International Tourism Congress ITC2022
Tourism – Going Back/Forward to Sustainability

November (16)17-19, 2022, Łódź, Poland

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

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Organised by

Faculty of Geographical Sciences, University of Lodz (Poland)

in cooperation with

CiTUR Centre for Tourism Research, Development and Innovation.

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2. TOURISTS' MOTIVATIONS IN PROTECTED AREAS: THE CASE OF VALE DO TUA REGIONAL NATURAL PARK (NORTHEAST PORTUGAL

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Goal: Considering the increased competition among tourism destinations, it becomes very important to identify the reasons why tourists choose to visit some destinations instead of others. Natural parks and other protected areas (PA) are popular destinations for people who want to enjoy nature-based leisure, travel, and ecotourism activities (Konu & Kajala, 2012). Indeed, despite the desire to enjoy the landscape, and nature in general, the broadening of knowledge and rest are considered ecotourism motivations, the motivations that lead people to visit PA are not homogeneous (Carneiro et al, 2006) and ecotourism market is not homogeneous (Wight, 2001).

This empirical study identifies visitors´ motivations of a Portuguese protected area (PPA), the Vale do Tua Regional Natural Park (PNRVT), addressing the following research questions: What is the profile of PA visitors? Do motivations differ between different PA? What motivates tourists to visit the PNRVT? It seems important to know the perceptions and profile of potential visitors of PNRVT by understanding their motivations and the importance given to resources, activities, equipment, and services. "

Method: Data were collected by means of a self-administrated questionnaire reaching a convenience sample of 395 respondents. From those, only 100 (34.7%) respondents indicated that they had already visited the PNRVT and were considered for the evaluation of motivations of this natural park. The data obtained were analysed using Jamovi statistical program, using univariate and multivariate statistical techniques.

Findings: From the results obtained, it is possible to conclude that visitors of PPAs aim to see nature, landscape, flora, fauna, and paths. Regarding the motivations for visiting the PNRVT, the question with a Likert scale between 1 (not at all important) and 5 (very important) shows that the most valued motivations are learn/expand knowledge and see a specific place, all with averages close to 4. Among the most valued is the have peace and calm/being away from the crowds and moving to a different environment/having new experiences. The least scored motivation was meeting new people. Those preferences and motivations are not similar to other PPA as Gerês and Sintra-Cascais (see Carneiro et al., 2006).

Limitations: The main limitation of this study concerns the fact that the surveyed and convenience sample includes a small sample size of actual visitors to the PNRVT (n= 100), impeding representativeness.

Practical implications: The present investigation contributes by helping public institutions and private companies to improve their tourism offerings and develop more efficient marketing plans. Knowledge of the expectations of potential visitors regarding infrastructure, products and services and the profile of potential visitors inform political and economic agents, contributing to the positioning of the PNRVT in the tourist market. Landscape, flora, fauna and pedestrian routes are the most appreciated resources on PNRVT.

Originality: This empirical study reveals that the motivations for visiting different PA can be considerably different and compares different PPAs. The diversity of motivations to visit PA of different geographical areas and with different tourist attractions seems to exist. It also contributes by adding knowledge about a natural park in a low-density population region from the northeast interior of Portugal.

Key words: Visitors, Motivations, Natural Park, Ecotourism, Protect Area.

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