

The Evaluation of Tourist Routes in Portugal: A Case of Social Policy

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Abstract This paper analyses the Tourist Routes in Portugal from a point of view of social policy, specifically focusing in the evaluation procedures and from there deriving conclusions about the management of those routes. The methodology has two parts – first the basic framework of evaluating programs in social policy is defined; secondly the Tourist routes in Portugal are described. After that, the routes are analysed according the evaluation methodology. We find out that the routes are evaluated, when this happens, by very basic results methods, which suggests that the routes are made by political or administrative or even marketing considerations and not by economic reasons. We also found that most of the routes are managed by municipal councils, on a shared basis, and their enjoyment is mostly free. The evaluation of results of the routes is made in an unreliable way. Signaled routes are in the minority, and route promotion is done using information technologies, but leaflets are not dispensed with. These findings question the relevance of the investment in the routes. Further studies should be done to further analyse the importance of the routes in the country. The paper is composed by the following sections: 1. Introduction 2. Literature review on social policy and tourism routes 3. Methodology and Data collection. 4. Results. 5. Discussion 6. Conclusions.

Keywords: evaluation of touristic routes, Portugal, social policy

1. Introduction

Tourism is an important economic activity worldwide. Tourism exports reached US\$1.481 billion in 2019, resulting from a movement of 1.46 billion of international tourist arrivals. Europe is the main tourist destination with 744 million (million) of international arrivals, which generated receipts of USD 576 billion (billions), followed by Asia Pacific with 362 million international arrivals, which corresponded to revenue of USD 443 billion, America ranks third with 219 million international arrivals and USD 342 billion in revenue, followed by Africa with 70 million international arrivals and USD 38 billion, and the Middle East comes in last with 65 billion million international arrivals and USD 81 billion. In the same year Portugal ranked 9th in tourism exports with USD 15 billion in receipts. (UNWTO, 2020) If this movement is important for large nations, it has a very particular meaning in developing countries, contributing to the social uplift of their populations, which, otherwise, would see their income highly reduced, reaching high levels of poverty.

One of the products that contribute to these results, and which is part of our study, are tourist routes (Meyer, 2004). They are particularly relevant in inland territories, as they allow tourists to leave the major tourist gateways and travel to these territories, not only to enjoy the tourist resources that exist there, but, hopefully, to contribute economically to their growth, consuming local products, such as accommodation, restaurants, handicrafts, among others, and for the creation of jobs, particularly for young people, helping them to settle in these territories. This is, therefore, an aspect of a social nature that must be encouraged so that the aforementioned objectives can be materialized.

When tourists travel to a particular destination, they may have had several motivations that led them to this choice, such as cultural aspects, natural resources (sea, sun, landscape, etc.), religious (religious practices or visits to certain places), sports (whether as practitioners or spectators), visits to a particular city (city breaks), visits to family and friends, among others (Yoo and Park, 2018). In this investigation, in addition to identifying the existing tourist routes in mainland Portugal (we excluded the Autonomous Regions given the inexistence or scarce local reality of tourist routes), it was intended to know their management method (only routes with their own management were considered) and to know whether or not they evaluate the results not from the point of view of the users (tourists), but in terms of their amount of enjoyment.

The relevance of this study is related to the number of resources, both material and immaterial, existing with great dispersion throughout the national territory, and the importance that tourist routes have in their

knowledge. The importance of evaluating the number of tourists who use each route is essential to understand the possible economic contribution that they represent for the territories where they are located.

Given the gap in the literature consulted, this article is important to understand the Portuguese reality, particularly about the importance and the way in which the evaluation of tourist routes is carried out, because only in this way can one know the importance of routes, and their relevance for the development of tourism in the regions where they are located.

The paper is composed by the following sections: 1. Introduction 2. Literature review on social policy and tourism routes 3. Methodology and Data collection. 4. Results. 5. Discussion 6. Conclusions.

2. Literature review on social policy and tourism routes

2.1 Evaluation methods in social policy.

2.1.1 Evaluation by results

There are mainly two types of evaluation methods (Tomé 2005). Evaluation by results answers to the question: what happened? The following topics are analysed: the resources that were used in the operations; the number of supported persons and organizations (physical indicators); the volume of applied funds, originating the so-called "financial indicators"; accessibility, measured by the percentage of the potential target group that was included in the program; the situation of the individuals and organizations that were supported, in relation to the variables that may reflect their situation immediately after the end of the program; for instance, regarding a training program those variables are wages, and employment situation (for individuals) and productivity, quality of labour relations, number of workers, exports (for individuals).

2.1.2 Microeconomic evaluation "before after"

The second method of evaluation consists in the comparison of what happened before the program start, with what happened after the program end, regarding the variables that may describe the situation of the individuals and organizations that were involved in the program. Those variables differ from program to program. In the case of a vocational training program, they are linked with wages, employment conditions, unemployment spells, self-esteem (in relation to individuals) and labour relations, productivity, or exports (in relation to companies).

2.1.3 Micro-econometric evaluation "with-without"

This evaluation is made using two representative samples, one of participants, the other of non-participants; each group is surveyed longitudinally, for the relevant period of time. The program impact is equal to the difference in the situation of the participants, and given that they participated in the program, in relation to the situation that they would have been in, if they hadn't participated. Although this analysis compares two periods of time, it is essentially a "with-without" study. This type of studies answers to the question: what difference did the program make?

2.1.4 Macroeconomic analysis

This type of evaluation tries to assess the impact of the social policy operations in the big macroeconomic variables (consumption, investment, Gross Domestic Product (GDP), external debt, and public deficits). Those variables are different from the ones that are addressed in the microeconomic studies and that have to do with the direct situation of the economic agents that were involved in the programs (wages, employment, exports, productivity, etc). Thus, this analysis completes the other three forms of evaluation that were presented in the paper. This analysis may be made in a "before-after" or in a "with-without" perspective. For the making of these studies, three steps have to be taken: firstly, the structure of the economy has to be previously defined; that definition is usually made using "input-output" methods and models of "supply and demand"; secondly, the definition of the "impulse" given by the program in the economy has to be made; in the easier cases this "impulse" will be the investment made by the program promoters; thirdly, the calculation of the impact of that "impulse" in the economy, using multipliers, as also to be made.

2.2 Concept of tourism routes

A tourist route is some path that may be followed about some distinctive theme. Furthermore, the goal is to guide the visitor on a voyage of discovery, on a common subject, which receives more visibility. Therefore, the main goal is to group the touristic assets by topic or within a large geographic area (UNWTO, 2017, p. 28).

2.2.1 Classification of routes

For the elaboration of this study, we did a literature review. We ended with the following classification:

- Cultural Routes – routes that are based in known cultural events and sites which may be visited every time or only in certain seasons (Meyer, 2004; UNWTO 2017; Lourens, 2007);
- Religious routes – routes that are based on pilgrimages routes (Rinschede 1992; Balestrieri & Congiu 2017);
- Gastronomic routes – routes which are devoted to gastronomy, and which the importance of using local products is put in much relevance (by product, dish and tradition), (Ricolfe, Merino, Marzo, Ferradis, Rodriguez, 2008; Herrera, Herranz & Arilla, 2012; López-Gusmán & Cañizares, 2012; Gheorghe, Tudorache & Nistoreanu, 2014; Jeambey 2016);
- Heritage routes – which are interdependent with cultural routes (Comissão Europeia, 2016; Prats 2011);
- Eno-tourism routes – routes linked with wine, for which wine production is factor that induces visiting (Hall, C.M. & Mitchell, R. 2000; Hall & Macionis, 1998, citado por Bruwer, 2003; Armas, 2008);
- Industrial tourism routes – based on using abandoned or forgotten industrial complexes as a tourist product; they also rely on the organization of tourist routes related to industrial heritage, and on the importance of conservation of industrial heritage, (factory and productive, patrimonial or historical) (Abad 2002; Fernández & Ramos, 2004; Copic, S., Dordevic, J., Lukie, T., Stojanovic, V. Dukicin, S., Besermenji, S. ... Tumaric, A. 2014; Cho & Shin, 2014; Bujok, Klempe, Jelinek, Porzer & Gonzalez, 2015);
- Ecotourism routes – based on nature tourism, on the importance of natural resources in the development of a nature tourism destination, and on the importance of environmental conservation particularly in natural areas.

In the set of articles consulted, we did not find any article that addressed our topic – the evaluation of tourist routes from a policy perspective; this is a clear sign of the existence of a research gap, and therefore the present study is a contribution to fill it.

2.2.2 Conceptual model

Based on the literature review we considered that six types of routes existed, namely cultural, religious, gastronomic, heritage, wine or other. These six types of routes could be visited in two ways: freely, or in organized groups. In this context, one of the important topics to be addressed was the form of implementation. Other important topics were the following: management entity (public, private or other); structure of governance (management, technicians, administrative personnel, others); share of work in the governance (full or shared). In terms of promotion, the options were own website, shared website, Facebook, other social media, leaflets, or other. In terms of costs, we addressed total costs, costs with implementation, costs with maintenance and the share of funding by the EU. Finally, regarding the type of evaluation, the following issues matter: type of evaluation (direct control, survey, other), periodicity (annual, bi-annual, tri-annual, other, number of visitors in 2014, 2015 and 2016 (Mota, 2020).

3. Methodology and data collection

The present study had its starting point in the review of the literature to establish the relevant concepts of tourist routes that exist, the characterization of the various types of routes and the determination of the research gap. As a result of the literature review, the study objective was defined as the evaluation of Tourist Routes in Mainland Portugal. Afterwards the second step of the research was to determine the existing routes and their managing entities.

Initially we made a consultation through the Internet to identify the several existing routes. Subsequently, we sent emails to all the municipal councils of mainland Portugal (according to the list on the website of the National Association of Portuguese Municipalities), regional tourism entities and Turismo de Portugal, with the aim of

collecting the necessary elements for this study. As a final result, we obtained 202 responses (72.66%) from the 278 municipal councils contacted.

From the analysis of the collected elements, we found it difficult, in the answers obtained, to mention local routes, pedestrian trails, programs of tour operators called routes and others as tourist routes. In view of this situation, we had to clearly define which criteria the routes should meet in order to be included in this study. The selected criteria were: The route C1) has a theme; C2) has a management entity C3) is located in multiple locations; C4) has a website (own or shared); C5) exists for more than 3 years (Since 1 January 2013); C6) has signage.

The reasons that presided over the choice of each criterion were:

- C1) It is understood that a tourist route should have its own theme as its umbrella, as shown in the literature;
- C2) Considering that this study intends to evaluate the route, it is essential that there is a management entity;
- C3) Given the large proliferation of local itineraries with a possible lack of self-management, their consideration in the study would provoke a large amount of analysis, with distortion of the final results due to the discrepancy between local visits, walking routes and the enjoyment of tourist routes;
- C4) We consider it important for the dissemination of routes to have electronic information, so that its existence can be known by tourists - if this function does not exist, the result of the route may be distorted due to lack of information on an equal basis for those who benefit from this condition;
- C5) For the evaluation of tourist routes to be meaningful, we only considered routes which already existed for some time - we opted for three years (existing before January 1, 2013), avoiding the distortion of results by including more recent routes;
- C6) Having its own signage is important for us to consider the route in the study because, otherwise, the enjoyment of the route by tourists is limited.

In a first phase, we considered only criteria C1, C2 and C3 as mandatory, with the rest being weighted according to the responses to the survey. As a result of this analysis, 184 potential routes were identified to be considered in the study. This work spanned from February 2014 to April 2017.

As a next step, a pilot questionnaire was designed and sent to 18 personalities, with 11 responses being obtained. In view of the responses received, the final questionnaire was created and sent by email to the entities identified as managers, together with a comfort letter making it clear that the collected elements would be used exclusively for academic purposes. The universe considered is constituted by the routes that, according to the research initially carried out, fulfilled the criteria C1, C2 and C3 mentioned above.

From the analysis of the responses received, 100 routes were excluded because they “did not leave the paper” (therefore they were never put in practice), they were “only suggestions for visits”, they were “very old and there was neither a management entity nor elements about them”, and also because the entities contacted had “declined to the invitation” or have not responded.

The consultation was carried out between mid-May and September 2017.

4. Results

As a result of the survey, we proceeded to an analysis of the responses received (Mota, 2020). 171 responses were received out of a universe of 184 (92.93%), of which 84 were through a questionnaire (49.12%). Responses were obtained by email and not by completing the questionnaire, the reasons for which are shown below. It should also be noted that several questionnaires were not answered in their entirety, which affects the totals for each item. We thus obtained a sample of appreciable size, although not random and, therefore, not statistically representative of the universe of tourist routes.

A summary of the results is the following:

- As for the type of route, it was found that the largest number of responses concerned heritage routes, 56 (66.67%), followed by cultural routes, 47 (55.95%), wine and gastronomic routes, both with 18 (21.43%),

others, 13 (15.48%) and, finally, religious, 11 (13.10%). It appears, therefore, that cultural and heritage routes have, together, great relevance in the study, totalizing 103 mentions (47 cultural and 56 heritage). However, the total number of responses obtained regarding the type of routes (163) makes it evident that several routes under analysis are composite, associating several types in the same route.

- As for the way in which the routes are used, most are free to use, 46 (54.76%), and with organized departures/groups, 25 responses (29.76%) were obtained.
- From the answers obtained, it appears that 82 routes have a management entity (97.62%), of which 47 are public (55.95%), 24 are private (28.57%) and with other forms 2 (2, 38%).
- We also asked the date of implementation of the route, obtaining 76 responses (90.48%). The results have a high dispersion.
- As for the governance structure, 26 (30.95%) indicated management, 27 technicians (32.14%), administrative 10 (11.90%) and another type of structure 17 (1=9.94% or 2=20 .24%). Given the content of the answers, we have some doubts about whether there is effective governance or just a mere management of the route. In future work, this issue may be explored further. These doubts are reinforced by the answers to the following question, "Is the governance structure dedicated or shared?", as the number of those who answered that it is dedicated, 27 (32.14%) is clearly lower than the number of those who answered shared, 42 (50.00%).
- To the question about whether or not there was a contribution from the European Commission, we received few answers, yes 38 (45.24%) and no 38 (45.24%). As for the percentage of reimbursement, the answers varied between 60% and 85%.
- Asked about the costs of designing and implementing the route, the respondents indicated very different numbers, between 1,000 and 15 million Euros. Regarding the question about the annual cost of maintaining the route, the answers range from 200 Euros to 300 thousand Euros. With these results, it becomes very difficult to define a standard-type of costs for the implementation and maintenance of tourist routes.
- As for the means of promoting the route, 65 (77.38%) responded that they used leaflets, followed by their own website with 49 (58.33%), shared website with 39 (46.43%), Facebook with 36 (42.86%), others with 21 (25.00%) and other social networks with 17 (20.24%). It appears, therefore, that, as would be expected, a great use of information and communication technologies, with multiple responses to the various types proposed.
- Regarding the question about the signalling of the routes, we obtained a low number of positive answers, 39 (46.43%), and the negative ones totalled 30 (35.71%). Perhaps these results explain the low cost of both the design and implementation of the routes and their maintenance. As mentioned earlier, since 1998 there have been specific signs for tourist routes, making strange, therefore, the existence of such a large number of unmarked routes, which means that tourists are inhibited from enjoying the route to its fullest.
- We were also interested in knowing the number of visitors to the routes in the last three years related to the execution of the study (2014 to 2016), as well as whether there were evaluations of the results, their frequency and the method used. These answers were, from the outset, very important for our study, given the research gap identified regarding the evaluation of the results of tourist routes. The results obtained were the following: As for information on the number of visitors to the route, in 2014 they indicated 29 (34.52%), in 2015, 35 (41.67%), and in 2016, 36 (42.86%). With regard to the periodic assessment of the number of visitors to the route, 43 (51.12%) responded positively and 28 (33.33%) negatively. As for the periodicity of periodic evaluations, 14 (16.67%) responded annually, 3 (3.57%) every three years, 1 (1.19%) and another 8 (9.52%); Finally, as for the evaluation method used, 18 (21.43%) indicated direct control, 3 (3.57%) and another 10 (11.90%) surveyed. With these results, we found that the evaluation of the number of visitors is not carried out in about 40% of the routes, which translates into ignorance of their impact and importance for local tourism, as well as their degree of attractiveness and present. We recognize, however, the difficulty of evaluating visitations in the case of free-use routes for which it is not easy to obtain credible values. Even so, we believe that the evaluation of results is crucial for monitoring the evolution of the route and its eventual restructuring.
- Finally, we commented on the responses received, justifying not sending the questionnaire. Thus, we obtained 34 responses (188%) claiming that 34 responses were not implemented; 44 (25.73%) indicate that they are suggestions for itineraries, tourist programs or walking routes; 5 (2.92%) do not have elements related to the route; and for 4 routes (2.34%), the values were aggregated in a single answer.

- We did not receive a response from 12 entities (7.02%), and 5 (2.92%) routes declined the request for collaboration.

5. Discussion

On the other hand, the type of access to the route strongly influences the evaluation behaviour: more than 80% of the routes with “organized access” carry out an evaluation, but only about half of the routes with “free access” do so. The explanation, already mentioned above, lies in the fact that, in the first case, there are records of the participants, while, in the second, the tabulation is more difficult. Thus, we consider urgent the development of tourist routes with: (i) creation of a certifying or accreditation body that determines clear rules for the creation of routes; (ii) redefinition of management models that should, desirably, be ensured by an association with the participation of public bodies, particularly the managing entities of the territory, and the actors involved in the promotion and use of the route; (iii) more up-to-date and mandatory road signs and interpretation; (iv) forms of financing and continuous evaluation of the route's performance, namely in terms of its enjoyment and economic impacts on the territory.

The certification provides tourists with quality information about the products that may be included in the routes, such as handicrafts or gastronomy, representative of the region and produced there, enabling informed choices. Certification is already officially practiced in Portugal since regulations were recently created for the certification of the Camino de Santiago (Dec.-Law 51/2019 of 17 April). Several entities promote “quality seals” or “adherence to the route”, which are a principle of certification, but which are given by peers, without official recognition, despite these instruments having their own regulations.

We believe that the standards for this certification and/or accreditation should be issued by the Secretary of State for Tourism, through Turismo de Portugal (TP), after public discussion, and involve the regional tourism entities (ERT) and the managing entities or route promoters. The application of these standards would be the responsibility of public or private entities, duly authorized by the TP for the respective certification/authentication. The ERTs would be responsible for verifying compliance with these standards, by the entities certified/authenticated in the meantime, monitoring their performance. We understand that the model used for the certification of the Caminhos de Santiago could serve as a generic model for the future regulation applied to tourist routes, although there may be adaptations depending on the type of route to be certified.

We could and should evolve towards the creation of a “National Network of Tourist Routes” (RNRT). This network would make it possible to scale existing routes or those to be established, as well as their joint dissemination, which would allow tourists, whether national or foreign, to know the themes of existing routes in Portugal, as well as their territorial distribution, through its own website. At present, if a tourist wants to find out about the existing routes in Portugal, he will have to go, as we did, through the websites of the more than 300 municipalities in the country.

The dissemination, in a consolidated phase, should be done by a confederation of federations of each of the basic themes of the routes, and the federations would bring together the territorial associations. For example, in the case of wine, each route would have its own association, the set of wine routes constituted a federation, which in turn was associated with a confederation. We would thus have a bottom-up organization.

This organization could start in a simpler form, gradually evolving to the organizational form proposed above. As attributions, the RNRT could strive to only include routes with professional governance and with the participation of stakeholders. In addition to marketing, it could carry out route evaluation studies, thus minimizing the respective weight for each of the routes involved.

6. Conclusions

This paper was a first attempt. We would like to make a more developed study based in the facts we found and using less the evaluation of results and more the evaluation of impact, in micro and if possible, in macro terms.

As possible future research, we refer to the study of the performance of the routes, at the level of NUT II, taking into account the local evolution of tourism, with estimation of the direct, indirect and induced economic impacts that the routes generate.

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