

SERVICE QUALITY IN PORTUGUESE ADVENTURE TOURISM COMPANIES

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Introduction

The growth of the Active Tourism sector in Europe is very recent (Arcos, 2004; Beedie & Hudson, 2003; Carvalhinho, 2011; Cunha, 2006; Mediavilla, 2014), where several studies characterize the different destinations and territories, where these kind of activities are developed (Bell, Tyrväinen, Sievänen, Pröbstl, & Simpson, 2007). The nature and the different types of environment where these services are provided, can lead to some risks resulting from the interaction of various factors such as increased adrenaline, positive feelings and experiences (Blanco, 2012). On the other hand, this practice leads to the exposure of calculated risks, minimized by the specialized companies of the sector.

In the present decade, some research studies characterize this type of companies and some worrying conclusions have been withdrawn, such as the no attention that the active tourism clients felt when they made activities. More worrying is the fact that this type of posture can result in accidents more easily, as well as the lack of technical framework in the services development (Consumer, 2000; Eroski, 2005).

Recent investigations of Lázaro Mediavilla Saldaña, with the conception and validation of a tool capable of measuring the quality parameters emerging from the services of the Active Tourism Companies - Valuation Tool of the Technical Quality in Active Tourism (Mediavilla, 2010), allowed the adaptation of the said instrument to different social and economic realities, according to the country of origin of the different companies participating in the various studies.

In this article, we analyze the data resulting from the application of the already validated HEVA questionnaire (Bento, 2017) to a group of 183 Portuguese Active Tourism Companies, trying to characterize their business profile, forms and methods of action in the sector.

Methods

The aim of this study was to analyze active tourism entrepreneurs' perception of the quality indicators in the services offered by the companies operating in the area. The validated HEVA questionnaire (Bento *et al.*, 2017) was applied to a set of 183 Portuguese active tourism companies.

Data collection was performed by submitting the questionnaire online to companies through the "Google Drive" platform. This process was developed during the period of the year where there is less workload, namely between November and March (winter season). We have sent and collected information in a space of 4 months.

A descriptive and inferential statistical analysis made it possible to characterize the profile of the companies which participated in the study, as well as the most and the least valued factors in the several domains and parameters which determine service quality indicators. We used the program S.P.S.S. - Statistical Package for Social Science "(version 20.0 for Windows).

References

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Results

Through the analysis of the data from the first part of the HEVA questionnaire (Bento *et al.*, 2017), we present the profile of the sample studied, regarding the Portuguese Active Tourism Companies respondents.

Faro district, with 35 companies (19.1%) was the region with more responses, followed by Lisbon with 24 (13.1%) and Porto with 23 (12.6%), were the most represented in this study.

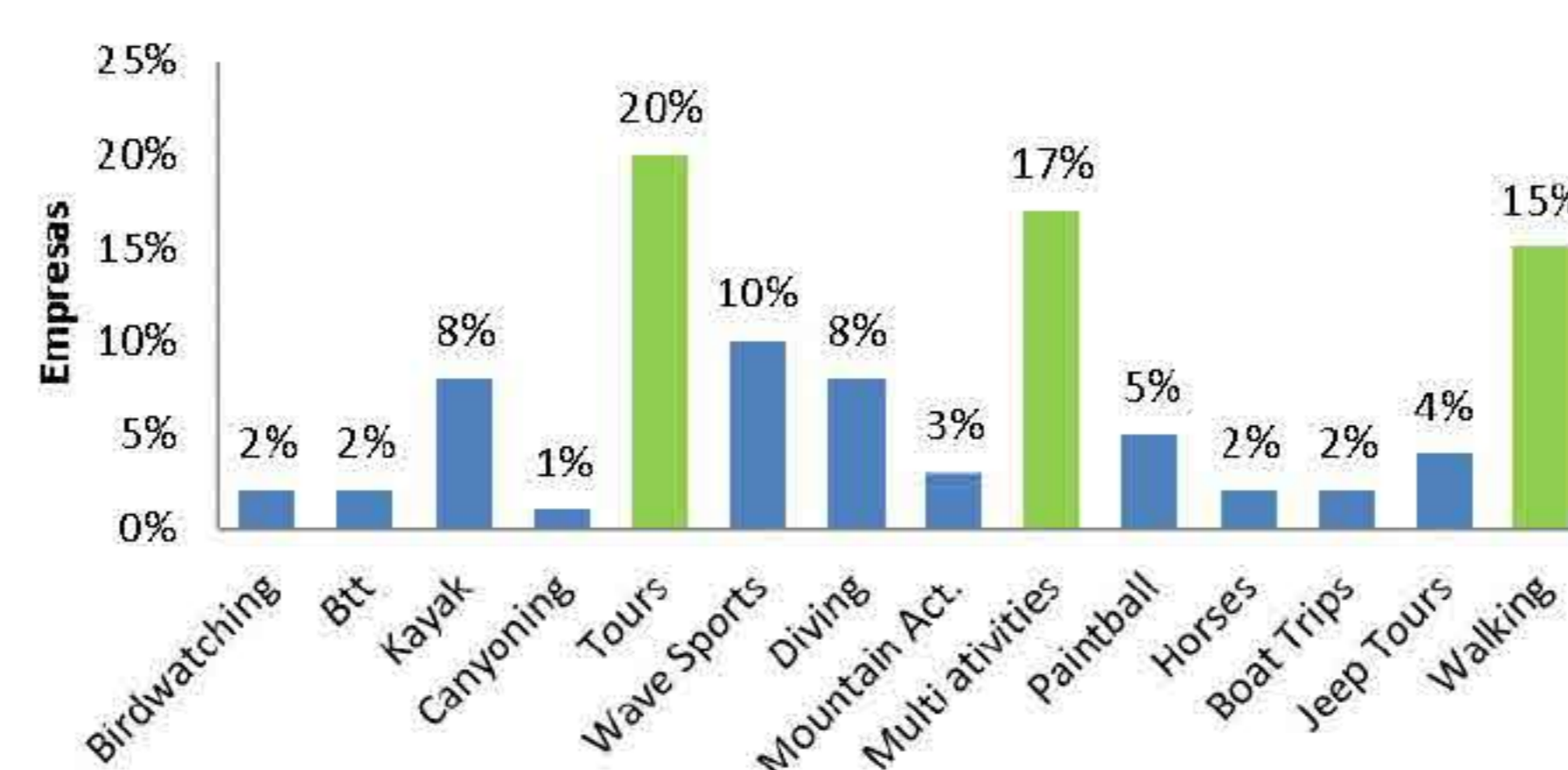
Most respondent companies choose to operate in a more regional context, in relation to the location of their headquarters, managing and organizing activities and services without major travel. However, there are also many companies moving from north to south of the country (25.7%), streamlining their activities / services in a more national context (table 1).

Table 1. Portuguese active tourism intervention area

Type	Frequency	%
Local	39	21,3%
District	13	7,1%
Region	50	27,3%
Nacional	47	25,7%
Internacional	34	18,6%
Total	183	100%

The services and activities provided by the companies surveyed, we highlight the fact that 81.4% of the sample has an average of 10 activities / products for the market, with only one operating base for the development of all its activity. The most successful activities or products are "tours" (20%), followed by "multiactivities" programs (17%) and "walking" (15%).

Table 2. Activities developed by the companies participating in the study



In management and administration factors, should be noted that the majority have less than a decade of existence, are managed by 1 or 2 partners and develop their activity during the 12 months of the year. They also affirm that their Intervention and business management, is positioned mainly (70.5%) in the tourism sector.

In human resources area, we highlight the fact that Portuguese active tourism companies respondents report that they have an average of 2 fixed workers in their workforce, reinforcing with temporary work up to a maximum of 5 human resources, according to the seasonality and services.

Figure 1. Active tourism human resources



Conclusions

According to the data presented, we identified a business profile of Portuguese active tourism companies respondent.

In this way we can conclude that:

- The companies participating in the study are, for the most part, quite young, having 5 to 10 years of existence.
- These types of organizations are constituted, mainly by 1 or 2 partners, very active in the diverse functions and business activities.
- The active tourism companies dynamize activities and services, during the 12 months of the year.
- They identify and promote, in the majority, through 1 or 2 activities, being able to offer more products, subcontracting services to other companies.
- The owners of the companies, create their own jobs, reinforcing their staff only in the high season, in a timely manner.
- It is a sector clearly positioned in the tourism area, having as predominant area of action "land activities", adapting training strategies, business development and regulation, based on this option.



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