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The Economic Dimension of Quality in Tourism: Perceptions of Portuguese Public Decision Makers at the Local Level

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ABSTRACT

A quality assessment scale in tourism was constructed in five dimensions: economic, development, human resources, marketing and product. We presents the research findings for the economic dimension, aiming to understand the perception of Portuguese public decision makers at the local level. Using survey methodology, a sample of Portuguese municipalities was used for data collection. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were performed, and three factors supported quality assessment regarding economics: development strategy (F1), economic factors of demand (F2), and financial incentives (F3). Results focus on the validation of the psychometric properties of this measuring instrument, identifying key issues for future research.

KEYWORDS

Competitiveness; Economic dimension; Quality; Tourism; Portugal

Introduction

In Portugal, creating conditions at the local level for enhancing tourism competitiveness is often based on the initiative of local public authorities. In this sense, municipalities constitute destination management organizations (DMO), assuming a major role on local tourism development. They play an important part in local tourism planning, supporting entrepreneurship, and destination marketing, as well as raising funding, attracting businesses, and new markets. As the success of a destination depends on the overall level of services quality, they should also be able to promote the use of resources efficiently so that quality tourism products and services could be provided in the destination in order to achieve sustainable growth, increase the added value of the tourism sector, improve and diversify its market segments, and enhance its attractiveness and benefits, both for visitors and the local community, in a sustainable perspective (Lee, 2016; Mansour & Ariffin, 2017; Singh, 2015). Therefore, it is relevant to understand the

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perception of local decision makers on quality in tourism. For this purpose, a destination quality assessment scale was developed, consisting of five subscales to evaluate the following dimensions: economic, development, human resources, marketing, and product. The absence of reliable tools adapted to the Portuguese reality, considering the quality of tourism assessment, motivated the construction of this questionnaire. It is also considered that this instrument is a support tool for decision-making, which emphasizes tangible and intangible aspects of quality. This study analyses the economic perspective of quality in the perception of who has responsibilities for the development of tourism. It identifies the factors that at regional or local level support the most appropriate economic development strategy to attract the demand.

Theoretical framework

The relationship between quality and tourism economic development can be approached according to different perspectives. The most noteworthy in the scientific literature are as follows:

(a) regional economic development policies (Badulescu, Hoffman, Badulescu, & Badulescu, 2016; Bannò, Piscitello, & Varum, 2015; Blasco, Guia, & Prats, 2014; Bohlin, Brandt, & Elbe, 2016; Garza & Cuevas-Contreras, 2016; Nilsson, Eskilsson, & Ek, 2010; Więckowski & Cerić, 2016);
(b) innovation (Booyens, 2016; Booyens & Rogerson, 2015; Makkonen & Rohde, 2016);
(c) products (Ferdinand & Williams, 2013; Getz & Page, 2016; Iañez-Pérez, 2011; Sakharchuk, Kharitonova, Krivosheeva, & Ilkevich, 2013; Sarasa, 2015; Vermeulen, 2015);
(d) marketing (De Noni, Orsi, & Zanderighi, 2014; Sertakova et al., 2016);
(e) cooperation between public and private sectors (Bernabé & Hernández, 2016; Perles-Ribes & Ramón-Rodríguez, 2017; Vodeb & Rudež, 2016).

Regional economic development contributes to territorial competitiveness. Increasing competitiveness levels is the goal of many economies. Therefore, public incentives are crucial for increasing the capacity of foreign investment attraction and entrepreneurship in tourism destinations (Badulescu et al., 2016; Bannò et al., 2015; González & Mendieta, 2009; Perles-Ribes & Ramón-Rodríguez, 2017).

The effect of political decisions on the economy is particularly felt within the tourism sector: on the one hand, local businesses use endogenous resources and knowledge available in the region where they operate; on the other hand, the concerted action between the government and the diverse local authorities is fundamental in the inclusion of research and development

(R&D) activities in the companies (Bohlin et al., 2016; Nilsson et al., 2010). These two aspects may shift the emphasis of national policy systems for regional economic structures (Blasco et al., 2014; Bohlin et al., 2016). In this context, it should eventually lead to the release of a new public management baseline, which should henceforth cover the impact of market transactions and stakeholder's decision-making at the local level on the most appropriate policies to the destination (Bohlin et al., 2016). In addition, and equally important, is the attractiveness of tourism products and services, which, in order to be competitive, need to have quality and cultural diversity, be based on the identity of the territory, demonstrate internal cohesion and be promoted internationally (Ferdinand & Williams, 2013; Getz & Page, 2016; Sakharchuk et al., 2013; Sarasa, 2015; Vermeulen, 2015). One of the strategies to overcome some barriers related to the development of destinations is to consider collaborative strategies in tourism planning, which are fundamental for the economic development of the sector and the regions (Badulescu et al., 2016; Nilsson et al., 2010; Vodeb & Rudež, 2016). However, raising these movements in a certain region requires financial support, fundamental to the internal development of companies, as well as to the creation of a set of structures that may support the required change process for the initial implementation of this kind of actions (Nilsson et al., 2010).

Innovation is also central to tourism quality because it circumscribes the focus on what is unique and authentic in the local culture, as well as how to present these experiences to visitors (Booyens, 2016; Booyens & Rogerson, 2015, 2016). It is associated with economic development, suggesting that it is driven by the search for new or more viable solutions, applying some of the "old" solutions to other contexts (Booyens & Rogerson, 2015). Innovation can be discussed as an important factor of economic development, competitiveness, and quality, because it refers to a differentiated organization of supply. This can be considered as a systematic, interactive, and integrative process throughout the economy. Makkonen and Rohde (2016) argue that regions need to have (1) a knowledge-building infrastructure, supported by scientific research; (2) an economic structure that facilitates businesses; and (3) a relational structure that reinforces links and collective learning among stakeholders. Accordingly, the competitive capacity of a region depends on the cultural matrix, the thirst for innovation, the entrepreneurship, the value framework, and the dynamics that may exist between stakeholders. It is this innovative synergy that confers the regions comparative advantage.

Regional economic growth also depends on a set of development policies, at different levels, which should boost the competitive advantage of companies and destinations (Booyens, 2016). Thus, it can be asserted that the quality of the tourism activity is determined by the combined action of four complementary factors: (1) the local standard of comparative advantages, translated by the endowment of cultural and natural resources, quality,

and product differentiation; (2) local market dynamics, accessibility to specialized business support services, and the level of skills and knowledge of human capital; (3) the dynamics of the local productive fabric, observed in the characteristics of the business fabric and in the forms of implementation of the companies in the territory, as well as in the capacity of entrepreneurship and strategic management; and (4) the conditions of embedding the territorial dimension into the local economy, through the articulation of identity, stakeholders, businesses, products, and policies with local economic dynamics, and this with the global economy. Consequently, public policies are a vector of development and economic diversification (Bernabé & Hernández, 2016).

There are many factors that affect tourism development nowadays: new infrastructures, international tourism flows, and free market of products and services are the most visible manifestations of this process. Price and exchange rate, quality and diversity of tourist services, and consumer trends and preferences can also be highlighted. The growth of tourism flows led to new services, as well as to the increasing concern on their quality (Więckowski & Cerić, 2016). For these reasons, it is of paramount importance to ensure quality, of products and services, and of destinations in general, given that the profile of tourists has been changing. Tourists are increasingly demanding and concerned by endogenous attractions, which portray the uniqueness of the destinations (Badulescu et al., 2016). Under these conditions, the territories tend to be attractive to both tourists and highly skilled workers. These two factors encourage and attract investment by producing dynamics between demand, settlement of "talents," and attraction of investment in various businesses, which, over time, create a spiral of initiatives that will self-stimulate themselves (Booyens & Rogerson, 2015, 2016; Clavé & Wilson, 2017; Vermeulen, 2015). This course defines an evolutionary path for tourism destinations and determines the way ahead, requiring growth and social, economic, and political diversity, which influences the destination attractiveness improvement. This dynamics and attraction ability leads to a greater competitiveness index of tourism products and services. However, there is no competitiveness without quality. That is, tourists may even be attracted and motivated enough to travel to a destination, but its ability to consolidate a profitable market size from an economic perspective also depends on the quality of services provided to the customer.

In this sense, the literature mentions some premises to be taken into account on this issue, specifically:

(a) it is necessary to implement models that guarantee the quality of destinations, integrated in regional plans aiming to generate tourism dynamics, when the goal is the socioeconomic activation of the regions

and the viability of emerging destinations (Bernabé & Hernández, 2016; Serrano-Bedia, López-Férnandez, & Gómez-López, 2007);

(b) the quality of destinations influences their competitiveness and should be measured through various indicators (De Noni et al., 2014; Rodríguez-Antón, Rubio-Andrada, Alonso-Almeida, & Celemín-Pedroche, 2016; Serrano-Bedia et al., 2007);

(c) the high quality of life of the destinations attracts specialized and entrepreneurial human resources, both nationally and internationally (De Noni et al., 2014);

(d) the sustainability of the destination brand, in the long term, depends on the quality of customer service, products and suppliers, and the production capacity (Nilsson et al., 2010);

(e) a quality environment is the basic element for transforming a given territory into a tourism destination (Sarasa, 2015);

(f) there are no quality destinations without highly skilled human resources in the hospitality industry (Soares et al., 2015);

(g) product quality is usually assessed by the price/benefit ratio and product innovation (Iañez-Pérez, 2011; Weidenfeld, 2013);

(h) the higher the quality of the social and communicational relations of the tourists, the greater the need of high-quality standards in the destination (Volgger & Pechlaner, 2015);

(i) the relocation of the investment increases the quality of the destinations, because it gives them an international dimension (Vermeulen, 2015);

(j) the economic ties and the exposure to markets and international trade practices facilitate the definition of the marketing strategy (Badulescu et al., 2016; González & Mendieta, 2009);

(k) the promotion and commercialization of tourism products should be developed around the articulated project of the destination; the funding should be directed toward the promotion of unique products, jointly fostered at the destination (Bernabé & Hernández, 2016; Garza & Cuevas-Contreras, 2016);

(l) marketing management should consider the destination as the commercial product to promote (Blasco et al., 2014);

(m) marketing should be oriented toward commitment to the customer (Getz & Page, 2016);

(n) destination development requires DMOs to be responsible for the planning of the tourism system, the integration of stakeholders, and the definition of the destination marketing strategy (Blasco et al., 2014).

In short, (1) tourism products and services need to be competitive in order to contribute to the economic development of a destination, (2) quality is a requirement for competitiveness, and (3) it is paramount to know how to

manage opportunities for business growth and to have a marketing strategy to promote the destination branding. DMOs, at the local level, must define public policies that contribute to the quality and diversity of tourism (Bernabé & Hernández, 2016). They should align their activity with the economic development of the territory, valuing quality, innovation, identity, and differentiation.

Methodology

Questionnaire construction

In this survey research, the instrument used was a questionnaire, entitled "Economic Dimension of Quality in Tourism." It was developed based on the following studies: European Commission (2000, 2003, 2013, 2016); De Noni et al. (2014); Dwyer and Kim (2003); Lousã (2013); Lozano-Oyola, Blancas, González, and Caballero (2012); Muñiz and Brea (2010); World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2007, 2010); Rodríguez-Antón et al. (2016); Spink and Merrill-Sands (1999); and Valls (2004). These authors suggest a set of indicators to evaluate the economic development, quality, sustainability, and tourism activity of destinations. Its integrated analysis led to the adaptation of a set of items presented in this subscale. The preparation of the questionnaire was also supported by the authors' previous research on the analysis of competitiveness indicators of destinations applied to the Portuguese reality. These previous works emphasize the importance of the operationalization of strategic and comprehensive information, which supports and facilitates the sustained and multidimensional development of tourism in Portugal, on a regional or local basis.

The literature suggests that tourism competitiveness involves the active participation of stakeholders in the definition of policies, planning, and strategic orientation for destinations. For this reason, the importance of assessing the quality of destinations is emphasized, through indicators that reflect the concerns of DMOs at the local level. Portuguese municipalities have many of these responsibilities in the territories they manage, including in the tourism sector. Knowing their perception about indicators that assess entrepreneurship, access to financial support, economic results, levels of satisfaction with tourism activity, and the quality of tourism experience was the foundation for building this questionnaire.

The underlying procedures in the construction of a measurement scale were followed, based on the definition of the construct and content domain, followed by the creation and evaluation of the measurement items, the design and execution of studies for development and improvement of the scale, and, finally, the creation of the final version of the scale (Netemeyer, Bearden, & Sharma, 2003; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Likert's recommendations (1932) in the construction of scales (see Lima, 2000) were also followed.

Thus, based on the literature review, a set of items that expressed opinions about the economic dimension of quality in tourism were created, having been selected 25 that showed a favorable or unfavorable position (see Appendix). Then, a sample of the population was asked to evaluate each of them, in a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree). The questionnaire also included a set of questions to determine the socio-demographic profile of the respondents (see Table 1).

Table 1. Characteristics of the sample [n = 134].

Sample	*N*	%
Sex		
Male	57	42.5
Female	77	57.5
Age		
Between 18 and 24 years	1	.7
Between 25 and 34 years	24	17.9
Between 35 and 49 years	88	65.7
Between 50 and 64 years	20	14.9
Over 64 years	1	.7
Working time in the municipality		
Up to 1 year	4	3.0
From 1–5 years	22	16.4
From 5–10 years	32	23.9
More than 10 years	76	56.7
Positions in the municipality		
Technical position	109	68.6
Political position	25	15.7
Mayor	3	1.89
Alderman	9	5.66
Vice president	4	2.52
Other	9	5.66
Hiring regime of workers in the municipality		
Term employment contract	4	3.0
Permanent employment contract	85	63.4
Individual work contract	7	5.2
Consultant	6	4.5
Other	7	5.2
Missing values	25	18.7
Professional category		
Director of services and equivalent positions	1	.8
Head of division	14	10.5
Subdirector, Director General, and equivalent positions	1	.8
Senior technician	80	59.7
Other	13	9.7
Missing values	25	18.7
Education level		
Basic education (9th year)	1	.8
Secondary education (12th year)	5	3.7
Bachelor's degree	4	3.0
Graduation	67	50.0
Postgraduate studies	29	21.6
Master's degree	27	20.2
PhD	1	.8

Data collection

The questionnaire, built using Google Forms, was available online from July 1, 2016 to January 15, 2017 and was sent by e-mail to all Portuguese municipalities. The control of the responses was carried out monthly through the variable "municipality," being sent a reminder to the municipalities that had not yet responded, reinforcing the importance of their participation in the study. The questionnaire had the instruction that it should be filled in by representatives of the municipality with responsibilities in tourism. Information on the objectives of the study, completion instructions, and the voluntary and anonymous nature of the participation and the guarantee of data confidentiality were also included in the beginning of the questionnaire. All the measures were taken to ensure participants' anonymity and data confidentiality, for ethical reasons as well as for avoiding biases. All formal and ethical situations were also taken into account.

With the goal of assuring its heterogeneity and diversity (Coutinho, 2015; Lopes, 2005), a non-probabilistic sample of convenience or intentional was created by leading the choice of the organizations based on previously defined criteria. The study was undertaken upon voluntary will of participation; therefore, the researcher did not have any control over the decision of the final group of participants. The described selection process was chosen for being unanimously seen as an approach adequate to the population in study and to the established goals, specifically to the aim of validating the factors that contribute to tourism quality based on the point of view of who runs the organization, the development, and the tourism regulations in Portugal (Aires, 2011). According to Hill and Hill (2008), the average tax of response from this kind of entities is 30%, if the questionnaire was sent by post mail, electronically, or in the traditional way. Taking into account that Portugal has in total 308 municipalities, the present sample of 134 (which corresponds to 125 municipalities) represents 41% of the Portuguese municipalities. Due to the normal lack of participation from organizations in this kind of research, achieving this percentage is considered a great result.

Characterization of the sample

Of the total 308 Portuguese municipalities, 125 participated in the study (40.6%). The sample is made up of a total of 134 participants from the participating municipalities, 57 (42.5%) being males and 77 (57.5%) being females. The vast majority of respondents work in the tourism department of municipalities (81.3%), are between 35 and 49 years old (65.7%), and occupy the position of senior technician (59.7%). Most have higher education qualifications at the undergraduate level (50.0%), a master's (20.1%) or a

postgraduate degree (21.6%); they have been working at the institution for more than 10 years (56.7%) and hold a tenure position (63.4%) (cf. Table 1).

Data analysis

The analyses were completed using the statistical program Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and the structural equation modeling software AMOS for Windows operative system. Frequencies were examined in order to eliminate sentences without variation, or in which the positioning of the sample deviated clearly from a normal distribution. Outliers were analyzed according to Mahalanobis squared distance (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013), not having been found values relevant. The normality of the variables was assessed by the coefficients of skewness (Sk) and kurtosis (Ku), showing that no variable presented values violating normal distribution, $|Sk| < 2$ and $|Ku| < 3$.

Exploratory factor analysis was performed using SPSS by principal component analysis (PCA). Although all items were analyzed in the exploratory factorial analysis, those that gathered significantly more than 50% of responses were flagged as potential items to eliminate. The PCA assumptions were tested through the sample size (ratio of 5 subjects per item and at least 100 participants – Gorsuch, 1983), the normality and linearity of the variables, factoriability of R, and sample adequacy (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Since we intend to retain as independent factors as possible, we have chosen VARIMAX rotation method with Kaiser's normalization.

Confirmatory factorial analysis (CFA) was performed with AMOS (v. 22.0, SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL; Arbuckle, 2013), estimation method by maximum likelihood (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2004), using the same sample as exploratory factor analysis ($n = 134$). Goodness of fit was analyzed by the indexes of NFI (normed of fit index; good fit > .80; Schumacker & Lomax, 2016), SRMR (standardized root mean square residual; appropriate fit < .08; Brown, 2015), TLI (Tucker–Lewis index; appropriate fit > .90; Brown, 2015), comparative fit index (good fit > .90; Bentler, 1990), RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation; good fit < .05; Kline, 2011; Schumacker & Lomax, 1996), and χ^2 ($p > .05$, but irrelevant if $N > 500$; Bentler, 1990; Schumacker & Lomax, 2010). The fit of the model was improved by modification indices (MIs; Bollen, 1989), leading to correlation of the residual variability between variables with MI > 90, $p < .001$.

The improvement of model fit was evaluated by the MIs (Bollen, 1989), and we considered liberating the parameters with higher MI. We followed Arbuckle's proposal (2013), which consists in analyzing the MIs by their statistical significance ($\alpha < .05$). Another criterion was designed by Marôco (2011), which advises to be safer to modify the parameters with MI higher than 11 ($p < .001$).

Reliability was calculated by Cronbach's alpha (Nunnally, 1978). Reliability coefficients higher than .70 were considered acceptable for convergence and reliability (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2009). In general, the value of .80 was taken as a good reliability indicator. The composite reliability and the average variance extracted (AVE) for each factor were evaluated as described in Fornell and Larcker (1981).

Results

Exploratory factor analysis

The requirements necessary to a reliable interpretation of PCA were analyzed. Given that the questionnaire had 25 items and the subjects were 134, the ratio was 5.36 subjects/item, which enables, a priori, a reliable utilization of PCA (Gorsuch, 1983). Additionally, the intercorrelation matrix differed from the identity matrix, since the Bartlett's test showed a χ^2 (136) = 874.49, $p < .001$, and the sampling was adequate – the obtained value to Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure was .778, higher than the required value of .70.

According to the eigenvalue criteria over one, emerged a solution of seven factors, responsible for 64.40% of the total variance. However, this factorial solution was not interpretable. Moreover, factorial loadings (*s*) showed the following items as less representative of each factor ($s < .50$; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013) or less discriminative (factorial loadings similar in two or more factors): (2) "Tourism is a financially viable business;" (12) "There is funding to attract tourists;" (20) "There is detailed and up-to-date information on the state of our municipality's economy;" (21) "Tourism in our municipality is not affected by competition from the nearest tourism destinations;" (22) "Remuneration in the tourism sector in our municipality is adequate;" (23) "It is a good option for making inexpensive trips;" (24) "It is a low cost tourism destination;" and (25) "We take into account previous information to plan tourism in the municipality." Therefore, we have chosen to delete these items.

The scree plot showed a solution of three interpretable factors, responsible for 53.42% of the total variance, with the first factor explaining 23.36% of the total variance, the second factor 16.66%, and the third 13.40%. Factorial loadings are greater than .50 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013) in all dimensions and are arranged in descending order in Table 2, together with the commonalities, eigenvalues, and explained variances. Factor 1 aggregates items 10, 9, 8, 18, 7, 19, 13, 11, and 1, which are related with the growth of tourism regarding investment, entrepreneurship, and the identity of products, being this factor designated *development strategy*. Factor 2 focuses on items 16, 17, 15, and 14, corresponding to the evaluation of tourism revenue resulting from tourist spending in the region. This dimension was called *economic*

Table 2. PCA of the economic dimension measure: factorial loading of F1, F2, and F3, communalities, eigenvalues, and shared variance of the rotated component matrix [n = 134].

	F1 Development strategy	F2 Economic indicators of demand	F3 Financial incentives	Communality
10. Tourism has experienced a strong growth in recent years in the municipality	**.772**	.090	−.029	.605
9. The municipality is attractive for international tourism	**.723**	.107	.126	.550
8. The municipality is attractive for domestic tourism	**.688**	.114	.289	.570
18. Tourism has created employment in the municipality	**.682**	.118	.075	.485
7. The municipality attracts investment in tourism	**.678**	.201	.072	.506
19. Tourism has contributed to entrepreneurship in the municipality	**.673**	.161	.054	.481
13. There is a growing interest in the municipality from international investors	**.575**	.405	.046	.497
11. Tourists buy typical products of the municipality	**.567**	.168	−.098	.359
1. Tourism is a strategic development sector in the municipality	**.502**	−.126	−.052	.271
16. We know how much tourists spend, on average, per day in the municipality	.141	**.877**	.075	.795
17. We know how much tourists spend, on average, per day in each service (accommodation, catering, etc.) in the municipality	.092	**.775**	.131	.627
15. We have data on tourism turnover in the municipality	.147	**.770**	.198	.654
14. We know the flow rate of tourists in the municipality	.171	**.698**	.002	.517
3. There is credit facility for investment in tourism in the municipality	.044	.087	**.785**	.626
4. There is public funding for investment in tourism in the municipality	−.037	.075	**.763**	.589
5. There are specific financial incentives for medium, small and micro enterprises in the municipality	.080	−.024	**.745**	.562
6. There are financial incentives in the municipality for tourists (e.g., senior tourism, accessible tourism)	.083	.216	**.578**	.388
Eigenvalues	5.01	2.28	1.79	
Percentage of explained variance	23.36	16.66	13.40	

factors of demand. At last, Factor 3 grouped the items 3, 4, 5, and 6, related to *financial incentives* in tourism.

Confirmatory factor analysis

CFA was performed in order to test the fit of the factorial solution found by EFA (exploratory factor analisys) (see fit indices for model 1 in Table 3, no error terms correlated). For model 1, NFI, SRMR, TLI, and RMSEA indices

Table 3. Fit statistics of the three-factor model for the economic dimension measure.

Model	NFI	SRMR	TLI	CFI	χ^2/df	RMSEA	RMSEA 90% CI
1	.726	.074	.796	.826	2.17* (df = 116)	.094	.078–.110*
2	.840	.064	.947	.956	1.31* (df = 113)	.048	.022–.068*

χ^2: Chi-square; df: degrees of freedom; NFI: normed fit index; CFI: comparative fit index; PNFI: parsimony normed fit index; SRMR: standardized root mean square residual; RMSEA: root mean square error of approximation; CI: confidence interval.
*$p < .05$.

showed a poor fit. Based on MIs higher than 11 ($p < .001$), we correlated error terms in each dimension in model 2, as shown in Figure 1. This covariation shows non-random measurement errors, which may result from items' similarities (e.g., semantic redundancy), sequential positioning

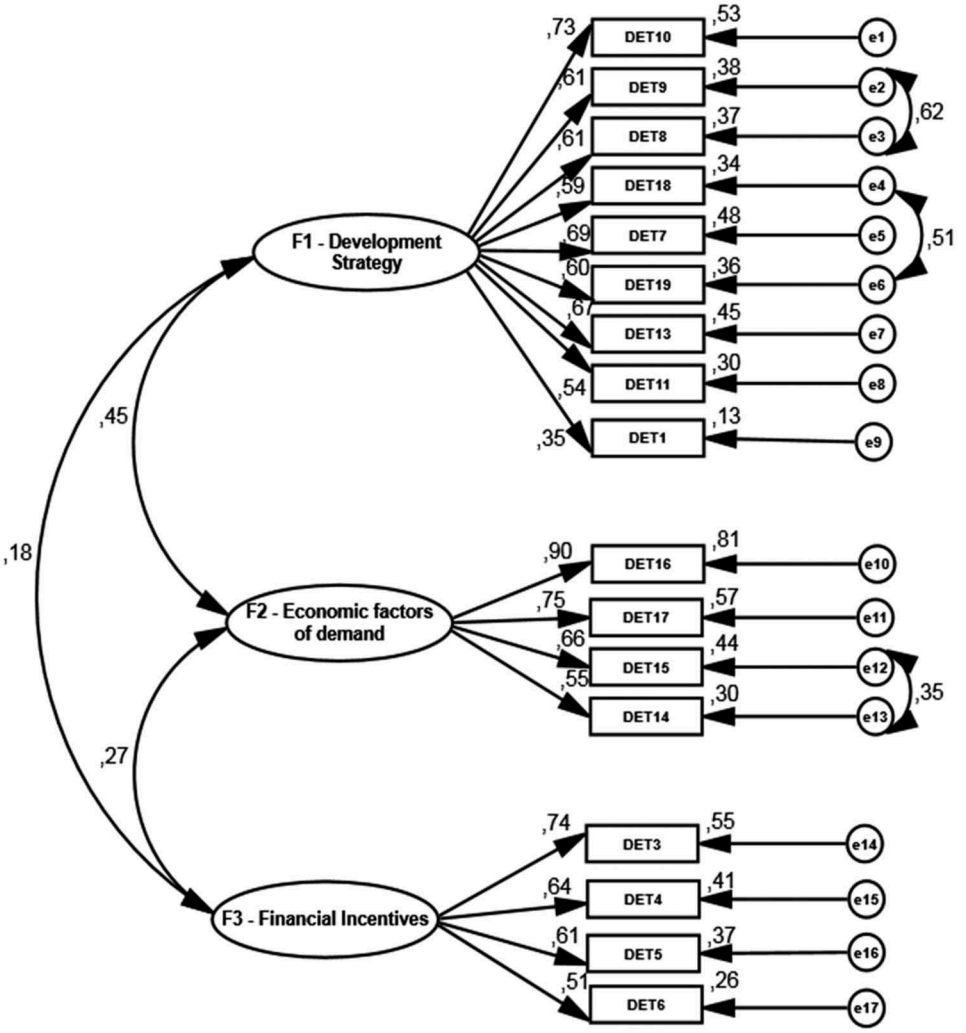

Figure 1. CFA for the economic dimension measure (Model 2): standardized regression weights and squared multiple correlations.

in the scale, as well as the specific characteristics of the respondents (Aish & Jöreskog, 1990). After analyzing the content of the items whose MIs referred to associations between the proportions of unexplained variance, it seems that the most plausible motive is some semantic and content proximity, namely, between items 8 ("The municipality is attractive for domestic tourism") and 9 ("The municipality is attractive for international tourism"), and also between 14 ("We know the flow rate of tourists") and 15 ("We have information about tourism turnover"). In relation to items 18 ("Tourism has created employment in the municipality") and 19 ("Tourism has contributed to entrepreneurship"), it is a fact that item 19 contributes inevitably to item 18 and may justify the association between errors. After establishing these error covariance, the quality of fit of model 2 improved, showing good fit in all fit statistics (see Table 3).

Standardized regression weights and squared multiple correlations of model 2 are shown in Figure 1. Standardized regression weights ranged from .35 to .90 and squared multiple correlations from 13% to 81%.

Cronbach's alphas (see Table 4) were good, since they were above .80 for Factors 1 and 2, and acceptable for Factor 3. Composite reliability was also good, since higher than .70 (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2009). Concerning the AVE, Factor 2 exceed .50, ensuring that the explained variance is greater than the residual variance (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988), and Factors 1 and 3 exceed the cutoff value of .40 (Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2000), showing an acceptable convergent validity. We are also in the presence of discriminant validity, given that the variance extracted from each factor is greater than the values of the squared correlations between each pair of factors (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) (see Table 4 for R^2).

The descriptive statistics and inter-correlations between the dimensions of the economic dimension measure are also indicated in Table 4. Means scores showed higher values for F1 – *development strategy* (M = 3.96), followed by F3 – *financial incentives* (M = 3.38), and, at last, F2 – *economic factors of demand* (M = 2.96). Intercorrelations are low between Factors 1 and 3 (R^2 = 3% of shared variance), and 2 and 3 (R^2 = 6% of shared variance), and moderate between Factors 1 and 2 (R^2 = 15% of shared variance) (Cohen, 1988).

Table 4. Composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), Cronbach's alpha (α), means (M), standard deviations (SD), and intercorrelations among factors (r^2 between brackets) for *economic dimension measure*.

	CR	AVE	α	Min	Max	M	SD	F1	F2	F3
Global scale	–	–	.839	2.35	4.47	3.59	.41	–	–	–
F1 – Development strategy	.93	.41	.848	2.33	5.00	3.96	.50	1	.38* (.15)	.17* (.03)
F2 – Economic factors of demand	.81	.53	.823	1.00	4.75	2.96	.69		1	.24* (.06)
F3 – Financial incentives	.72	.40	.701	1.75	5.00	3.38	.54			1

*$p < .001$.

Discussion

Development strategy (F1), *economic factors of demand* (F2), and *financial incentives* (F3) are the most valued factors by respondents, when assessing quality in tourism regarding the economic development of the sector, explaining 53.42% of the total variance. The scale showed a good fit in the CFA, as well as reliability and convergent and discriminant validities. These three factors identified by the data analysis will now be discussed, highlighting their main implications and relevance.

Results indicate that, for public decision makers, tourism is a strategic sector for the economic development of Portuguese municipalities. This sector has grown in recent years, has attracted foreign investment, and has experienced a growth in terms of the number of visitors. It is also relevant to point out its contribution to entrepreneurship. The items establishing Factor 1 show this trend. This is an aspect that is valued by respondents and which they consider very relevant. Similarly, it was found that endogenous products are highly sought after by tourists. In line with the literature review, tourism is envisaged as contributing to the economic development of destination regions and to the competitiveness of territories. Economic policies are also considered relevant to attract investment and entrepreneurship initiatives, which can increase the tourism potential of the destinations (Badulescu et al., 2016; Bannò et al., 2015; Blasco et al., 2014; Bohlin et al., 2016; Nilsson et al., 2010; Więckowski & Cerić, 2016).

The importance of strategic development, highlighted by Factor 1, implies that local stakeholders are heard on the necessary conditions to consolidate tourism growth, given that their contribution is crucial to the positive development of tourism and public incentives are essential to raise the territories' attractiveness. They also observe more directly the impacts of business and the fluctuation of markets at the local level, so they should have an active voice in the formulation of the policies that seem most appropriate to the destination. In this context, an economic tourism development strategy, managed locally, emerges as a determining factor in tourism competitiveness. This should be coupled with the management autonomy of public policies, because these are a vector of development and economic diversification (Bernabé & Hernández, 2016).

It is also important to note the percentage of explained variance associated with each of the factors. In this context, Factor 1 appears as the one that most contributes to the understanding of the economic dimension of tourism quality. This can be attributed to the fact that it associates the items that relate economics with politics and competitiveness with quality. The literature review confirmed that there is no competitiveness without quality. It is also consensual that the competitive capacity is directly associated to the economic development conditions of the territories. In this context, the

strategic orientation of tourism depends, essentially, on the view of local leaders on regional economic development. Thus, it can be said that Factor 1 aggregates the domains to be considered in a quality evaluation system, oriented to the monitoring of the following dynamics: (1) market; (2) entrepreneurship capacity; (3) product differentiation; and (4) articulation of business, products, and policies with the dynamics of the local economy, and this with the global economy.

The other two factors group items that refer to the necessary conditions for tourism consolidation. That is, they emphasize financial and quality management tools that support the economic activity.

Factor 2 groups the items related to the monitoring of economic indicators of the demand. The monitoring of these results allows strategic action guidance for the sector development: (1) knowing how much tourists spend on average, per product and service, supports the business dynamics, and provides decision-making evidence about the most feasible business areas; (2) knowing the tourism turnover provides important information on the development of the sector as well as on the break-even point of its growth; and (3) studying tourist flows supports supply differentiation, aligning it with the clients' expectations.

Factor 3 discriminates the type of financial incentives that stimulate business dynamics and contribute to tourists' attraction. Having financial incentives to support business activity, especially small and medium-sized companies, is something that respondents value as a tool that increases tourism development at the local level. This support can be private, structured in credit lines adjusted to the business reality, as well as public, focusing on the action of companies or other investments in the territory, complementary to the tourism activity. Financial incentives, in the opinion of respondents, can be both supply-driven and demand-driven. Public programs to support senior tourism or other disadvantaged groups, in addition to the social benefits they entail, are also a significant factor in economic development. These make it possible to mitigate seasonality, stimulate supply diversity, and contribute to stability in employment.

Furthermore, it is important to mention the items that were excluded in the data-processing phase. Being a low-cost destination and having funding for attracting tourists is not, from the perspective of the respondents, a factor of economic development. This information is coherent if we think that respondents were those responsible for tourism at the local level. Portugal in recent years has sought to attract tourists with a mid- or high-income level. So, the national tourism authority invested in infrastructure and high quality equipment, and also in the development of tourism products that reflect the territory's identity.

We acknowledge the lower response rate of municipalities considered to be mass market destinations, such as the Algarve and Madeira. However, this

information may suggest that respondents do not want to repeat past mistakes nor to turn Portugal into a mass destination.

The remuneration of the tourism sector was not considered important as a quality factor with effect on the economic development of tourism. However, this topic was addressed in an earlier study on the quality of human resources in tourism (Mira, Mónico, & Moura, 2017). Competition with nearby destinations is another item that was excluded after the exploratory factorial analysis. However, previous research allows stating that the proximity between destinations has been considered positive and framed in a supply strategy of complementarity (Mira, Moura, & Breda, 2016). It has also provided the gradual improvement of low density regions, close to major urban centers. As an example, is worth mentioning the project of the historic villages, the network of castles and walls of the Mondego, and the wine routes, located in the interior of the center and north of Portugal in low density regions, relatively close to urban centers with high attractiveness, such as Aveiro, Coimbra, Fátima, and Porto.

Finally, the nature of the correlations between factors reveals that tourism economic development strategy (Factor 1) needs to be supported on the evaluation of its results (Factor 2). On the other hand, policies directed toward the establishment of business financial support programs are often defined by the government at the central level. For this reason, it is possible to understand the weak correlations of Factor 3 with the other factors. Portuguese mayors do not have the political autonomy to decide on these matters. Although they consider financial incentives to be an essential tool for tourism growth at the local level, this decision is beyond their powers. These results suggest the need to provide regional public structures with policy-making skills that have an effect on the local economic activity (Blasco et al., 2014; Bohlin et al., 2016). It is not enough to assign them the responsibility for defining and implementing a socioeconomic development strategy if they are not given the opportunity to decide on the financial instruments that enable it to be operationalized.

Conclusion

Within the scope of this study, the economic dimension of quality relates to the economic development strategy and with indicators and financial incentives. It also stresses the issue of the participation of local public decision makers in shaping regional economic development policies. In Portugal, publicly owned DMOs play a very active role in tourism development, but the links between them at local and regional levels, as well as the functions and resources available to DMOs – which are formally recognized as such – need clarification and improvement. Local stakeholders, as aforementioned,

do not always have the required autonomy to create the necessary instruments for consolidating the development process.

Tourism competitiveness, among other aspects, depends on the supply quality, innovation, and business dynamics, given the economic viability of the sector. Understanding the importance of the various dimensions of tourism and its articulation need further R&D, as well as the interaction between the various stakeholders with an interest in the sector needs to be considered and discussed. Thus, the present study corroborates the literature review, since it verified that destination competitiveness is based on quality, diversity, identity, and cohesion of the territories (Ferdinand & Williams, 2013; Getz & Page, 2016; Sakharchuk et al., 2013; Sarasa, 2015; Vermeulen, 2015), as well as on collaborative policies and strategies that are fundamental to an accurate tourism planning, considering the economic development of the sector and the regions (Badulescu et al., 2016; Nilsson et al., 2010; Vodeb & Rudež, 2016). This fact increases competitive advantages for stakeholders and destinations (Booyens, 2016), through new and innovative solutions (Booyens & Rogerson, 2015).

Local economy and innovation policies can be the engine, or the obstacle, of contemporary regional competitiveness, because it is these that create the legal, regulatory and financial conditions, the level of the territories, which stimulate innovation, knowledge, and creativity (Booyens, 2016). The dynamics of the companies depends on the existence of financial resources in the territory, of the budget that allows them to develop and of suppliers that support their activity, essential conditions for the emergence of business opportunities. Thus, there is a territory economy that implies the ability to attract business, financing, and suppliers that support and stimulate business activity. To this fact, the need for public investment as a vector of development and economic diversification is not unknown (Bernabé & Hernández, 2016). In other words, what constitutes a comparative advantage is the ability of each region to create an environment conducive to entrepreneurial activity (Sakharchuk et al., 2013, Vermeulen, 2015).

Finally, the results of this study meet some priority lines defined in the Tourism Strategy 2027, proposed jointly by the Ministry of Economy and Tourism of Portugal, with respect to (1) valuing the territory by structuring tourism; (2) boosting the economy by attracting investment, increasing knowledge, innovation, and entrepreneurship; (3) enhance the qualification and training of human resources, attracting the most specialized by investing in improving the working conditions of the sector; (4) involve stakeholders, and society at large, in tourism development supported by networking; and (5) promote Portugal in international markets, reinforcing investment in tourism companies, bringing public administration closer to the sector and using new technologies.

Another aspect that deserves to be highlighted is the operationalization of the measurement indicators to which the proposed model points. This is a challenge that we hope to embrace in the future, as well as the sample dimension, that we expect to increase to ensure the validity of the empirical results.

This study is not intended to be a finished work and is part of a larger project for the construction and validation of a tourism quality assessment scale. Our purpose is that it can be used by those responsible for tourism in Portuguese municipalities, within the scope of organizational self-assessment processes, leading to continuous improvement. In fact, in Portugal, local public entities have a primary role in guaranteeing quality in tourism in its various dimensions. However, the organization of the country's political and administrative structure does not always facilitate this process. Very centralized public management models tend to hinder understanding the specificity of the various existing variables in local contexts. The uniqueness of the regions requires differentiated measures, adjusted to the reality of the economic, social, and cultural fabric, which do not always fit into national development support measures and programs. That is, being competitive on a global scale requires greater attention to regional and local particularities, since they are the ones that support supply differentiation. This is also where the service takes place, reflecting an intangible knowledge of customers' real needs, which emerges from the direct contact with them.

This research poses a challenge for future research. Specifically, explaining the importance of the economic dimension in tourism, associated with high-quality product and service standards. In this sense, the scale used in this work is presented in Appendix, in order to facilitate longitudinal studies or comparative analysis between countries. Another research suggestion points out to the clarification of the role of local DMOs.

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Appendix. Items of the questionnaire regarding the economic dimension of tourism quality

Instructions

This questionnaire intends to collect data on the quality of tourism destinations. Your participation is voluntary and, in case you accept to participate, we kindly ask you to answer all the questions. If you leave some blank, it compromises the inclusion of your questionnaire in the study. The questionnaire is confidential, and your answers will be anonymous. There are no right or wrong answers. It is expected sincerity in the responses, not needing to spend time reflecting to give your answer.

Thank you very much for your participation!

The following list contains statements regarding the economic dimension of quality in tourism. Please select your answer according to the scale below:	
1 = I strongly disagree	
2 = I disagree	
3 = I do not agree or disagree	
4 = I agree	
5 = I totally agree	
1.1 *According to my municipality, I consider that*	
E.1 Tourism is a strategic development sector	**1 2 3 4 5**
E.2 Tourism is a financially viable business	**1 2 3 4 5**
E.3 There is credit facility for investment in tourism	**1 2 3 4 5**
E.4 There is public funding for investment in tourism	**1 2 3 4 5**
E.5 There are specific financial incentives for medium, small, and micro-enterprises	**1 2 3 4 5**
E.6 There are financial incentives for tourists (e.g., senior tourism, accessible tourism)	**1 2 3 4 5**
E.7 The municipality attracts investment in tourism	**1 2 3 4 5**
E.8 The municipality is attractive for domestic tourism	**1 2 3 4 5**
E.9 The municipality is attractive for international tourism	**1 2 3 4 5**
E.10 Tourism has experienced a strong growth in recent years	**1 2 3 4 5**
E.11 Tourists buy typical products of the municipality	**1 2 3 4 5**
E.12 There is funding to attract tourists	**1 2 3 4 5**
E.13 There is a growing interest from international investors	**1 2 3 4 5**
E.14 We know the flow rate of tourists	**1 2 3 4 5**
E.15 We have data on tourism turnover	**1 2 3 4 5**
E.16 We know how much tourists spend, on average, per day	**1 2 3 4 5**
E.17 We know how much tourists spend, on average, per day in each service (accommodation, catering, etc.)	**1 2 3 4 5**
E.18 Tourism has created employment in the municipality	**1 2 3 4 5**
E.19 Tourism has contributed to entrepreneurship	**1 2 3 4 5**
E.20 There is detailed and up-to-date information on the state of our municipality's economy	**1 2 3 4 5**
E.21 Tourism in our municipality is not affected by competition from the nearest tourism destinations	**1 2 3 4 5**
E.22 The remuneration in the tourism sector in our municipality is adequate	**1 2 3 4 5**
E.23 It is a good option for making unexpensive trips	**1 2 3 4 5**
E.24 It is a low cost tourism destination	**1 2 3 4 5**
E.25 We take into account previous information to plan tourism in the municipality	**1 2 3 4 5**