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Cooperation and coordination in emerging tourism destination: the Minho-Lima case

The success of tourist development depends on the capacity of territory tourism agents to establish and sustain networks, involving not only companies but also the public sector. In fact, creating an attractive destination, able to compete with more consolidated and positioned ones, requires a cooperative behavior among the several agents who are part of it. This behavior will allow competing external and internally, in order to assure better product quality, continuous product renewal, the offer of unique experiences and the use of endogenous resources.

In this paper we refer to the results obtained from a survey applied to restaurants' owners, as well from interviews conducted to the main institutional agents related to tourist promotion and economic development of the identified territory. We believe that the before mentioned methodology can be a valuable instrument to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the selected territory in what refers its future tourism development. The idea we keep is that tourism agents' commitment constitutes a precondition for the success of the strategy to be defined. This is especially critical as what we can find in this territory until now is the total absence of commitment and coordination of those agents.

Keywords: cooperation; networks; tourist development.

Introduction

Tourism has been playing an increasing role in the development programmes that have been outlined with the goal of contributing to solve the crisis affecting many rural areas. However, despite the encouraging results attained, it is essential that growth happens in a sustainable way, either in economic terms or in environmental ones.

Therefore, it will be crucial that efforts are directed to the creation of innovating and diversified tourist products and services. Equally important is investing in the environmental balance, the recovery of the cultural heritage and the strengthening of strategic partnerships. In a certain sense, we can say that tourism needs to decentralize and diversify itself, taking advantage of the regions potential and setting up alternative tourist products (Cadima Ribeiro *et al.*, 2001). This way, the success of tourism industry is close related to local resources availability, in its quantitative and qualitative dimensions.

This approach is based on the endogenous development paradigm, which seeks to overcome regional disparities through the appeal not just to external factors but also to the territories own resources. This paradigm outlines the role of local decision makers, such as public and private institutions, local governments, firms and local inhabitants, which can be engaged in the process of economic and social transformation, as real sources of development (Polèse, 1998).

Also at tourism level, the development and behaviour of the agents is recognized as decisive for its success, especially through its ability to establish and maintain collaboration networks, not just involving firms but also public and other private operators.

The main objective of this paper is making a close approach to the motivations and behaviours of the actors involved in the development and promotion of a new tourism destination, the Minho-Lima (Portugal). In order to capture the perspective of these agents and to be able to analyse the extent they are committed to tourism development, we have conducted personal interviews to a panel of institutional actors (municipalities authorities, Alto Minho's tourist board, commercial and industrial entrepreneurs associations, sectoral entrepreneurial associations - Hotels, Restaurants and Tourism in Rural Areas-TRA, the Minho Valley Intermunicipal Community and the Lima Valley Urban Community). With the same goal, we have implemented a survey to a certain kind of local tour operators (the restaurants owners).

In section 1 of the paper, through a brief literature review, we give attention to territory resources as facilitating elements of the development of a tourist destination. A special attention is given to the attitude and behaviour of the involved agents. In section 2, the methodology adopted is presented. In section 3, the empirical results obtained are showed and commented. Finally, the main conclusions are drawn up.

1. Tourism development facilitating elements

When the development is an objective of a territory, it is necessary to have in mind a set of elements considered as facilitators of the enhancing of any economic activity, including the tourism one. Since our paper is an approach to the already mentioned geographic area from the optic of the endogenous development, it is important to start outlining the resources of the territory and its intrinsic factors. Among this set of elements we underline the infrastructures, the accessibilities, the firms, the social and political systems. These are all elements kept by previous studies related with tourism planning (Pearce, 1995; OMT, 1998). The research should also incorporate the analysis of the local population, as a differential element in tourist development.

In this context, the study of these elements, which are preparatory to the actions to be taken to achieve tourism development, is crucial, since each area presents its own and differentiated characteristics, which define and shape it economic, social and culturally.

Thus, any territory that wishes to develop economically, in general, and based on tourism, in particular, cannot just copy the models and proposals of others, as the economic, social, and politic environments are always different, and these differences affect results that can be obtained.

Often, these pre-conditions are neglected. For example, a destination endowed with abundant resources and tourist attractions is no guarantee of success because it may face other limitations: lack of support services, poor levels of organization, lack of cooperation between the decision makers. While enough attention is not paid to the missing factors, this will turn hard the development of the tourism industry, at least in the short run (Ritchie and Crouch, 2005).

In this sense, it is important to have in mind the type of infrastructure available in the territory, not just from a quantitative approach but also in qualitative terms. Regarding this issue, as described by Ritchie and Crouch (2005), we can differentiate the general infrastructure and the basic services infrastructure. In the first group, these authors include the destination's transportation systems (e.g., roads and highways, airports, railway systems, bus and terminals services, taxis, etc.), public security (police, fire and other emergency services), water treatment and garbage systems, health services (hospitals, clinics, laboratories, etc.), financial services (banks, credit institutions, etc.) the educational system (e.g., universities, schools, etc.) the administrative system, and so on. Besides these infrastructures, there is a set of support services considered essential to the efficient functioning of the destinations but whose demand depends only on a little piece from tourists and visitors. Some examples of basic services infrastructures are a comprehensive set of retail stores (clothing, food, etc.), gas stations, garages and vehicle maintenance facilities, laundries, hairdressers, bookstores, etc..

The competitiveness of a tourism destination will depend on the ability of public and private sectors to provide and maintain these types of infrastructures from which the tourist activity and local population depend upon.

Another element to highlight is the accessibility to a destination, which will not just depend on the transport infrastructures mentioned above and on the geographical localization, but also from factors such as: the formalities and barriers that involve getting a visa, the existence of connection routes to the destination, the airport capacity, the flights regulation, the competitiveness of the airline companies, etc. On the other hand, the existence of buses, trains, ferries and other ships also provide important modes of accessibility to a destination and to sites within the destination. A tourism destination will only be competitive if accessible to both the individual and tour operators, thus avoiding being overtaken in terms of development by others with lesser constraints in terms of accessibility (Mill and Morrison, 1992; Vogeler Ruiz and Hernández Armand, 1997; Ritchie and Crouch, 2005).

Likewise, it is important to focus on the availability and quality of local human resources, wage levels, productivity performance and ethics at work, working conditions, labour regulation and trade unions existence, etc. Important is, also, the availability of financial resources, the investment opportunities and the expectations of retrieval. Every one of these aspects is important and considered facilitator of the development of any economic activity and, in particular, of the tourism one.

The residents attitude towards the tourist and tourism industry is also a factor to be considered as the tourist, usually, expects to be well treated, that is, treated with kindness and courtesy. This depends not only from employers in the tourism activity but, also, of the hospitality displayed by residents (Baptista, 1990; Ritchie and Crouch, 2005).

Besides the residents' attitude, it is important to know the attitude and functioning of local businesses, usually small and medium firms with a high degree of flexibility to adjust to the frequent changes in demand, and on which the quality of life of residents heavily depends upon (Crouch and Ritchie, 1995). In this context, it will be useful to analyse the existing competition between firms, but also the levels of cooperation, specialization, innovation, investment, growth, the risk they are taking, productivity levels, supply products diversification and the seasonal imbalances.

No less important than the behaviour of the residents and enterprises is the political willingness and its determination towards tourism development. Even if tourism is an important economic sector in a lot of countries, regions and towns, the governments' attitude towards this activity is, often, of indifference (Gee and Foyas-Solá, 1999; Ritchie and Crouch, 2005). This attitude has been changing because social agents are recognizing the contribution that tourism might make to economic and social development. Therefore, the public sector is playing a crucial role in its management and enhancing in several cases.

This role can take shape at the organizational and coordination level. It will depend on the importance attributed to the tourist activity in the territory development strategies and on the political parties approach to country territorial development. Once committed to the development of the tourism industry, local, regional and national governments can give an impetus to the activity giving incentives to new projects and initiatives. In the opposite way, they can impose constraints of several natures (Vera, 1997).

1.1 Attitude / behaviour of agents

Once finished this general review of the facilitating elements underlined by the literature, we will focus on the last two mentioned topics, that is, on the attitude and behaviour towards tourism industry either of the business agents or the one of the public and private tourism entities.

As mentioned above, they constitute a strategic factor of general economic development and of tourism development. In particular, the attitude and behaviour of firms and institutions, specially, their ability to establish collaborative networks, is crucial to success. This has to do with the facilitating role they can play in the sharing either of resources either of knowledge and opening ways to action, too. Acting this way, they can drive converging efforts to stimulate the economic activity and to enhance development dynamism (Vázquez Barquero, 1999 and 2005). Being so, when a territory seeks to define a strategy for tourism development, one of the focuses should be the construction or the energizing of the organizational capacity of its economic and social agents and institutions. When supported by formal or informal networks, institutions and organisations used to become more flexible and receptive to changes (Vázquez Barquero, 1999). However, in not consolidated tourism destinations, it is common finding small and familiar businesses little or not coordinated at all and poorly competitive (Rodríguez Carro, 2006). Then, since these relationships and links do not create or grow independently and undifferentiated, as they are a social and historical product, gradually generated (Bercial and Timón, 2005; Vázquez Barquero, 2005), it is important to promote cooperation.

The creation of a collaboration network requires a cooperative behaviour from companies that normally compete between them and from agents and organizations that are bound not only by economic relations but also by geographic, social and cultural reasons. So, usually, this networking of actors requires that “one or more specific institutions play a leading role in institutional relations” (Gilly and Pecqueur, 1998, p.505).

As already underlined, many companies, especially small-and medium-sized ones, which had a course of action based on isolation, now have the need and a concern to be bound by any other companies in network (Cândido *et al.*, 2000). In this context, the ability to organize economic

and social agents has become a strategic factor in the development of a tourist destination, particularly if it is a not consolidated one. Indeed, it is essential for the success of a destination the existence of cooperation between the various actors, companies and business associations, regional development associations, education institutions, and central, regional and local public administration, etc.. This cooperation should be based on trust, sharing of knowledge, information and experience, looking for consensus on priorities and objectives, which is hard to achieve.

Still thinking in the success of the development strategy, based on tourism, it is worthy to note that, apart from creating a system of relations and commitments between business and local public and private institutions, it is important to be able to create receptivity in the local population for the new reality which is welcoming and accommodate tourists. This way, establishing a balanced and competitive new tourism destination implies to be able to communicate and transmit the necessary values and social rules to all sectors and groups of the local population. As a matter of fact, a destination only will be innovative if it is perceived as such by all the society, being or not part of the industry (Bercial and Timón, 2005).

2. Research methodology

In the next paragraphs we will make the presentation of the key techniques used to collect and treat the empirical information required to achieve the goal originally settled for this research.

The main instruments used to collect the information were the survey, applied to the restaurant owners, and in depth interviews, conducted in the case of the institutional agents of the Minho-Lima sub-region.

Details regarding the methodological issues and the results attained will be presented and discussed in the next sessions.

2.1 The interviews with the institutional agents

The technique used to approach the institutional agents, taken as privileged sources of information, was the semi-structured interview. It was thought that this approach would be rewarding because it would allow, both, collecting different live experiences and a large degree of communication flexibility, which would allow adapting the approach to the specificities of the interlocutors, taking into account the different nature of the institutions contacted. Previously, we cared to establish a certain number of categories that would give some consistency and uniformity to the various interviews to be implemented. Those organizing categories were:

- A - Region and tourism;
- B - Resources and tourism entities;
- C - Human resources involved;
- D - Integration with other local productive sectors;
- E - Creation of partnerships and cooperation;
- F - Territorial cooperation (neighbour territories and Galicia);
- G - Promotion.

One of the criteria for the selection of interviewees was to ensure the representation of the main actors, directly and indirectly linked to tourism development in the Minho-Lima sub-region. To this end, a provisional list of the institutions of the target territory was drawn up. This list was used to establish the preliminary contacts.

The sample originally outlined pointed to twenty-two institutional agents and public authorities dispersed geographically by the ten municipalities that comprise the territory under analysis. This way, we envisage respecting the rules regarding samples to be used in qualitative studies, which give more importance to the depth of the interview than to the size of the sample (Helfer and Orsini, 1996). From this sample, we succeed to carry out twenty interviews. Despite continued efforts, it was not feasible to interview any representative of the Caminha City Council nor the Monção and Melgaço Commercial and Industrial Entrepreneurs Association. It is worthy mentioning that the interviews made to the Valença City Council and to the Minho Valley Union Business (UEVM) were held simultaneously, at the request of the interviewee, as the person in charge was playing functions in both entities.

Table 1 – List of interviews

Identification of the local / regional development agent	Function performed
RTAM - Alto Minho's Tourist Board	President of RTAM
ACIVAC - Âncora e Coura Valleys Commercial and Industrial Entrepreneurs Association	President of the Directorate
Ponte da Barca City Council	President of CC
V. N. Cerveira City Council	President of CC
Valença City Council / UEVM	Tourism Councillor / President of the Directorate
Paredes de Coura City Council	Head of office of the President of CC
ACIAB - Arcos de Valdevez e Ponte da Barca Commercial and Industrial Entrepreneurs Association	President of the Directorate
UNIHSNOR – Union of the Associations of Hotels and Restaurants of the North of Portugal – Viana do Castelo – Alto Minho	President of the Directorate
Melgaço City Council	President of CC
Ponte de Lima City Council	President of CC
PRIVETUR	Member of the Directorate

Minho Valley Intermunicipalities Community	Manager/Member of the Directorate
AEPL - Ponte de Lima Business Association	President of the Directorate
AEVC - Viana do Castelo Business Association	President of the Directorate
Viana do Castelo City Council	Tourism Councillor
Monção City Council	President of CC
Arcos de Valdevez City Council	President of CC / Tourism Councillor
TURIHAB – Rural Tourism Association	President of TURIHAB
Valimar – Lima Valley Urban Community	Manager

Source: Authors' Elaboration

The first contact with the interviewees was made by post-mail and then confirmed by e-mail or phone. The interviews were conducted in November and December 2005 and January 2006, in the buildings of their institutions, according to the availability of the interviewees.

During the interviews it was used a script composed of topics (Attachments 1 and 2). The construction of the script was the result of a previous literature review and of an analysis of documents related to tourism planning and tourism potential published by the European Commission's General Directorate for Agriculture.

Despite using the script always as a guide, it was given "green light" to the interviewees to talk about the issue without constraints of time or subject, so that they could feel free to express their ideas, perceptions and feelings in a spontaneous way.

In the end of the programmed interview, the interviewee was asked if he or she would like to add anything else, after which it was considered finished.

The analysis of the information collected will be done in session 3.

2.2 The restaurant owners survey

Gastronomy constitutes one of the pillars of the tourism product supply of the Minho-Lima (RTAM, 2004b). Therefore, it was considered important to listen to the actors of this industry/branch of activity.

In fact, in many cases, visitors' motivation to visit some rural areas is gastronomy. This is particularly the excursionists' case. As a matter of fact, in the Minho-Lima sub-region all ten municipalities participate in an annual event sponsored by RTAM in partnership with the municipalities called *Gastronomic Sundays*, and some of the municipalities used to develop, even, other similar festivals in certain periods of the year (RTAM, 2001).

In the *Gastronomic Sundays* case, it uses to have the participation of the thirteen municipalities belonging to the RTAM (ten of which from the Minho-Lima), and the event takes place, each year, from February to May. This event involves more than three hundred restaurants, and

allows promoting the traditional cuisine recipes, together with the regional wines. As a complement and an additional attraction, an entertainment cultural programme is offered. Each municipality is in charge of defining and implementing this entertainment programme (RTAM, 2004a). This initiative seeks to promote the region and to boost the sector during the low season.

Having in mind such assumptions and recognizing the importance of these agents in the dynamics of the sector, and the need of its commitment to succeed in the aim of a new tourism strategy to be defined, it was decided to inquire the Minho-Lima restaurant owners, applying a especially designed survey. The objective to reach was to understand the kind of relationships they use to establish with other tourism agents and local industries and population (competitors, public administration, RTAM, customers, local inhabitants).

The starting point was the draw of a survey (Attachment 3), which was used to guide a semi-direct interview. This questionnaire was used since the first contact established with the restaurant owners.

The items of the survey were organized into seven major blocks:

- Restaurants and their owners' general data;
- Employees' data;
- Role of local products;
- Type of customers;
- Promotion of the region and of the restaurant itself;
- Relationships with other restaurants and/or accommodation establishments;
- Tourists' motivations.

Data was collected in all ten Minho-Lima municipalities, between November and December 2005. From the total of 105 restaurants contacted, 88 accepted to answer to the survey.

The initial contact was made by letter, in which it was explained the purpose of the research and the survey instrument was sent, so that the restaurant owners had a first contact with the kind of information which was demanded. Later, a telephone was made to confirm the availability of the restaurant owner to answer the survey and the meeting was schedule, according to the respondent convenience.

As the survey was sent by post in the first contact, in some cases, when the interview occurred, the questionnaires were already filled in and there was no willingness of the restaurant owners to complement or clarify some of the information given. However, in the majority of the cases, the restaurant owners did cooperate with the researcher, clarifying the doubts resulting of their answers.

The analysis of the results obtained will be made in the next section of the paper.

3. Interviews and survey results

As previously mentioned and having in mind the objective of the research, interviews were conducted to a panel of institutional agents and a survey was applied to a certain kind of tour operators (restaurants). Next, we will present the main results we got from the empirical approach and will produce a few derived comments.

3.1 Institutional agents

To analyze the institutional agents' involvement in the development of tourism in the Minho-Lima sub-region, interviews were conducted with a set of local actors: local authorities, region of tourism board, commercial and industrial entrepreneurs associations, rural tourism associations, restaurants and hotels association. Indeed, the tourism involves multiple players and interactions between them are important to the success of the business.

In this section of the paper a qualitative analysis of the data obtained on the interviews is produced. The analysis does not intend to capture the point of view of all the interviewees. The inferences and interpretations kept seek to answer to the goals initially set and contribute to a better understanding of certain agents behaviour and motivation in defined economic, social and political contexts.

The results of the analysis carried out are presented according the categories specified in the methodology section.

A - Region and Tourism

As underlined, we thought important to know the opinion of the interviewed local agents about the role of tourism in the development of this territory.

Many of them told us that the tourism had a role “very important” or “important” in this territory development, although presenting, mainly, a local vision, pointing it as a bet of the municipality or working area which they were representing.

The focus on tourism can be substantiated by the actions that they had developed in this direction (investments in water supply, in residual waters and garbage treatment, in traffic regulation, in conservation and restoration of monuments and cultural heritage, namely, the recovery of historical centres, the preservation of natural areas, and in the implementation of different sorts of incentives to the supply of entertainment activities, etc.).

Despite this, they drew our attention to some problems that turn those efforts less effective. The lack of inter-municipal cooperation, the under-utilization of resources and the relative absence of quality investments were mentioned.

Those who expressed reluctance about the role of tourism in local development, not attributing to it a real economic relevance, were mainly from municipalities with a tourist image less consistent.

B - Resources and tourism entities

When the development of tourism is an objective of a territory, they must carefully evaluate which resources, infrastructure and services account for the activity, since these factors will influence the type of activities and the development, itself (OMT, 1998). In this sense, it was important to know if there was a particular concern in each municipality regarding the information and relevant data available referring to resources and entities linked to tourism. This had to do with the need to ensure their efficient management, as well as their availability to a set of agents, when requested.

More than two thirds of the respondents said they did not possess any inventory, neither of resources nor of entities linked to tourism. In the case of commercial and industrial entrepreneurs associations, they have only lists of their members.

Apart from RTAM, which is supposed to have this information, as tourism promoting public agency, there are some municipalities that possess their own leaflets and brochures, envisaging to supply the required information.

C - Human resources involved

Considering that the availability of qualified human resources in this area is very important in planning tourism development, it was thought to inquire the interviewee's opinion about the issue. According, we have questioned the institutions representatives about the existence in their organizations of tourism technicians or people working in this concrete area.

We could verify that more than half of the contacted organizations had no technical expertise in the field of tourism. This may denote "amateurism" in dealing with issues related to the sector. Just half of the local authorities contacted claimed to have people working in tourism promotion or planning. From those, we find the ones that have shown more commitment with tourism development at municipal level.

D - Integration with other local productive sectors

One of the dimensions to explore in a tourism strategy to develop at the local level is the desirable linkage with the territory and the integration envisaged with other local production activities. In this sense, it was asked to the interviewees whether or not this integration was having place in the Minho-Lima sub-region.

Respondents argue that tourism had dragged other local productive sectors (or, at least, had made it in some market niches), mainly due to the valorisation it allowed of some quality endogenous products (conducting to the certification of some of them), and, this way, providing an opportunity to preserve and reinvigorate agricultural production and handicraft activities that, otherwise, would tend to disappear. Respondents who have shown more “pessimistic” declared that they considered still scarce the valorisation and commercial use of local products. On the other hand, the activities integration envisaged is proving to be difficult due to the lack of an entity that promotes it. Other way, the main beneficiaries of the tourism activity will remain the hotels and restaurants and, in some cases, the retail sector.

E - Creation of partnerships and cooperation

One of those aspects identified by the literature as a prerequisite for tourism activity success is the consensus and cooperation between that is viable to establish among the different involved economic and political agents. Consequently, it was asked to the interviewees if, in the territory under analysis, there was or not willingness to cooperate and to work in a partnership basis.

Although the majority of respondents said that they already had participated or were participating in some kind of partnerships, they end by admitting that there was still much work to do in this field. In formal terms, despite the existence in practice of these partnerships, the work continues to be done following a very individual approach. According with the interviews, the municipalities of the Lima Valley cooperate with the municipalities of the Lima Valley and the municipalities of the Minho Valley, the same way, cooperate with the ones of its own Valley and the Galicia neighbour ones. Apparently, it is more common to observe partnerships between these municipalities and the other side of the border than between them and the Portuguese neighbouring municipalities of the South.

At firm level the situation is even more complex. The mentality of entrepreneurs seems not to be enough open to partnerships with their counterparts or, even, with the public actors. In the absence of an entity that takes a mandatory role of coordinating the promotion and the general planning and animation of the territory tourism activity, each operator tends to remain “in its own space”.

F - Territorial cooperation (bordering territories and Galicia)

Being a border territory, with strong links to the northern border of the Minho River, it mattered to know the view kept by respondents about the players of the other side of the border.

A very significant number of the respondents support the existence or establishment of cross-border partnerships. However, most of those interviewed recognized that much still needs to be

done at this level. A tourism promotion strategy based on the image of a destination putting together two countries captured some attention amongst our interviewees.

The point of view more focused in the business/firm level admits that there are difficulties in terms of turning effective this concepts as, if cooperation is hard to establish between those that are closer, these difficulties increase with distance and with less knowledge about their potential partners.

G - Promotion

From the analysis of the interviews, it resulted clear the perceived limitations of the tourism promotion strategy undertaken. The lack of coordination of the strategies regarding the organization of the interface with the market and promotion, itself, was commonly underlined by our respondents. This has to do with the confusion of responsibilities that exists between the different authorities and institutions in terms of their role in what regards tourism planning and promotion. Either the municipalities, either the municipalities associations (Minho and Lima Valleys) or the tourism region board made reference to this issue. As a result of the before mentioned situation, individual initiatives are the most present feature of conducting Minho-Lima tourism, “draining” functional and financially the RTAM (which gets its major financial and political support from the same municipalities). As a consequence, on an autonomous basis, RTAM is unable to do much more than to produce a few of its own brochures and participating in a few tourism fairs. Of course, this raises the problem of the scale of the intervention and of the efficiency of the action.

For some interviewed, the solution implied the fusion of the two tourism agencies (Alto and Verde Minho) that existed by that time, with the creation of a larger promoting and planning tourism region dealing with tourism phenomenon in the Minho, as a all. This tourism agency would be supported by municipal structures but would centralize the organization and promotion of the territory. In other cases, when a clear fracture with the regional tourism structure - RTAM - was assumed, the solution proposed would pass by assigning a more active role to the municipalities associations. In such a situation, the role conferred to regional tourism boards turned not clear, at all.

Additionally, it is interesting to note the scarce union spirit that prevailed, even between the municipalities and other organisms with responsibilities in tourism management. An exacerbated municipal localism (Pereiro Pérez and Conde, 2005) seemed to obstruct the coordination of a well-planned tourism and was turning hard its improvement.

H - Factors of success and difficulties

To conclude the reference to the interviews results, we would like to comment the factors of tourism success mentioned by the interviewed agents. The same procedure was followed regarding constrains or difficulties felt. We have asked them to establish a rank using a list we have provided (Attachment 2). They were asked to order them from the most to the least important.

Table 3 – Factors of success and difficulties in developing tourism in the Minho-Lima

Factors of success	1 st		2 nd		3 rd		Total	
	Nº	%	Nº	%	Nº	%	Nº	%
Recovery and promotion of historic centres	5	26	7	37	5	26	17	30
Bet on an urban and environmental discipline	1	5	-	-	2	11	3	5
Gastronomy	4	21	6	32	3	16	13	23
Experience at TRA	2	11	1	5	-	-	3	5
Cultural and environmental corridors (including those linking to Galicia)	-	-	-	-	2	11	2	4
Improvements in accessibilities	7	37	3	16	6	32	16	28
Partnerships between municipalities of Minho and Lima Valleys and Galician's ones	-	-	2	11	1	5	3	5
Total	19	100	19	100	19	100	57	100
Difficulties	1 st		2 nd		3 rd		Total	
	Nº	%	Nº	%	Nº	%	Nº	%
Lack of entrepreneurial culture	3	16	2	11	4	21	9	16
Lack of cooperation culture, at institutional and firm level	3	16	10	53	2	11	15	26
Lack of quality of accommodation	1	5	2	11	2	11	5	9
Lack of complementary activities to lodging (in particular, tourist animation companies)	-	-	1	5	2	11	3	5
Fails in the promotion strategy	10	53	4	21	3	16	17	30
Confusion / vagueness at the level of responsibility of each institutional actor	2	11	-	-	4	21	6	11
Deficit of vocational training	-	-	-	-	2	11	2	4
Total	19	100	19	100	19	100	57	100

Source: Authors' Elaboration

The answers analysis allows identifying the three most important factors of success according to the actors contacted. Presenting them by descending order, those factors are: recovery and promotion of historic centres; improvements in accessibility; and gastronomy. Also by descending order of importance, the main difficulties pointed out are: the failing in the promotion; the lack of cooperation at institutional and firms' level; and the lack of entrepreneurial culture.

In terms of factors of success kept, these answers reflect the idea that endogenous resources should take a much larger role in the design of the Minho-Lima tourism strategy, in order to better serve the tourists.

Still following the view of the interviewees, in what concerns the difficulties, those are, mostly: the failing in tourism promotion; and the lack of cooperation, either between tourism institutional agents and authorities or between private tour operators.

Together, those factors were blocking the tourism development of this tourism destination.

3.2 Tour operators: the restaurants

Given the importance that the gastronomy takes on the image of Minho-Lima, it was considered important to listen to the actors of this industry, using a survey that was applied to 105 restaurants of the target territory. 88 valid answers were obtained.

In this sub-session of the paper we will analyse the data collected through the survey applied to the restaurant owners. The analysis was divided according the thematic blocks defined in the methodology.

In the first subset of the questionnaire, the following parameters should be identified: gender, age and birthplace of the restaurant owner(s), type of ownership, operational period, membership of a hotel/restaurant group and public support to the installation of the establishment.

Starting by commenting the general data regarding the restaurants and their owners, it is important to emphasize that 60.2% of the contacted restaurant owners were individual entrepreneurs. Of the 35 restaurants that worked on society, 85.7% were family societies (formed mostly by couples; there were some cases of societies joining parents and children). The owners were mostly males (73%), with 61.4% of the restaurants contacted managed only by men, against 10.2% managed by women.

Of the total number of owners inquired, 12.8% were under 35 years old, 37.6% were between 36 and 50 years old and 49.6% surpass the 50 years old. As for the birthplace, 70.1% of the restaurants were owned by people of the municipality where the restaurant was located. If we consider the firms in which at least one of the partners was born in the municipality, this percentage increased to around 75%. In 11.5% of the restaurants the owners were from a neighbouring municipality (belonging to the Minho-Lima sub-region) and only 10.3% of the establishments were managed by individuals from outside the sub-region.

Regarding the period of operation, it was possible to know that about 47.1% of the restaurants contacted had started its activity less than 10 years ago (although, in 43.9% of the cases they had only changed the management structure), while 31% operated since 20 years ago or more.

According to the respondents, the increase lived by the sector in the last years, in terms of establishments, seems to be due not just to the increase felt in terms of visitors and to the expectations generated regarding the role that tourism could play in the region but, also, to the increase of the demand associated to local consumption (as we see underline ahead, when addressing the type of customer issue).

Regarding public aids for establishments' installation or renewal, 79.5% of the contacted restaurants said not to have benefited from any kind of public assistance (although some, in reduced number, have submitted applications). This could help to justify the small percentage of restaurants that carried out an building renewal (26.1%) over the last 5 years.

In another subset of issues, some labour aspects were analysed: number of employees, gender, age, birthplace and type of contract signed. Direct employment in the contacted restaurants can be classified in two types: one is family employment (44.7%); and the other is non-family employment (of which 9.1% were workers without an effective labour link). It should be noted that only a few restaurants admitted they used to hire seasonal workers, not identifying the precise amount or workers, however.

The employees were mostly (78.6%) inhabitants of the municipality where the restaurant was installed, accounting for 88.5% of the workers involved if the entire Minho-Lima sub-region was considered. These were low qualification workers, with the exception of a few higher quality restaurants.

Despite the direct impact of the restaurants employment could look quite small in terms of the total employment rates of the sub-region, we should remember that these restaurants act as facilitators and catalysts for other economic sectors, turning its economic impact much larger. We can see that if we analyze the role of restaurants as elements of a production chain, that is, able to encourage and disseminate the use of local products. In its large majority (89.8%), the contacted restaurants made current use of local products, boosting, this way, the local economy. However, restaurant owners claimed that, occasionally, they face difficulties in getting some typical products. These difficulties had to do with an insufficient supply structure, putting some stress in the relationship between producers of goods and restaurants.

When associated to a hotel service, the restaurants act as an important complement of the functioning of the company, namely combating the seasonality of the demand. Indeed, restaurants do not suffer demand fluctuations of the same magnitude of the one suffered by accommodation facilities. This relates close to the supply of their services to the local inhabitants and neighbouring areas ones. In fact, regarding the restaurants capacity, it is

noticeable that about 66% possessed over 60 seats, of which 24.1% had over 100 seats (ranging from 110 to 500). The capacity allows extending the services supply to weddings banquets, religious parties and other social ceremonies, business meetings, etc., diversifying the services having in mind to conquest different target niches.

When asked about the type of customers they use to have, 52.3% of the restaurants answered that theirs customers used to be diverse, prevailing local residents during the week and people in transit and tourists or excursionists during the weekend. The residents were the habitual customers of 19.8% of the contacted restaurants. 18.6% told that national tourists were the majority of its customers.

The foreign tourists still represented a small percentage of the total clientele of the contacted restaurants, but about 8.1% of the restaurants said that their customers were, above all, Spanish people.

Regarding the tourism promotion issue, despite the majority of the contacted restaurants (61.4%) to declare that they used to participate in the initiatives taken by local authorities, more than 45% of them rated as poor or very poor the municipalities work at this level. The main complaints were related to the scarcity of events, the failure felt in terms of promoting the local gastronomy and the difficulties associated to coordinating tourism events with the ones of neighbouring municipalities.

The criticism to failures in promotion extended to the regional tourism agency board (RTAM), whom they accused of doing little for the restaurants. Restaurant owners believed that the work of this agency in the resolution of the problems related to the low season demand was not effective. Indeed, despite more than 80% of the contacted restaurants to use participating in the event *Gastronomic Sunday*, the majority faced this event as an isolated episode, with little general impact beyond the period that follows its organisation. The interviewees declared to ignore other measures or plans that either municipalities or the RTAM had in mind to implement or were implementing.

In individual terms, the promotion was something on which the contacted restaurants showed little interest. As self-promotion instruments, some restaurants only had placards on the establishment entry and personalised cards. Usually, they don't have their own web-pages and, in some cases, they were even unaware that they were mentioned on the web-pages of RTAM and of the city councils that had available an Internet page.

The promotion in local newspapers and radios was the way they used the most in order to promote their services. Few restaurants declared to have participation in specialized web-pages and to have been associated to promoting initiatives dedicated to a particular product (usually, the wine), taking profit of the visibility of such events.

During the interviews, despite some exceptions, it was notorious that little cooperation and little contact was experienced with the other restaurants and tourism entities. In theory, they could

profit from joint work promotion with these other tourism agents. The emerging idea was that they preferred to act independently and according to its own criteria. Thus, even though 81.8% of the restaurants were part of the restaurants and hotels entrepreneurs association, which is supposed to represent the interests of the sector, they have no experience of concerted activities, with the exception of *Gastronomic Sunday*. The number of those who declared they had no relationships with other entrepreneurs of the region reached 87.5%, and 9.1% referred that they just kept an informal relationship.

Likewise, despite the proximity to Galicia, 72.7% of the interviewees stated that they did not know or knew little about the tourism supply available across the border. There was no relationship with Galician's entrepreneurs (95.5% answered to have not any kind of relationship with Galician's entrepreneurs).

When questioned about the reasons that lead the tourists to visit the municipalities in which they were installed, 20% of respondents placed the natural heritage first, followed by the built heritage (13.8%), representing the gastronomy and the festivities the main reason for 9,2% and for 6,2% of respondents, respectively. However, the majority of respondents (44.6%) intended that it was the value of the tourism attributes of the territory, as an all, that motivate the tourists visit.

Conclusions

The research developed and presented in the previous sections of this paper envisaged to clarify the roles that are taking the various actors in the development and consolidation of the Minho-Lima tourism industry. The major inspiring idea behind the approach was the one that competitive development and sustainable tourism is associated with the commitment and attitude put by the different actors (public and private) in the success of the activity.

In what concerns the involvement of the different actors in the development of the sub-region tourism supply, it seems that the various institutional players (municipal councils and inter-municipalities association, restaurants and hotels entrepreneurs association, commercial and industrial entrepreneurs associations and regional tourism agency) show a strong sensitivity to the economic opportunity that the tourism sector represents. Although, there is not a concerted position about the strategy to follow and there is little coordination between the different institutional agents and even between the tour operators in terms of planning and action regarding the positioning of the territory as a new tourism destination. This has major consequences in the efficacy of the territory tourism promotion, besides the additional financial costs it implies.

This lack of coordination and of a common concept about what the Minho-Lima tourism industry should be and how it should be institutionally managed expresses itself in the existence of several brands, dispersal of resources allocated to promotion and scarce exploitation of synergies. One shock example is the low use of the information technologies as means of marketing promotion of the available services, and the diversity of sites where the different parts and resources of the territory are promoted.

From the empirical work done, we could even conclude that the Minho-Lima tourism destination, as real territory, does not exist in the conscience of their players. The idea of this sub-region as a common destination, which could benefit by being a border region, as shown not to be present in the mind of a significant part of the actors, including local authorities.

A major sign of this lack of a clear strategic idea about what the tourism should be and how it should be organized is the incapacity demonstrated by various entities to coordinate their actions and to converge in a board that could give some consistency to the operation of the several tourism agents. This happens in spite of the wealthy of tourism resources the territory is endowed with and of the local uniqueness of some of its attributes.

With respect to the tour operators, namely the restaurants, we could conclude that there are no horizontal connections between firms, being perceptible an adverse culture to cooperation and to partnership. The fact that these establishments are, mostly, of family ownership, with little training in business management, helps to explain this behaviour.

In contrast, there is fragmentation and scarce public and private promotion and animation initiatives, poor and not always cordial relationships between the industry and the public entities. The relationship between the tourism sector and other activities, including the traditional ones, is inconsistent, even if the local products are consider to be an important asset, contributing to the success of the regional gastronomy and the retail sector.

Also from the survey applied to restaurants, it emerges quite clear the existence of dissatisfaction regarding the tourism promotion implemented. Meanwhile, it is quite scarce their own advertising efforts and their wishes to intensify cooperation with the public authorities or, even, among the private tourism operators, themselves.

Putting together the empirical literature review we have followed and the results we got from the empirical approach undertaken, we end more convinced than before that networking and partnership, through the sharing of market information, the sharing of know-how and the increase of financial resources, could allow to project this territory as a promising tourism destination and to allow tourism activity to be a strong regional development instrument.

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Attachment 1 - Script of interviews to institutional agents

I - Introduction

- a) Thanks
- b) Presentation of the study and goals

II - Data collection

- a) Role of tourism to the region (level of interest; expectations)
- b) Organizational structure in this area
- c) Abilities of the entity and activities in this field
- d) Inventory of resources and entities directly or indirectly related to tourism
- e) Integration with other local productive sectors
- f) Willingness to partnerships, cooperation with other entities
- g) Territorial cooperation (bordering territories and Galicia)
- h) Promotion and marketing
- i) Factors of success and difficulties in developing tourism in the region.

III - Conclusions

- a) Additional comments (something that the interviewee would like to see addressed)
- b) Opinions on the tourist index

IV - Identification of the interviewee and function performed

V - Thanks

Attachment 2 - List of some success factors and difficulties in developing tourism in the Minho-Lima

Order from 1 (most important) to 7 (least), the following factors of success and difficulties in developing tourism in the region:

Factors of success:

- ☐ Recovery and promotion of historic centres
- ☐ Bet on an urban and environmental discipline
- ☐ Gastronomy
- ☐ Experience at TRA
- ☐ Cultural and environmental corridors (including those linking to Galicia)
- ☐ Improvements in accessibilities
- ☐ Partnerships between municipalities of Minho and Lima Valleys and Galician's ones

Difficulties:

- ☐ Lack of entrepreneurial culture
- ☐ Lack of cooperation culture, at institutional and firm level
- ☐ Lack of quality of accommodation
- ☐ Lack of complementary activities to lodging (in particular, tourist animation firms)
- ☐ Failures in the promotion strategy
- ☐ Confusion / vagueness at the level of responsibility of each institutional actor
- ☐ Deficit of vocational training

Entity:

Thank you!

Attachment 3 - Survey to restaurants

Survey to restaurants

Minho Lima

1. Owners' general data

ID:.....

Age:.....

Birthplace:.....

2. Type of property

Group / individual firm?.....

How long has been in activity?.....

Is it part of a group of restaurants / hotels?.....

Financial support to install the establishment?.....

From what entity? Local / Central / EU.....

3. Type of management

Who is responsible for accounts: The actual management, a manager, office hired?.....

.....
Restaurant capacity?.....

The business was expanded / renovated in the last 5 years?.....

Has it regional cuisine menu?.....

Type of customers?.....

4. Labour issues

Nº of employees?.....

Gender and age?.....

Family members?.....

Birthplace?.....

Type of contract signed?

5. Community Networks

Usually use local products in he/her establishment?.....

Where usually makes purchases for he/her
establishment?.....

Is it part of any association or group of similar companies?.....
Participates in the promotion of the municipality?.....
Opinion about the municipality in terms of tourism promotion?.....
.....
Have available means of promotion / information for tourists?.....
Know the Galician tourism?
Have relationships with Galician's entrepreneurs?.....
Have relationship with entrepreneurs of the region?.....
Motivations of tourists?.....
.....

Thank you!