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Tourism, Hospitality & Events
Innovation and Resilience
during Uncertainty

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Outdoor tourism demand segmentation: A case study from north of Portugal

Outdoor tourism has been practised substantially in the last few years, particularly in the pandemic period when outdoor activities increased considerably (Silva et al., 2021). Outdoor tourism can be understood as the practise of outdoor activities (Ferreira et al., 2021) classified as hard or soft (Tsaur et al., 2020; UNWTO, 2014). These activities often take place in nature, protected areas, urban parks, and rural areas (Derek et al., 2019). Furthermore, outdoor tourism is considered one of the fastest-growing subcomponents of tourism and a trend in line with the principles of sustainability and environmental awareness (Valizadeh & Khoorani, 2020). Demand for outdoor activities encourages innovation, especially during uncertainty. Indeed, practitioners of outdoor activities seek health and have shown a growing interest in different activities and have adopted new behaviours, creating an opportunity for organisations to innovate (Hansen et al., 2019).

This research aimed to segment the market of visitors who practise outdoor activities in the North region of Portugal based on their motivations. To this end, a survey was applied to visitors who practised outdoor activities in the region. The data was collected between June and September of 2021, and a final sample of 200 valid questionnaires was obtained. In an overall analysis of the socio-demographic and professional profile of the respondents, it can be said that the sample is constituted by women (50.5%), aged between 28-38 or over (58.5%), with higher education levels (70.5%), single (53.3%) and Portuguese (94.5%), with an average monthly income between 601€ and 2400€ (74%). Most of them live in the Porto Metropolitan Area (25%) located in the Northern region of Portugal. Relating to outdoor activities, 35.5% of the sample occasionally practise these activities in their residence area, and 20% practise 1-2 times a week. The activities most practised were walking/hiding (28.8%), running (11.7%), and cycling (9.5%).

To achieve the objective of this research, the cluster analysis technique was applied. The hierarchical analysis was used in the first step to find the optimal number of clusters, and three were found. Afterwards, the non-hierarchical clustering method was performed, known as K-means, which transfers an individual to the cluster whose centroid is located at the shortest distance (Hair et al., 2014).

Similar to a study developed by UNWTO (2014), the present research also segmented visitors, who engage in outdoor activities based on their motivation, and a division of activities into soft and hard was considered. Fourteen motivations that lead visitors to practise outdoor activities were considered and measured on a 5-point Likert scale.

The results show the existence of three clusters, which are described as follows. Cluster 1 (Soft practitioner): includes 37.2% of the sample. Consists predominantly of women (56.3%), within

18 and 35 years old (60.0%). Most of the practitioners had completed higher education (78.9%), with an average monthly income of 601€ and 1200€ (35.2%). Almost 27% resides in Tâmega and Sousa Region. The practitioner of this cluster occasionally practise outdoor activities in their residence area (38.0%). Notably, this group prefers activities classified as soft (76.9%) and opts for land-based activities (72.3%).

Cluster 2 (Radicals): is the smallest group, involving 14.1% of the sample. Women account for 51.9% of the sample, aged between 18 and 35 years old (63.0%). Also, 76.3% are holders higher of education with an average monthly income of 1201€ and 1800€. This group of practitioners practise outdoor activities 3-5 times a week (40.7%) in their residence area, which is Tâmega and Sousa (29.6%). Almost half of the practitioners (47.6%) of this cluster practised hard activities, and it was the group with the highest percentage (28.6) of participants in aquatic activities.

Cluster 3 (Enthusiasts): the largest cluster with 48.7% of the sample. Most visitants in this cluster were males (52.7%), aged between 18-35 years old (54.8%), and higher education is the most cited educational level in this group (76.3%), with an average monthly income of 601€-1200€ (28.0%). In a total of 34.4% of them lives in Porto Region, and Outdoor activity in the residential area is occasional. Similar to Cluster 1, the enthusiasts practise soft (67.5%) and land-based (72.3%) activities.

It is noteworthy that in Clusters 1 and 3, the highest motivation mean was Nature/landscape (4.90 points \pm 0.300; 4.40 points \pm 0.592), and in Cluster 2 was accommodation (2.85 points \pm 1.027), results related to the characteristics of outdoor activities.

This research demonstrates that segmentation of outdoor tourism demand in North of Portugal should set out marketing and promotion strategies in different destinations, attracting demand, from outside the region and according to their preferences. Therefore, this study contributes to the literature by expanding the discussion on outdoor tourism segmentation, an underestimated topic.

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Keywords: Outdoor Tourism; Outdoor activities; Motivations; Visitors’ profile; Clustering

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