto city is a de-facto tourist destination.

As mentioned, the city has the basic resources (environmental or cultural), the services (habitations, comforts, health and leisure), the governance (public services, infrastructure and public utilities), the marketing, and the competitive edge. Or, in other words, the city possesses the key characteristics of a tourist destination.

Bibliography