

Creación y desarrollo de productos turísticos: innovación y enfoque experiencial

Edición a cargo de
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**ASOCIACIÓN ESPAÑOLA
DE EXPERTOS CIENTÍFICOS
EN TURISMO**



AECIT
2012

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**Creación y desarrollo de productos turísticos:
innovación y enfoque experiencial,
Actas del XVII Congreso de la AECIT.**

O Carballiño, Ourense. 21-23 de noviembre de 2012.

Esta publicación ha estado coordinada
desde la Secretaría Técnica del Congreso.

Servicio de Fomento do Emprego,
Igualdade e Asuntos Sociais.
Deputación Ourense.

Esta publicación está financiada por
la Diputación Provincial de Ourense.

Edita: AECIT Asociación española de expertos científicos en turismo

Diseño, maquetación y fotografía: Nacher Publicidad

ISBN: 978-84-616-1805-7

XVII CONGRESO INTERNACIONAL DE LA ASOCIACIÓN ESPAÑOLA DE EXPERTOS CIENTÍFICOS EN TURISMO.

O Carballiño 21 a 23 de Noviembre de 2012.

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Designing sensory tourist experiences in the countryside.

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1. INTRODUCTION

A new scenario has been emerged from the beginning of the 21st century, where the leisure and tourism industries are focusing on enhancing and managing experiences for their consumers (Morgan, Lugosi & Ritchie, 2010; Pine & Gilmore, 1998). The relevance of the experiential paradigm in conceptualizing tourism has directed special attention of destinations to the five human senses – sight, smell, taste, hearing and touch – in theming, designing and managing tourist experiences (Ellis & Rossman, 2008; Mossberg, 2007; Pan & Ryan, 2009; Schmitt, 1999).

In the countryside, tourist experiences encompass a diversified collection of undeveloped resources offering multiple sensory stimuli. In this context, rural environment, differing in some ways from the features of the urban environment, can play an important role in the tourist's experience intensity (Farrell, 2000; Sharpley & Jepson, 2010). Natural resources such as water, vegetation, and wildlife are indeed attractive features of pristine areas, and are ideal locations for nature activities such as bird-watching, hiking, or fishing (Kastenholz, 2003; Roberts & Hall, 2001). These endogenous resources are particularly rich in protected areas, such as natural parks.

This study aims to apply the experiential paradigm knowledge to tourism, specifically discussing the role of human senses in designing and enhancing tourist experiences in rural destinations. In accordance with the stated objective, this study proposes the following research question: *Is it possible to find meaningful holistic themes from sensory impressions of tourist experiences in the countryside?*

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The Experiential Paradigm in Tourism

Tourism constitutes one of the pioneer examples of the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Quan & Wang, 2004) as a consumption experience (Woodside *et al.*, 2000) of a composite product, comprising lodging, food, transportation, souvenirs and leisure activities (Mossberg, 2007; Otto & Ritchie, 1996). Therefore, knowing how destinations and tourism organizations can create conditions to enhance tourists' global experience is crucial in order to develop effective management and marketing strategies (Morgan, Elbe, & de Esteban Curiel, 2009; Mossberg, 2007; Ritchie & Hudson, 2009; Volo, 2009; Tung & Ritchie, 2011). The experiential paradigm approach considers that although experiences are individual and internal, comprised by a constant flow of conscious thoughts and feelings (Carlson, 1997), they can be designed (Stamboulis & Skayannis, 2003) and co-created by the visitor and the supplier (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004), making the experience more valuable to the consumer and, consequently, benefiting the provider (Scott, Laws & Boksberger, 2009). Additionally, the existence of a theme allows participants to organize their impressions, increasing the memory of events. In contrast, the lack of a theme can make it difficult to recall the experience (Ellis & Rossman, 2008; Mossberg, 2007; Oh, Fiore & Jeoung, 2007).

2.2. Sensing Tourist Experiences in the Countryside

A multidisciplinary view of the literature shows that the human senses provide information on the surrounding world and mediate everyday experiences, allowing individuals to make sense of the world (Hultén, Broweus & Dijk, 2009; Krishna, 2012; Rodaway, 1994). The neuroscientist Damásio (1995, 2010) claims that the factual knowledge needed for reasoning and decision-making comes to mind in the form of images. These images come in all sensorial varieties, not just visual, but sounds, textures, smells, tastes, pains and pleasures, and refer to any object or action that is being processed in the brain. In fact, researchers in human geography, anthropology and history have been claiming perception as corporeal (body), involving a set of interactions within an environment (place) in a specific period (time), and being a learned behaviour (cultural) (Classen, 1997; Howes, 2005; Rodaway, 1994; Smith, 2007; Tuan, 1977). Regarding to the relationship between body, people and places, Porteus (1986) devises the term 'sensescapes', arguing that, similar to the notion of landscape, with its primarily visual connotations, other senses can be spatially ordered or place related, such as smellscape, soundscape, tastescape, or geography of touch (Macnaghten & Urry, 1998; Urry, 2002). Thus, current research in tourism studies claims a holistic approach to the five senses with a view to understanding their role in global tourist experiences, since previous studies privileged the sense of vision (Agapito, Valle & Mendes, 2012; Dann & Jacobsen, 2003; Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2003; Govers, Go & Kumar, 2007; Kastenholz, Carneiro, Marques & Lima, 2011; Pan & Ryan, 2009).

Apart from the relevance of sensory information for the destination communication, using the potential of the new technologies (Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2003), other managerial contributions have been overlooked, such as the development of sensory itineraries for travel journalists groups or for tourists with specific profiles. The development of sensory itineraries may encourage small regions with similar sensescapes to find niches and to promote together (Pan & Ryan, 2009).

With regard to empirical research, there has been a preference for the study of the senses in urban rather than in rural environments (Dann &

Jacobsen, 2003), despite the richness of their natural resources, which are ideal for a variety of outdoor activities (Kastenholz, 2003; Markwell, 2001; Roberts & Hall, 2004). Against this background, measuring the sensory perception of tourist experiences in rural areas may contribute to the development of a sensory instrument helping to support management decisions regarding to endogenous resources, by carefully designing, managing and communicating tourist experiences. While staging memorable experiences, leading to tourist's loyalty (Tung & Ritchie, 2011), a cautious use of the potential of sensory stimuli offered by local natural resources and activities would help to promote a sustainable development of rural areas (Kastenholz *et al.*, 2011).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Setting

The study was developed in the three most representative municipalities of the Southwest Alentejo and Vicentina Coast Natural Park (ASVCNP) – Vila do Bispo, Aljezur and Odemira. The ASVCNP is a natural protected area situated in Southwest Portugal, extending over approximately 60567 ha of land area and 28858 ha of sea area, comprising the Vila do Bispo, Aljezur, Odemira and Sines municipalities' coastal areas. Internationally, the existing natural values justified the integration of the area in the Natura 2000 protected network. The flora is characterized by a large diversity of natural resources with over 700 species of plants, of which many are native to Portugal. The setting is an important stopover for migrating birds, and it also has dozens of species of mammals, and aquatic fauna. Geologically, the park comprises a variety of landscapes: cliffs, beaches, dunes, temporary lagoons, marshes, rocks, and estuaries (Hidroprojecto, 2008). In addition to the coastal scenario, all these municipalities are characterized by a significant inland area.

3.2. Instruments and Data

A survey questionnaire was applied to tourists who had spent at least one night in the area under study, from 15 July to 15 December, 2011. The group of questions used in this specific study included five open-ended questions based on direct elicitation (Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2010) in order to capture the five senses impressions regarding the tourists' overall experience in the rural area under study. Sociodemographic information was also required.

Table 1- Respondent´s sociodemographic profile

Gender	Age	Country of origin	Education	Marital Status	Occupation
Male: 43.1%	<21: 2.8%	Portugal: 58%	Secondary School 9.4%	Single: 31.5%	Employed: 75.7%
Female: 56.9%	21-30: 17.7%	Spain: 11.6%	University degree: 85.6%	Married/living as a couple: 65.2%	Self-employed: 14.9%
	31-40: 43.1%	U.K: 8.8%			
	41-50: 22.7%	Netherlands: 5.5%	Other: 5%	Divorced: 3.3%	Student: 4.4%
	51-60: 9.4%	Germany: 4.4%			Retired: 3.9%
	>60: 4.4%		Other: 11.6%		
					Unemployed: 0.6%

A sample of 195 tourists was determined using the most conservative estimate for a single proportion (0.5), a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 7%. The questionnaire was applied evenly at eleven rural lodgings, based on a cluster sampling method. For this, 35 rural lodging were considered to meet the conditions for participating in the study, given that they were located in the destination under study – the municipalities of Odemira, Aljezur and Vila do Bispo – and satisfied minimum quality requirements. Of these, 11 accommodations (30%) were randomly chosen as venues to administer the questionnaire. Tourists older than 17 years old were invited to participate in the study. Moreover, only one person from each family completed the questionnaire in order to avoid the risk of quasi doubling a specific answer. The owners and/or managers of the accommodations were informed about the aims of the survey and received instructions on its application. From the 204 collected surveys, a total of 181 valid questionnaires were obtained (92.8% of the selected sample) (Table 1).

3.3. Data Analysis Methods

Preliminary content analysis of the open-ended questions was conducted using the software IBM – SPSS Text Analytics for Surveys (STAS) in order to find sensory categories for each of the five human senses. Descriptive statistics and the Chi-square test for uniform distribution were also used to analyse and compare data.

Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) was employed in the assessment of sensory themes of tourist experiences in the rural area under study. MCA is an exploratory and descriptive technique that is appropriate when the intention is to examine the associations between three or more categorical variables (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). In this study, MCA is applied to the variables resulting from content analysis

related to each sense category (columns) referred by the tourists (rows). In this procedure, the lack of reference to a sensory category was recoded as 1 (no) and the spontaneous reference to each sensory category was recoded as 2 (yes).

4. STUDY FINDINGS

The respondents spontaneously referred to the sensory expressions related to their overall experience through the open-ended questions (Table 2).

In table 2, sensory categories for each of the five human senses were created if the related words appeared in at least 10% of the responses (n=181) (Govers *et al.*, 2007), as presented in the list of most frequently used impressions produced by STAS.

Table 2 - Sensory categories

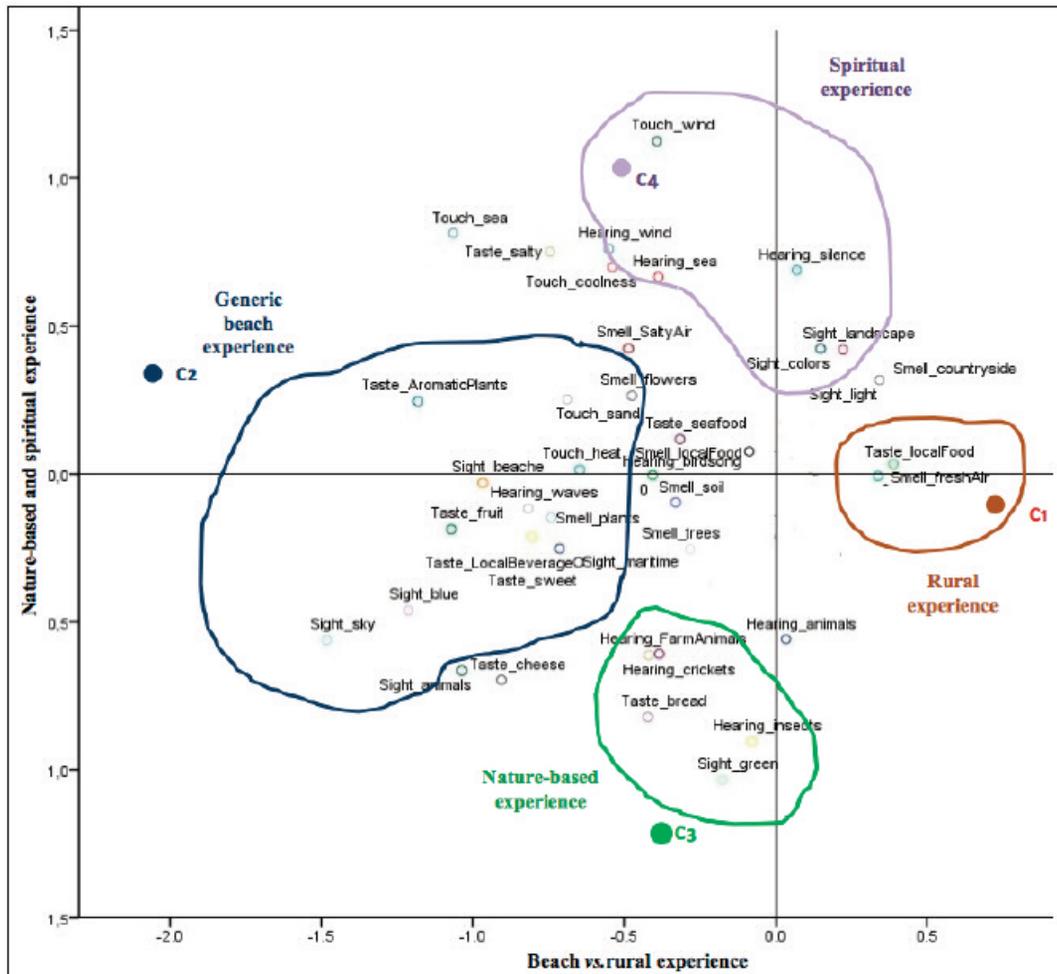
Sight	% of respondents	Hearing	% of respondents	Taste	% of respondents
Landscape	47,0%	Birdsong	59,1%	Local food	59,1%
Light	26,0%	Wind	26,5%	Seafood	34,3%
Diversity of colors	21,0%	Sea	24,9%	Sweet	18,2%
Maritime scenario	14,9%	Silence	23,8%	Fruit	17,1%
Green	14,4%	Crickets	20,4%	Aromatic plants	16,6%
Beaches	13,3%	Farm animals	19,3%	Cheese	14,9%
Blue	13,3%	Waves	16,0%	Bread	13,3%
Sky	11,0%	Animals	15,5%	Salty	
Animals	9,9%	Insects	10,5%	Local beverage	12,2%
					11,0%
Smell		Touch			
Sea salty air	37,6%	Heat	34,3%		
Plants	22,1%	Coolness	25,4%		
Trees	18,8%	Sand	23,2%		
Flowers	14,4%	Sea	18,8%		
fresh air	13,3%	Wind	9,9%		
local food	10,5%				
Soil	9,9%				
Countryside	9,9%				

MCA was applied to the 40 sensory impressions resulting from the content analysis, revealing a two dimensional solution. The two dimensions account for 99.38% of the variance, suggesting that a third dimension would not add more relevant information. Additionally, the Cronbach's alpha exceeds the recommended threshold of 0.5, showing good composite reliability (dimension 1: 0.741; dimension 2: 0.587).

The discrimination measures were also analysed. The first dimension comprises the sensory impressions related to a 'beach experience *versus* a countryside experience'. The second dimension encloses the sensory categories related to a 'nature and spiritual experience'. The relationships between the sensory impressions are revealed in Figure 1. In this plot, along dimension 1, two groups of dimension categories are far apart, meaning that these variables are well discriminated in this dimension. Focusing on dimension 2, also two groups of variables are displayed far apart. To interpret the relations among the points in the map, the angles from the origin with the category points should be analysed. As observed, four acute angles are formed, suggesting four sensory themes.

Using the two dimensions produced by MCA as input variables, a k-mean cluster analysis was performed in order to validate the themes suggest by MCA. The final cluster centers (C1 to C4) are represented in Figure 1. Cluster 1 (C1) comprises 73 tourists, cluster 2 (C2) encloses 17, cluster 3 (C3) includes 52, and cluster 4 (C4) groups 39 individuals. As observed, a solution of four clusters coincides with the four themes indicated by MCA.

Figure 1 – Joint category quantification plot



A complementing analysis was performed through cross-tabulation tables, using the Chi-Square for independence test. The intersections between each sensory category and the four clusters were analysed. The results indicate that most of the sensory categories present higher frequencies in the corresponding theme performed by MCA. Additionally, the results of the Chi-square test show a significant relationship between most of the variables. The sensory impressions with a non-significant relationship with the corresponding cluster are those which, in the discrimination measures present a low discrimination or both discriminate highly the dimension 1 and dimension 2. For these reasons, the following variables are not considered in the final sensory themes: 'sight_light', 'hearing_birsong', 'hearing_animals', 'smell_local_food', 'smell_soil', 'smell_countryside', 'smell_trees', 'smell_salty_air', 'taste_seafood', 'taste_salty', 'taste_cheese', and 'touch_coolness'.

Table 3 – Sensory themes

	Rural experience	Generic experience	beach	Nature-based experience	Spiritual experience
	(Cluster 1)	(Cluster 2)		(Cluster 3)	(Cluster 4)
Sight		Beache		Green	Landscape
		Blue			Diversity of colors
		Sky			
		Maritime scenario			
		Animals			
Hearing		Waves		Farm Animals	Silence
				Crickets	Sea
				Insects	Wind
Smell	Fresh air	Flowers			
		Plants			
Taste	Local food	Aromatic plants		Bread	
		Fruit			
		Local Beverage			
		Sweet			
Touch		Sea			Wind
		Sand			
		Heat			

As shown in **table 3** and **figure 1**, it is possible to theme tourist experiences in the countryside based on sensory information, confirming that the tourist's perception of their global experience is multisensory, and that there is no evidence of a dominant sense. These results allow a positive answer to the research question previously presented.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The general goal of this paper was to discuss the role of the five human senses in designing tourist experiences in the countryside. The relevance of the experiential paradigm in conceptualizing tourism has directed special attention to smellscape, tastescapes, soundscapes and haptiscapes, in addition to landscapes, in managing and theming tourist experiences (Ellis & Rossman, 2008; Mossberg, 2007; Schmitt, 1999). The lack of studies with a holistic approach to the role of the five senses in tourist experiences, particularly in rural areas, reveals the need of further studies in order to understand how the senses interact (Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2004; Pan & Ryan, 2009; Rodaway, 1994) aiming to enhance the tourist's sensory experiences, and to bolster local resources and activities (Kastenholz *et al.*, 2011).

This empirical research shows that all the five senses interact during tourist experiences. Furthermore, the results suggest that sensory information is suitable for theming tourist experiences in the countryside, which is line with previous studies (Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2003, 2010; Pan & Ryan, 2009). Thus, apart from the emotional and symbolic dimensions, the attempts to design and communicate memorable tourist experiences in rural areas may focus on sensory elements related to nature (e.g. endemic fauna and flora, natural landscape) and rural characteristics of place identity (e.g. local products and gastronomy, handicraft, farm activities, local architecture), enabling a pleasurable aesthetic experience (Kastenholz *et al.*, 2011).

Besides the relevance of sensory information for the destination communication, using the potential of the new technologies (Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2003), other managerial contributions can be highlighted. According to Pan & Ryan (2009), sensory themes can be used to develop sensory itineraries that may encourage small regions with similar sensescape to find niches and to promote together. These sensory itineraries can be directed to specific groups with different motives and needs, such as journalists, investors, visually impaired visitors (Dann & Dann, 2011; Richards, Pritchard & Morgan, 2010; Small, Darcy & Packer, 2012), and other visitors. Consequently, sensory themes can be used to identify niche markets in specific cases and contribute in finding activities that bolster natural and cultural heritage, whilst promoting the sustainable development of rural areas, valorizing the endogenous resources (Kastenholz, 2003; Murphy & Price, 2005; Roberts & Hall, 2004).

Future research may find interesting to address the existence of different sensory themes related to different seasons of the year, to specific outdoor and nature-based activities, and to tourist motives should be addressed in, in a view to mitigate the seasonality related to tourism in coastal areas, such as the South of Portugal. The authors suggest a deeper conceptualization of the role of the five human senses in tourist experiences, as well as further empirical studies integrating a sensory holistic approach in different rural areas, allowing comparing results.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper is partially financed by FCT – Foundation for Science and Technology.

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