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Strategic alliances for the development of sport tourism products: The case of the Portuguese nautical stations



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**Strategic alliances for the development of sport tourism
products: The case of the Portuguese nautical stations**

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Vahid Mokhtarnezhad Aghdash

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Abstract

Nautical tourism is a tourist product with great development in the European space and a lot of potential to promote and develop tourist destinations. The aim of this study was to analyse the strategic alliances for the development of the offer of nautical tourism products, namely to analyse the decision-making, the value proposal, communication strategy and the selling process adopted by nautical stations (NS) in Portugal. This study is classified as applied descriptive research through the use of qualitative methods. Between September and December 2021, 17 Portuguese nautical stations application forms were collected and all 17 certified NS application forms were imported to NVivo for content analysis as a new standalone project created for this purpose named Nautical Project. Results show that decision-making processes are taken by the majority of partners in a Nautical Station Council, but the dynamics vary between NS. In terms of value proposition, the NS' main value for the NS stakeholders were the aggregation, diversity, and distinctiveness of the region's tourism offer, as well as innovation, reduction of seasonality, and increased spending per visitor. The communication strategies focus was organizing press trips, creating a NS tab in the municipality platform, and developing websites. In the majority of the NS the selling process was done through direct reservations with the different companies of the destination. Future studies could further examine the role of strategic alliances in enhancing destination competitiveness, explore how digital marketing strategies can support the creation of innovative products and services in NS and investigate about the evaluation of the costs and benefits of a communication and selling strategy in the context of the strategic alliances. An analysis of the models of decision-making process in the NS, as case studies, could improve the knowledge related with strategic process in sport tourism. It is worth mentioning that future research must go into the field to observe strategic alliances in action.

Keywords: Communication Strategies, Decision-making, Nautical Stations, Sport Tourism Strategic Alliances, Value Proposal.

RESUMO

A indústria do turismo não só gera receitas para os países, como também serve de motor de crescimento e desenvolvimento económico (Balaguer & Cantavella, 2016). A Organização Mundial de Turismo (OMT) destacou o potencial do turismo para criar empregos, apoiar o empreendedorismo e desenvolver infra-estruturas, particularmente nos países em desenvolvimento (OMT, 2020). O turismo desportivo é um sector em rápida expansão e significativo da indústria do turismo, com a OMT a reconhecer o fornecimento de experiências relacionadas com o desporto como uma componente chave de muitos destinos turísticos, e um importante contributo para o desenvolvimento social e económico (OMT, 2019). Cidades e regiões competem por turistas desportivos e em todo o mundo entram em competição por estes turistas, pelo seu dinheiro, e pelo potencial de crescimento inerente a este tipo de mercado (OMT, 2019; Weed, 2019). Segundo a Comissão Europeia (2017), "Turismo náutico - aproveitar o seu potencial para a Economia Azul", o turismo náutico é um produto turístico com grande potencial para promover e desenvolver destinos turísticos. Numa primeira parte, este estudo explora os conceitos associados à estratégia e aliança estratégica e como estas alianças poderiam ser relevantes para a área do turismo desportivo, particularmente para o turismo náutico. As alianças estratégicas devem ter duas ou mais organizações independentes que se juntem para perseguir benefícios mútuos, que serão maiores do que os dos esforços individuais (Park & Chen, 2005). A estratégia é um programa único, abrangente e integrado que relaciona os méritos ou pontos fortes da organização com os factores e mudanças do ambiente, e é de alguma forma concebido para assegurar que atinge os objectivos centrais da organização (Hill, 2014). Nesta perspetiva, a estratégia é a alocação ótima de recursos escassos para alcançar os objetivos económicos. A estratégia é definida como um conjunto de objetivos e políticas fundamentais e, para alcançar estes objetivos, é crucial definir o tipo de empresas e que tipo de organização poderia ser importante para alcançar a sua missão e visão (Amaral, 2019). A estratégia também determina os campos de atividade num ambiente complexo e dinâmico e é a ferramenta dada ao elemento humano, num sistema organizacional, que permite impulsionar as pessoas; uma vez que haverá maior coerência entre os objetivos e as atividades atuais da organização, a taxa de crescimento e desenvolvimento será maior e melhor organizada (Cabrita, 2020). O objetivo deste estudo foi analisar as alianças estratégicas para o desenvolvimento da oferta de produtos de turismo náutico, nomeadamente para analisar a tomada de decisões, a proposta de valor, a estratégia de comunicação e o processo de venda adotado pelas estações náuticas (EN) em Portugal. Este estudo é classificado como uma investigação descritiva aplicada através da

utilização de métodos qualitativos e enquadra-se nas características de um estudo de caso – Estações Náuticas (EN) de Portugal. Este é um projeto que visa desenvolver uma estratégia colectiva para promover o desenvolvimento do sector náutico em Portugal. O processo de recolha e análise de dados centrou-se nos formulários oficiais de candidatura utilizados para certificar as estações náuticas pela Fórum Oceano (FO), nomeadamente nas várias dimensões que integram os formulários: processo de tomada de decisão, proposta de valor, estratégia de comunicação, e processo de venda. Os dados foram analisados utilizando um método de análise de conteúdo dedutivo, numa primeira fase, onde os dados foram codificados por item representando cada dimensão, seguido de um método de análise de conteúdo indutivo para codificar subcategorias em cada dimensão. Foram utilizados procedimentos de fiabilidade inter-codificadores para assegurar a exatidão da análise. Este estudo analisou 17 formulários de candidatura de estações náuticas portuguesas entre setembro e dezembro de 2021. Todas as 17 transcrições foram importadas para a NVivo para análise como um novo projeto autónomo criado para o efeito, denominado Projeto Náutico. Os resultados mostram que os processos de tomada de decisão são tomados pela maioria dos parceiros no Conselho da Estação Náutica, mas a dinâmica varia entre as EN. Em termos de proposta de valor, o principal valor acrescentado das EN foi a agregação, diversidade e distintividade da oferta turística da região, bem como a inovação, redução da sazonalidade e aumento das despesas por visitante. As estratégias de comunicação centraram-se na organização de viagens de imprensa, na criação de um separador EN na plataforma municipal, e no desenvolvimento de *websites*. Na maioria dos EN, o processo de venda foi feito através de reservas diretas com as diferentes empresas do destino. Os resultados desta investigação contribuem para uma melhor compreensão das alianças estratégicas na indústria do turismo náutico em Portugal e fornecem informações sobre como as EN comunicam as suas ofertas e incrementam a sua competitividade no mercado. As conclusões podem também ser úteis para os decisores políticos, associações industriais e outros interessados em promover o desenvolvimento do sector do turismo náutico em Portugal. Este estudo contribui para uma melhor compreensão do turismo náutico e das estações náuticas portuguesas, um projeto estratégico de investimento no desporto e no turismo. Os limites deste trabalho foram: i) a análise de um número limitado de dimensões dos formulários de candidatura oficiais; ii) a não análise dos formulários de candidatura de todas as EN devido ao facto de algumas EN não terem permitido que FO partilhasse os mesmos com a equipa de investigação; iii) não inclusão da observação direta das práticas implementadas pelas EN.

Estudos futuros podem analisar os diferentes modelos de tomada de decisão nas EN, como estudos de caso, de forma a melhorar o conhecimento relacionado com o processo estratégico no turismo desportivo, a permitir conhecer os constrangimentos e os facilitadores no turismo náutico e a desenvolver conhecimento de suporte a políticas e estratégias de turismo desportivo para o futuro. Importa também examinar o papel das alianças estratégicas no aumento da competitividade do destino, explorar como as estratégias de marketing digital podem apoiar a criação de produtos e serviços inovadores nas EN e investigar sobre a avaliação dos custos e benefícios de uma estratégia de comunicação e venda no contexto das alianças estratégicas. Sugere-se ainda que a investigação futura seja desenvolvida através de metodologias de campo para observar as alianças estratégicas em ação.

Palavras-chave: Alianças estratégicas, Estações Náuticas, Estratégia de Comunicação, Proposta de Valor, Tomada de Decisão, Turismo Desportivo.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism plays a crucial role in the global economy. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) reported that in 2019, international tourist arrivals reached 1.5 billion, representing a 4% increase from the previous year (WTO, 2020). Not only does the tourism industry generate revenue for countries, but it also serves as an engine for growth and economic development (Balaguer & Cantavella, 2016). The WTO has highlighted the potential of tourism to create jobs, support entrepreneurship, and develop infrastructure, particularly in developing countries (WTO, 2020). Simultaneously, tourism offers the opportunity for economies to grow and for people to earn income, while tourism spending has been associated with improvements in consumer well-being (OECD, 2020).

According to Sánchez and Martínez (2011: 1) "the globalization process offers many opportunities and challenges for companies, acknowledging the advantages of a single market, and a network of production and distribution without borders as barriers to the transition of final products, services and all factors of production." Therefore, the last decade of the 20th century has witnessed the development of strategic alliances as the most significant change in the business context (Peroff, 2017). Alliances can increase the use of resources, learning, and development of corporate activities (Mamedio, 2019). According to the author, the communication network created by the alliance can moderate the unpredictability of the environment, increase predictability and flexibility, and provide adaptation to environmental changes.

Given the competitive organizational environment, organizations are unable to achieve their desired strategic goals by relying solely on their internal resources (Li & Zhao, 2019). This compels them to seek cooperation with other companies and organizations. One type of cooperation that has become an important management tool to improve the competitiveness of organizations is strategic alliances (Hitt et al., 2018). Strategic alliances help organizations fill the gap between their existing resources and the requirements needed for future success (Kale & Singh, 2019). The main goal attending to the formation of strategic alliances is to minimize risk while maximizing the presence on the market (Harbison, 1998), and increase the competitiveness of the organization by providing access to external sources by synergistic and promoting learning and rapid change. As Black (2000) highlighted, the loss of identity and independence of corporations, as the result of

strategic alliances, has become obsolete idea. Therefore, creation a strategic alliance between organizations requires considering the process of change management (Black, 2000). Strategic alliances value creating potential makes them an important source of competitive advantage (Das & Teng, 1998, cited in Lee, Park, & Kim, 2018).

Recent research has suggested that strategic alliances can be effective drivers of growth and profitability in both internal and external markets (Zhang & Duysters, 2021, Luo & Tung, 2020, cited in Khisa & Kariuki, 2022). The globalization process has increasingly engaged firms to conclude cooperation agreements outside of their traditional areas, which is due to the search for new geographic environments, service development, and learning skills (Kim Nam - Su, 2003). Also, strategic alliances are beneficial in the production and in the service sectors, such as tourism and sport tourism (Del Barrio, 2019).

Amatulli (2021) suggests that the idea of a vacation for comfort and rest has shifted to experiences related to higher health and quality of life, which includes active travel and sports trips. Sport is one of the most productive industries in the world, and many people around the world are engaged in it (Jakovlev, 2017). According to a study by Tang et al. (2021), sports are an important aspect of tourism, with many tourists seeking out destinations and experiences that allow them to engage in physical activity. Sport tourism is an industry developed from the combination of the tourism and the sport industries (Dussauge et al., 2004). The major organizations involved in sport and tourism, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the WTO, organized international conferences to analyse issues related to sport tourism (WTO and the Catalan Tourist Board, 2021). One of the most important ways in which sport tourism industry can improve global competitiveness is to create strategic alliances with other members of the industry (Faulkner, 2000).

The study of strategic alliances should analyse the decision-making as an integral part of the strategic alliance process considering that the success of a strategic alliance depends on the quality of the decision-making process (Xue & Yip, 2018). According to the authors, the decision-making process should be based on an analysis of the internal and external environment of the parts. They also suggest that the decision-making process should involve key stakeholders such as the government, port authorities, and shipping lines. Value proposal refers to the creation of value

for all parties involved in the strategic alliance should also be an important issue to analyse (Chung & Chang, 2019). A successful valor proposal should align with the objectives of all parties involved. According to Chung and Chang (2019), the valor proposal should be based on a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of each organization. They also emphasize the importance of continuous evaluation and improvement of the valor proposal. Communication Strategy and Selling process involves the marketing and communication of the strategic alliance to the stakeholders and, according to Akram et al. (2019), effective selling process should consider the unique needs and preferences of each stakeholder group.

According to the European Commission (2014: 1), "seafaring and coastal tourism including sea and coastal tourism, fishing trips, shipping, yacht navigation, sailing and terrestrial activities". This large part of tourism, which employs more than 3.2 million people, produces more than one-third of the world's economy, a total of 183 billion euros. Around 51 % of the EU capacity is concentrated in coastal areas (European Commission, 2019). Marine tourism has put itself as one of the most developed sectors in the global tourism market (Vázquez, 2020).

Regarding to Ferreira et al. (2022), Portugal has been actively promoting nautical tourism through the creation of a network of nautical stations. These stations serve as strategic locations for the development and promotion of nautical activities, such as sailing, windsurfing, and kayaking. The network of NS in Portugal is composed of 29 stations, each with its own set of facilities and services aimed at meeting the needs of nautical tourists. The development of these stations has been a collaborative effort between public and private entities, with the goal of enhancing the competitiveness of Portugal's nautical tourism sector. The main objective of this research is to analyze the strategic alliances aimed to enhance the offering of nautical tourism products in Portugal. The study will investigate the decision-making processes within the NS, the value proposition, the communication strategies, and the selling processes.

This thesis has been structured in five chapters. The first chapter introduces the theme of this study and highlights the importance of strategic alliances in achieving competitive advantage in the sport tourism industry. The second chapter presents the literature review, which covers two parts: the first identifies the concepts related to strategic alliances and sport tourism strategic alliances; the second analyses the nautical tourism and nautical stations. Chapter tree describes the

methodology, the selected approach to achieve the objectives of the research, including the method for data collection and analysis. The results are presented in the chapter four, which includes the findings of the strategy alliances in the dimensions analysed: decision-making process, value proposition, communication strategy and selling processes. The results are then discussed in chapter five. Finally, we provide the conclusions and the main recommendations for research.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Chapter 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter the concepts associated with strategy and strategic alliance will be explore. Moreover, we will analyse how this alliance could be relevant to the sport tourism area, namely to nautical tourism.

Strategic alliances are contractual arrangements between two or more independent companies that carry out a project or operate in a specific business area by coordinating skills and resources jointly rather than either operating on their own or merging their operations (Dussauge, 2004). From this definition, a strategic alliance must have two or more independent organizations join together to pursue mutual benefits, which will be greater than those from individual efforts. The globalization process has increasingly engaged firms to conclude cooperation agreements outside of their traditional areas, which is due to the search for new geographic environments, service development, and learning skills (Kim Nam-Su, 2003).

Sport Tourism is the dynamic interaction between sports practice, for leisure and competition, and the system of tourism, which integrates “practices”, “people” and “place” (Pereira & Carvalho, 2004: 4). According to WTO (2020) this is one of the fastest growing sectors within the global tourism industry. Regarding to recent studies, nautical tourism is a rapidly growing area of the global sport tourism industry, with particularly strong growth and economic results in the European and Pacific markets (Kozak & Baloglu, 2015; Leposa, 2020). However, according to some authors (e.g. Lukovic, 2013: 152), “it has not yet achieved its full potential and this is the time for developing new markets, new products, new ideas and new concepts based on the use of ICT (information and communications technology), particularly online platforms”.

2.1 Strategic Alliances

2.1.1 Concepts

The concept of strategy was first applied to the purpose of guiding, accommodating and coordinating forces to achieve the objectives of the war in the military sciences (Amaral, 2019). Chandler (1962: 13) used the term strategy for the first time and defined it as “strategy means determining long - term goals of an organization and selecting the necessary resources to achieve this goal”.

For Juch and Kulec (1988), strategy is an integrated set of actions that connects the strategic advantages of the organization to its environmental challenges. Strategy is designed to ensure that the fundamental goals of the organization are met through appropriate action. Following Queen (1999) definition, strategy is a pattern, or a program that adds radical aims, policies and chains of an organization.

Strategy is a single, comprehensive, integrated program that relates the merits or points of the organization's core strengths with the factors and changes of the environment, and is somehow designed to ensure that it achieves the core goals of the organization (Hill, 2014). In this perspective, strategy is the optimal allocation of scarce resources to achieve economic goals. Strategy is defined as a set of core goals and policies and in order to achieve these goals, it is crucial to define the kind of businesses and what sort of organization which could be important to achieve its mission and vision (Amaral, 2019). Strategy also determines the fields of activity in a complex and dynamic environment and is the tool given to the human element, in an organizational system, that drives people; since there will be greater consistency between the aims and current activities of the organization, the growth rate and development will be bigger and better organized (Cabrita, 2020).

Eisenhardt and Schoonhoven (1996) defined a strategic alliance as a long-standing relationship between two or more partners within a demand chain to improve and develop mutual agreement strategies in terms of common goals and contextual opportunities. Also, a strategic alliance is a long-standing relationship between two or more partners within a demand chain to improve and develop mutual agreement strategies in terms of common goals for involved partner (Eddie, 2004).

Strategic alliances in some national and international markets have changed the underlying model of competition, from the traditional competition of the company to the company to compete against the network (Kotler, 2016). The strategic contributions differ in terms of the level of cooperation of partners and their value (Larrinaga, 2017). As the author highlighted strategic contributions may vary with the casual relationships of the seller, sharing of human resources in the form of intra - company groups, sharing of capital required to provide technology, research and

development, advertising, the share of the company's private information - such as market and market information as well as forecasts, shared financial risk, especially in the case of goods and services, and the mutual trust of partners.

The loss of identity and independence of corporations, as the result of strategic alliances, has become an obsolete idea. Hence, the creation of a strategic alliance between organizations requires considering the process of alliance adaptation and its drivers (Reuer & Zollo, 2000). In some national and international markets, strategic alliances have changed the underlying model of competition, from the traditional competition of the company to the company to compete against the network (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Strategic contributions differ in terms of the level of cooperation of partners and value (Larrinaga, 2017).

In general, from many and existing definitions of unification, the notion of strategic alliances is based on three principles (Masselink, 2016):

- a) The partnership between partners is formal;
- b) Existence of at least two partners;
- c) Achieving strategic goals.

The success of any single alliance depends on some key factors that are relevant at each stage of alliance evaluation (Gulati, 1998). These include (a) the formation phase, wherein a firm deciding to initiate an alliance selects an appropriate partner, (b) the design phase, where in a firm (and its partner) set up appropriate governance to oversee the alliance, and (c) the post formation phase, where in a firm manages the alliance on an ongoing basis to realize value (Schreiner, Kale, & Corsten, 2009).

Strategic partnership is a closely related concept to strategic alliances (Išoraitė, 2009). It is fundamental to understand the concept of partnership discussing the implications and relevance of inter-organizational relationships. A criticism of the partnership literature concerns the lack of consistency among researchers in attributing a definition to the concept of partnerships (Roberts & Bradley, 1991; Wood & Gray, 1991; Auster, 1994). The multitude of different forms that partnerships can take contributes to this lack of consistency. Examples of the multitude of

structures of inter-organizational relationships include joint ventures (Hitt, Ireland, & Hoskisson, 2017), board interlocks (Cummings & DiMartino, 2012), contracting agreements (Schoenherr, 2018), sponsorships (Meenaghan, 2017), licensing agreements (Kang & Magnusson, 2018), long-term purchasing and supply contracts (Giunipero, Handfield, & Eltantawy, 2019), joint development projects (Elmquist & Fredberg, 2018), or other resource and information exchange programs (Das & Teng, 1998, cited in Lee, Park, & Kim, 2018).

In cross-sector collaborations, for example, exchange structures can be funding relationships, philanthropic exchanges, or in-kind contributions. Typically, many of these exchanges have been broadly termed ‘partnership’. This hampers theoretical and empirical consistency and can affect the interpretation and validity of results and conclusions. In light of this criticism, there were general weaknesses in the definitions forwarded by authors who have studied partnerships (Provan & Kenis, 2008). Wood and Gray (1991: 147) developed a definition for collaboration in which the “collaboration occurs when a group of autonomous stakeholders of a problem domain engage in an interactive process, using shared rules, norms and structures to act or decide on issues related to that domain”. While encompassing several important variables such as the maintenance of organizational autonomy, interaction and exchange and a common problem domain this definition is missing a few critical elements. Specifically, the temporal dimension is missing. Thus, collaboration is not a once-only interaction, it is a dynamic ongoing process that changes and evolves over time (Hara & Hewitt, 2007). In addition, according to Raja (2007) the notion of a partnership being mutually advantageous (although not always equitable) for stakeholders, which is not included in Wood and Gray's definition, is a significant aspect for organizations to consider when entering into a relationship with another organization.

Oliver (1990: 241) also formulated a definition of partnership which stated that interorganizational relations (IORs) “... are the relatively enduring transactions, flows and linkages that occur among or between an organization and one or more organizations in its environment”. This definition, while including key dimensions previously outlined, does not address the issues of conscious or voluntary membership and organization identified by Park (1996).

2.1.2 Types of Strategic Alliance

In general, four types of strategic alliances can be introduced (Rodrigues, 2016: 273): “i) Joint venture; ii) Consortium of mutual services; iii) Licensing agreement; iv) Participation in the value chain. According to the author, this type could be described as:

i) A joint venture is a business partnership between two or more parties who agree to collaborate on a specific project or undertaking. Each party contributes resources such as capital, expertise, and assets, and shares in the profits, losses, and risks associated with the venture. Joint ventures are often formed between companies with complementary strengths, such as different areas of expertise or market reach, in order to leverage each other's strengths and achieve a common goal

ii) Consortium of mutual services: This type of arrangement typically involves two or more organizations coming together to jointly provide a set of services to their customers or clients. The consortium members may pool their resources and expertise to offer a more comprehensive and integrated set of services, or to provide services that would be difficult or impractical to offer alone.

iii) Licensing agreement: This type of agreement allows one party (the licensor) to grant another party (the licensee) the right to use a particular product, technology, or intellectual property for a specified period of time, in exchange for compensation. The licensee may be able to use the licensed item for their own purposes, or may be required to pay royalties or other fees based on the use or distribution of the item.

iv) Participation in the value chain: This refers to the different stages or processes involved in creating and delivering a product or service, from raw materials to final delivery to the customer. Participation in the value chain can refer to any part of this process, such as sourcing materials, manufacturing, marketing, distribution, or customer service. Organizations may choose to participate in the value chain by performing one or more of these functions themselves, or by partnering with other organizations to jointly manage different parts of the process.”

2.1.3 Motivations for Establishing Strategic Alliance

Strategic motivations for establishing strategic alliances can include expanding market share, entering new markets, acquiring new resources and capabilities, and reducing uncertainty

(Banalieva & Dhanaraj, 2014; Das & Teng, 1998, 2000; Inkpen & Tsang, 2005; cited in Cullen & Parboteeah, 2015). For instance, Banalieva and Dhanaraj (2014, cited in Cullen & Parboteeah, 2015) found that firms were more likely to enter into strategic alliances to expand their market share, gain access to new markets, and acquire new resources and capabilities. Similarly, Inkpen and Tsang (2005) found that firms were motivated to establish strategic alliances to reduce uncertainty, share risks, and achieve competitive advantage.

Operational motivations for establishing strategic alliances can include reducing costs, improving quality, enhancing productivity, and increasing efficiency (Chen & Chen, 2010; Das & Teng, 1998 (cited in Lee, Park, & Kim, 2018)).

In conclusion, motivations for establishing strategic alliances can vary depending on the specific goals and context of the firms involved. Strategic and operational motivations can both play a significant role in driving firms to enter into strategic alliances, and firms must carefully consider their motivations and objectives when choosing to engage in such partnerships.

2.1.4 Benefits and Disadvantages of Strategic Alliance

Strategic alliance is an agreement between two or more organizations to cooperate in a specific business activity, so that each benefit from the strengths of the other, and gains competitive advantage and also the formation of strategic alliances has been seen as a response to globalization and increasing uncertainty and complexity in the business environment (Hitt, 2017). Strategic alliances involve the sharing of knowledge and expertise between partners as well as the reduction of risk and costs in areas such as relationships with suppliers and the development of new products and technologies (Išoraitė, 2009).

Creating a strategic alliance has many benefits (Carayannis, 2000):

- (a) Scale savings and savings resulting from the scope;
- (b) Quick and easy access to knowledge and market;
- (c) Reducing the capital needs and the risks involved in the development of new products and technology;
- (d) Effect of competition on relevant markets;

- (e) Reduce the political and financial risk;
- (f) Achieve a competitive advantage;
- (g) Improvement of sales growth;
- (h) Generating engagement in the business portfolio;
- (i) Increasing revenue.

Alliances can increase the use of resources, learning, and development of corporate activities (Mamedio, 2019). According to the author, additionally, the communication network created by the alliance can moderate the unpredictability of the environment, increase predictability and flexibility, and provide adaptation to environmental changes.

2.1.5 Strategic Alliances: Decision Making, Value Proposition, Communication and Selling Processes

Xue and Yip (2018) also investigated the role of strategic alliances in decision-making. The authors examined how firms can leverage strategic alliances to enhance their decision-making processes and outcomes. They found that strategic alliances can provide firms with access to new resources, knowledge, and expertise that can inform and improve decision-making. Moreover, strategic alliances can also enable firms to share risk and reduce costs associated with decision-making, which can lead to better outcomes in the long run. However, Xue and Yip (2018) also noted that firms must carefully consider the risks and challenges associated with forming strategic alliances, including potential conflicts of interest, cultural differences, and differences in strategic objectives. Overall, Xue and Yip's (2018) research highlights the potential benefits and challenges of leveraging strategic alliances in decision-making, and underscores the need for firms to carefully evaluate the costs and benefits of this approach. While Chung and Chang's (2019) research primarily focuses on the role of strategic alliance in value proposal, they also emphasize the importance of continuous evaluation and improvement of the valor proposal. The authors highlight that valorization is a complex and dynamic process, which requires firms to constantly assess and refine their strategies in order to stay competitive and maximize their chances of success. They argue that firms must be willing to experiment with new approaches and technologies, and to incorporate feedback and insights from various stakeholders throughout the valorization process.

Furthermore, the authors highlighted that firms must also be prepared to adapt their strategies in response to changing market conditions, regulatory requirements, and other external factors. Overall, their research underscores the importance of ongoing evaluation and improvement in the valorization process, and highlights the need for firms to remain agile and responsive in order to succeed in this dynamic environment.

Akram et al. (2019) investigated the role of strategic alliances in the communication strategy and selling processes. The researchers analyzed how firms can leverage strategic alliances to enhance their communication and marketing strategies, specifically in the context of selling processes. They found that strategic alliances can provide firms with access to new customer segments, distribution channels, and marketing expertise that can inform and improve their communication strategies. Moreover, strategic alliances can also enable firms to share costs associated with communication and marketing, which can lead to better outcomes in the long run. However, Akram et al. (2019) also noted that firms must carefully consider the risks and challenges associated with communicating and marketing strategic alliances to stakeholders, including potential conflicts of interest, differences in brand identity, and legal and regulatory issues. Overall, their research highlights the potential benefits and challenges of leveraging alliance strategy in communication and marketing strategies, and underscores the need for firms to carefully evaluate the costs and benefits of this approach.

2.2 Strategic Alliances in Sport Tourism

2.2.1 Tourism Phenomenon

Tourism is an ancient phenomenon based on people's need for travel and adventure, as well as their desire to explore new places and experience different cultures (Shoval, 2012). Also, the development of major components in technology, transportation and declining working hours encourage people to travel (Miles et al., 2002).

Budeanu (2005) shows which multiple economic benefits brought by tourism, regions and nations all around the world are constantly stimulating its development, causing the rapid growth tourism has had during the past 50 years. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council in 2019 (WTTC, 2019), the travel and tourism industry continued to be one of the fastest-growing

sectors in the world, contributing to 10.4% of global GDP and supporting 319 million jobs in 2019. In 2018, the industry's contribution to global GDP was 10.6%. In terms of economic growth, the travel and tourism industry outperformed the global economy in both 2018 and 2019. The WTTC highlighted that, the industry's growth rate was 3.9% in 2018, while the global economy's growth rate was 3.2%. In 2019, the industry's growth rate was 3.5%, while the global economy's growth rate was 2.5%.

It is important to note that the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the travel and tourism industry in 2020, as mentioned in my previous response. In 2018, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO, 2018)) reported that, the travel and tourism industry played a significant role in global economic growth. The industry's GDP growth rate was 4.6%, which was 50% higher than the global economic growth rate of 3%. In addition, the industry employed 313 million people across the world, equivalent to 1 in 10 jobs, and generated 10.4% of global gross domestic product (GDP) (ICAO, 2018).

The WTO (2001: 13) defines tourism as “the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related with the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited” Several definitions of tourism can be founded in the literature: i) tourism has been defined as experiences of travel and space and as nonresidents travel (Gretzel, 2009); ii) Darbellay (2012: 441) have provided a technical definition of tourism, in which “Tourism consists of all the relationships and phenomena that arise from strangers residence”, this is not a permanent residence and does not have any association with the activity; the British Tourism Association (2002: 32) also defined tourism as “a short–term and temporary move of people to destinations out of the normal location of life and work and they do activities with every purpose and daily visits”. From the above definitions, we can define tourism as a distant travel pattern from home and at the same time to acquire a new experience (Vázquez, 2002). Tourism activity is a fragmented industry based on small business enterprises, which makes it difficult for managers to control all components of the tourism system or all elements and stages of the decision process (Keller, 2008). The author highlighted this is a sector that has the capital, knowledge, and enough experience to be completely independent. So, by working together and in collaboration, it can overcome the

difficulties that arise in the development of the tourism sector, which can be positive when opening new markets or developing new products.

According to a recent study by Jones and Smith (2021), the increasing focus on sustainable tourism practices has led to a growing recognition of the importance of collaboration and partnerships among tourism agents, as they work to mitigate the environmental impacts of tourism and promote sustainable development in the industry. In their recent study on collaboration networks in tourism, García et al. (2021) found that the establishment of stable relationships between adjacent administrations is crucial for effective cooperation in solving mutual problems. These networks enable joint efforts that bring together public and private actors to develop solutions for common issues, while also promoting a more equitable distribution of benefits and responsibilities among the network participants. Furthermore, the authors note that such cooperation networks can lead to increased regional competitiveness and improved sustainability in the tourism industry.

In the process of tourism development, both the resources and the capacities that affect a particular part of the tourism system may be spread among several stakeholders. It seems certain that a defined number of actors can work together if the chance of reaching the goals and creating new opportunities are seen to be clear, and if they involve themselves in team work (Bramwell & Lane, 2000). Cooperation is well regarded as a strategy to strengthen tourism (Hall, 2005) and, in this sense, interactions at various levels are crucial (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009).

2.2.2 Sport Phenomenon

The sport phenomenon is a complex and multifaceted concept that has been studied by scholars across a variety of disciplines (Maguire, 1999). While there is no universally agreed-upon definition of sport, it is generally understood to involve physical activity, often of a competitive nature, that requires skill and is governed by a set of rules or customs (Donnelly & Young, 1988). This definition highlights the importance of physical activity and competition, as well as the existence of rules and norms that govern behavior within the sporting context. However, some scholars argue that this definition may be too narrow, as it fails to account for the wide range of activities that can be considered sports (e.g. Houlihan, 1997). For instance, some forms of physical

activity that do not involve competition or skill, such as yoga or tai chi, may still be considered sports by some individuals or cultures. In the context of nautical stations, sports can include a wide range of activities that take place on the water, such as sailing, kayaking, windsurfing, and jet skiing (Buckley, 2012). These sports often require specialized equipment and training, and are typically associated with recreational or competitive pursuits.

Competition is considered by many as the 'heart and soul of sport management' (Shilbury, 2012, cited in Lorgnier, 2014). Beyond the sport industry, the sporting competitive spirit has also inspired management research, and competition is considered a dominant paradigm in strategic management (Barney, 1986; Padula & Dagnino, 2007; Porter, 1980, cited in Lorgnier, 2014). However, in reaction to this trend, cooperative approaches have emerged before the turn of the millennium, through various concepts including strategic alliances and network and cluster strategies (Powell, Koput, & Smith-Doerr, 1996, cited in Lorgnier, 2014). As a result, a growing body of researchers set out to study the simultaneity of competition and cooperation. However, the phenomenon has rarely been studied in the service industry (Ritala, Hurmelinna-Laukkanen & Blomqvist, 2009, cited in Lorgnier, 2014), which is particularly damaging, as this type of industry relies strongly on value co-creation.

In the sport industry, few attempts have been made to address the concept of co-competition strategy (Robert, Marques, & Le Roy, 2009; Woratschek, 2004; Woratschek, Roth, & Pastowski, 2003; Vernhet, Auge, & Fernandez, 2011; cited in Lorgnier, 2014). Moreover, the concepts remain disconnected from the service-dominant (S-D) logic paradigm and more research is necessary to better understand the contexts in which value networks emerge in the sport industry (Woratschek, Horbel, & Popp, 2014). The sport services emerging research on co-competition in professional sports (Robert et al., 2009; Stewart, Nicholson, & Dickson, 2005; Woratschek, 2004; Woratschek, Roth, & Pastowski, 2003, Vernhet et al., 2011; cited in Lorgnier, 2014) reveal that clubs from professional leagues simultaneously implement strategies of collaboration and competition during their season. Robert et al. (2009, cited in Lorgnier, 2014) report that football clubs benefit financially from negotiating resources together. This research also emphasizes the role of the professional governing body in the optimization of crucial resources, such as broadcasting rights. Vernhet et al. (2011, cited in Lorgnier, 2014) further postulate that such co-competitive strategies can

also be mediated through the leagues, which act as brokers for the clubs (Snow, Miles, & Coleman, 1992, cited in Lorgnier, 2014). The aforementioned studies identify cooperative strategies in professional sports clubs but, outside of the realms of professional sports, amateur sports clubs equally resort to these hybrid strategies. Indeed, nautical sports clubs on the Opal Coast are engaged in competition at multiple levels, notably the recruitment of college graduates, welcoming tourists and leisure-seekers, the supervision of educational practices, or sporting competition (Lorgnier, 2014).

2.2.3 Sports Tourism

Pereira and Carvalho (2004: 4) understand Sport Tourism as the “dynamic interaction between sports practice, for leisure and competition, and the system of tourism in which Practice, People and Place should definitely be considered”. According to the authors, the practices are a key point because sport, facilitator of experiences at different levels, is the focus of the development of sport and tourism, allowing people who are active and interactive element of the process, ownership of the place. The place, elected by the tourist, displaced from their habitat and where practices are held, must respond to the imagination and be enveloped in distinct meanings.

Sport tourism could refer to “participation in active or non-active sports movements and through organizing economic commercial factors from the country of origin to the destination country and trips to the destination country” (Lukovic, 2013: 110). According to Higham and Hinch (2018), sport tourism represents a unique travel pattern that combines sport and tourism, attracting millions of people from all over the world to participate in or watch events. Sport tourism is interpreted as a leisure travel sport that pulls individuals out of their community and temporarily out (Gibson, 2006, cited in Cappelli, 2009) or even a kind of travel away from home to play, sport, sport watching, or visiting a sports attraction and involves both race and race activities (Hudson, 2003). Accordingly, sport tourism is a leisure trip when people temporarily withdraw to participate in physical activities, watch these activities or attractions related to sports activities (Luković, 2011). As highlighted by the author it can be said that any type of travel to sport activities is called sport tourism and may take place individually or collectively.

Understanding participation is currently one of the most debated and complex themes of sport tourism and nature sports (Melo, 2017). Existing literature covering sport tourism has examined participation through the development of several frameworks that can be applied to nature sports, namely, typologies of sport tourism (Gammon & Robinson, 1997, cited in Standeven & De Knop, 1999) and the classification of sport tourism activities into active and passive forms (Gibson, 1998, cited in Cappelli, 2009). Later, Jackson and Weed (2003) developed the Sports Tourism Demand Continuum, while Weed and Bull (2004) proposed the Sport Tourism Participation Model. Despite the very important contributions of these frameworks to understanding sport tourism participation, there is also a need to move into the explanation of participation and non-participation (Melo, 2017).

Sports tourism is a rapidly expanding and significant sector of the tourism industry, with the WTO recognizing the provision of sports-related experiences as a key component of many tourist destinations, and an important contributor to social and economic development (WTO, 2019). Cities and regions compete for sports tourists and across the globe are entered into honorable combat for these tourists, their money, and the inherent growth potential that follow in their wake (WTO, 2019; Weed, 2019). Weed (2019) stressed that the winners will be those cities/regions that can fathom the fundamental motive power of sports tourism, and most successfully can utilize the potential of sports as tourist attraction. This is especially true for regions with attractive natural landscapes and resources, for example, coastlines, lakes, and mountains, which provide good opportunities for the development of sports related tourism (Buhalis, 2000; Higham, 2005).

Nonprofits in the sport tourism industry are a rich topic of inquiry because of their particular legal status. Tribou & Augé (2006, cited in Babiak, 2007), nonprofits can draw on their capability to work with competitors to overcome their internal weaknesses and to develop and formalize cross-sector partnerships. In particular, prior research has revealed that nautical sports clubs from Northern France rely on their network in tourism and sport industries to overcome financial difficulties (Lorgnier, Penel, & Mikulovic, 2007; Penel, Lorgnier, Mikulovic, & Bui-Xuân, 2005; cited in Lorgnier, 2014). An examination of the extant literature on cooperation strategy led Lorgnier (2014) to try to identify and classify cooperations by nature and level of complexity. The results showed six cooperation strategies between the nautical sports clubs from the Opal Coast in

Northern France. Value co-creation and risks of value destruction were displayed in this study. Namely, the value creation were “pooling of resources, enhanced financial performance, economy of scales, sharing basic knowledge and dominant logics, and benefiting from complementary heterogeneous resources)” (p: 104), and the value destruction were “exposes the partners to problems regarding the economic health of each membersynergizing the offering involves solving new problems of coordination The grouping imposes responsibilities that can detract from the initial mission of the nonprofit (ex: sporting and citizen formation) to meet commercial objectives” (p: 105).

Concerning regional sports tourism development, the cooperation of a very diverse group of actors (individual or corporate) from different social systems is crucial (Gibson, 1998, cited in Cappelli, 2009). Specifically, the differing interests of various regional stakeholders in sports tourism have to be coordinated. Also, collective efforts are required to provide a sports tourism experience for visitors with a diverse range of products, aiming for a positive and sustainable regional development (Getz & Page, 2016). Subsequently, a key challenge in managing regional sports tourism (RST) is the intersectoral integration of a heterogeneous group of actors (Tuppen, 2000) who act both as single actors and simultaneously as a collective actor in organizing and providing the overall sports tourism product of a region. However, there is only limited scientific knowledge about organizational structures, mechanisms, and processes in RST (Higham & Hinch, 2002). Hence, it is crucial to understand the complex interplay of single actors’ actions and the development of collective structure through regional cooperation in sports tourism (Chalip, 2006). The sports tourism product is a bundle of services and experience opportunities offer by from diverse actors in a destination (Woods & Deeganm, 2006; Woratschek, Zieschang, Beier, & Roth, 2005; cited in Elbe, Hallén, & Axelsson 2009). It is necessary to understand the structural conditions of the organization and the dimensions of the RST product and its side effects to manage a complex network such as RST. Considering the characteristics of the RST product, the overall sports tourism product is fundamentally linked with the visited region from a visitor perspective. Furthermore, aspects of physical appearance such as beautiful landscapes, attractive and well-maintained areas and spaces for sports tourism, and the attitude of locals toward sports tourism activities are relevant (Harrison-Hill & Chalip, 2005). The authors reinforced that based on the fact

that quality in sports tourism consists of many different elements, the sports tourism product has to be understood as the overall sports tourism experience as perceived by a visitor. The multi-dimensional nature of the RST product has consequences for the supply-side of the market which is largely invisible to the visitors (Hinch & Higham 2004). In this line, several aspects have to be considered in this context to understand the structural challenge concerning the organization of RST. On an abstract level, different social systems such as sport, economy, and politics with differing interests and norms are involved in RST. Moreover, the systems of health, leisure, and ecology, as well as several subfields, are related to RST (Gursoy, Ribeiro, & Lu, 2018). According to Gursoy, Ribeiro and Lu (2018: 5), "Public organizations (e.g., regional administration and infrastructures, tourist boards, and public sports facilities/spaces), nonprofit organizations (e.g., sports clubs) as well as for-profit organizations (e.g., skiing schools and sports rentals) play an important part in contributing to an RST product". Additionally, the text notes that other entities, such as hotels, retailers, farmers, local residents, and environmental protection bodies, also play a role in the development of RST. It is a key issue in sports tourism that requires nature-based resources and infrastructural arrangements which might have significant ecological and social impacts and subsequent problematic issues (Bull, 2005; Hall, 2005). In sum, the highly heterogeneous group of actors constitutes a specific feature of sports tourism and contributes to making the management of RST a complex task (Hall, 2005; Tuppen, 2000; cited in Ziakas & Costa, 2011). Tuppen (2000) stressed that this inherent complexity results in a great number of actors or stakeholders from different sectors with different organizational cultures, interests, and goals.

2.3 Nautical Tourism and Nautical Stations

2.3.1 Nautical Tourism: Concepts and Markets

Nautical tourism is a highly dynamic product of the coastal tourist space with great potential to develop consolidated destinations and can serve destinations that are not attractive for development (Gómez, 2012). The success of this type of tourism depends on the wide range of activities it offers and on the possibility of integrating it with active tourism and contact with nature (Perelló, 2013). Lukovic (2014) advocated that this global industry is constantly expanding and achieving good economic results, especially in the European markets and the Pacific. The author

highlighted that this type of tourism has not yet achieved its full potential and is now the time to develop new markets, new products, new ideas, and new concepts based on the use of IT and communication technology, particularly online platforms. Recent studies suggest that online platforms can help to promote and market maritime tourism (Han & Lee, 2020; Kim & Lee, 2021), enhance the tourists' experience and satisfaction (Li & Wu, 2020), and improve the efficiency and sustainability of the industry (Hong et al., 2020; Lee & Park, 2021). Therefore, it is crucial for maritime tourism stakeholders to embrace and utilize these technological advancements to create new opportunities and increase competitiveness in the global market.

The first article published on nautical tourism dates to 1989 and is entitled “Development of the Marinas in Yugoslavia”, in which Deskovic dealt with the development of nautical tourism and its viability (Deskovic, 1989). Even though 30 years have passed since the first publication, the exact definition of nautical tourism is still a complex issue due to the multifunctional nature of nautical activities.

Pelález (2003) places nautical tourism within the framework of a set of relationships between people who come together when they travel for less than a year and whose main motivation is to carry out nautical activities. Due to the multifaceted nature of tourism, new typologies have come into existence and many different forms of tourism have co-existed over the last decades. Particularly related to water as a tourism resource, according to Jennings (2007), several terms have been addressed such as marine tourism, river/canal tourism (Panne, 1990, cited in Jennings, 2007), marina-based tourism (Smith & Janner, 1995, cited in Jennings, 2007), nautical tourism (Pavel et al., 2013) and more recently lake tourism (Hall & Härkönen, 2006).

Jennings (2007: 16) advocates the concept of water-based tourism as it “relates to any touristic activity undertaken in or in relation to water resources, such as lakes, dams, canals, creeks, streams, rivers, waterways, marine coastal zones, seas, oceans and ice associated areas”. In this point of view, this form of tourism is strongly resource-based, i.e., the natural resource (water) firmly determines the whole development and activity (boating, sailing, surfing, fishing, one-day tours, scuba diving, etc.). Luković (2007) define nautical tourism as a sum of poly-functional activities and relations that are caused by the tourist stay within or out of the ports of nautical

tourism, and by the use of vessels or other objects related to the nautical and tourist activities, for the purpose of recreation, sports, entertainment or other needs.

In relation to the differences that may exist between nautical, maritime, and marine tourism (Forteza et al., 2017), there is no unanimity or clarity among the authors. In general terms, the differentiating element attributed to nautical tourism is the practice of sporting activities at sea (Ferradás, 2001; Luković, 2013) which can also be carried out in aquatic environments (Jovanovic et al., 2013). To continue with this point, there is no precise definition of the concept of nautical tourism as the authors point out that the definition has a certain complexity due to the links that it has with maritime and navigation activities; therefore, if all the elements are considered, a more complete definition of nautical tourism can be obtained (Luković, 2007). Other definitions of nautical tourism start from the perspective of the tourist product itself related to the practice of leisure activities in direct contact with the sea (Ayala, 2007).

Nautical tourism can be defined as an active holiday in contact with the sea that allows all kinds of nautical activities to be carried out in leisure time, it is a segment of coastal tourism that is independent of weather conditions and related to leisure and sports activities developed at sea (Towner & Weaver, 2002).

It is considered a commercial activity that has developed between ordinary tourism and maritime activity, comprising characteristics that make it a special type of tourism (Kovačić, Bošković & Favro, 2006). It is a complex system that requires the use of all the patterns and regularities of the general system theory for its management (Favro, Kovačić, & Gržetić, 2008). It highlights the importance of developing a relatively new nautical market, defining it as a system that is divided into technological subsystems at sea and on land (Kasum, Žani & Boži, 2011). Nautical tourism is a diversified branch of general tourism that has significantly changed the structure and peculiarities of the tourism industry (Kovačić & Favro, 2012). These authors point out that nautical tourism is a variety of tourism with the sea as a distinctive element where the marinas are considered central actors of nautical tourism, dedicated to satisfying the complex and growing demand of the nautical tourist (Benevolo & Spinelli, 2018). It is a complex system that uses various forms of technical and technological processes, hence is exposed to certain risks (Kasum, Mikuličić, & Kolić, 2018). For coastal areas with marinas, nautical tourism provides a

further complement to the tourist and holiday offer of the area (Benevolo & Spinelli, 2018). The authors reveal that nautical tourism is still a variant of tourism with the sea as the protagonist and, at the same time, a differentiating element where the marinas are central actors to satisfy the complex and growing demand of nautical tourism. Nautical tourism is a relevant category of maritime tourism, since generates direct impacts on coastal development and destination promotion and has become one of the most important areas of research (Bał, Czalczynska & Podolska, 2019).

In order to develop an overview about the concepts of water-based tourism activities Amaral, Rodrigues and Cravo (2020: 155) created the table above.

TABLE 2.1 CONCEPTS OF WATER-BASED TOURISM ACTIVITIES

| Term | Definitions and perspectives/Author/Year |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Coastal and Marine Tourism | <p>“Marine tourism includes those recreational activities that involve travel away from one’s place of residence and which have as their host or focus the marine environment (where the marine environment is defined as those waters which are saline and tide-affected).” (Orams, 1999, p. 9). “Over the last decade, coastal and marine tourism issues – which have much in common with multiple-use and congestion conflicts traditionally faced by natural resource managers and planners – have suddenly and simultaneously become salient in the “real world” of politics and commerce, and in the academic world of policy scholarship.” (Miller, 1993, p. 183)</p> <p>. “Tourism problems – and the environmental and human issues subsumed in this category – can be solved, but this will not happen effortlessly. For the private sector to assist in the task, ethical guidance, as well as educational delivery systems, will be needed. For the public sector to develop costal and marine tourism policies, it will be necessary to create new laws and regulatory regimes.” (Miller, 1993, p. 193)</p> |
| Lake Tourism | <p>“(…) lake tourism is tourism that occurs not only on the lake itself, but also in the surrounding area. Lacustrine tourism systems therefore include the lake, the foreshore and those amenities, facilities and infrastructure in the surrounding region that support the role of the lake as a tourist attraction.” (Hall & Harkonen, 2006, p. 4).</p> <p>. “(…) the idea of lake tourism reinforces the idea that there are certain geographical entities that, because of their particular environmental characteristics are often designated as a separate type of tourism in which the specific environment serves to attract particular activities and which serve to convey certain environmental images as part of destination promotion” (Hall & Harkonen, 2006, p. 5).</p> |
| | <p>“Nautical tourism is a specific form of tourism that characterizes tourists traveling by water, either by sea or river, and their consent to the marina and port, specially designed for the reception of this type of tourists, for rest and recreation” (Gračan et al., 2018, p. 152)</p> <p>. “Nautical tourism is a multifunctional tourist activity with a strong maritime component that is involved in nautical tourism as a tourism phenomenon, based on seagoing vessels and ports. (Gračan et al., 2018, p.152)</p> |

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <p>Nautical Tourism</p> | <p>. Nautical tourism is a form of tourism which beside recreational navigation, organized with one's own or rented boats, accommodation and/or overnights on board, includes also trips organized by cruising ship owners and travel agencies, cabin cruisers for the tourists' rest and recreation (e.g. fishing, scuba diving, underwater photographing). (Pavel-Musteata & Simon, 2013)</p> <p>"Nautical tourism is a sum of poly-functional activities and relations that are caused by the tourists boaters' stay within or out of the ports of nautical tourism, and by the use of vessels or other objects related to the nautical and tourist activities, for the purpose of recreation, sports, entertainment or other needs" (Luković & Gržetić, 2007, cited in Luković, 2012, p. 400).</p> |
| <p>River Tourism</p> | <p>"Rivers are a major tourism resource providing spectacular settings, recreational opportunities, waterfront landscapes in many centres of tourism interest, a means of transport and an essential source of water for human consumption." (Prideaux, Timothy & Cooper, 2009, p. 14)</p> <p>. " (...) rivers are an important resource for tourism destinations in three ways: to provide drinking and domestic water, to facilitate the development of intense tourism-oriented environments such as landscaping and golf courses and to fill swimming pools (...) river water is necessary to grow many of the agricultural products and generate electricity needed to sustain tourism in all regions of the world" (Prideaux et al. 2009, pp. 20-21)</p> <p>"(...) rivers of America are both a cultural and natural resource for recreation and tourism. Rivers flowing through some of the country's most spectacular natural scenery concomitantly flow through some of the most interesting cultural areas that epitomize the cultural and ethnic diversity that is also so much a part of the US tourism industry." (Timothy, 2009, p. 51)</p> <p>"Several iconic forms of tourism can be attributed to the Nile. These range from river cruising to cultural tourism based on antiquities, which happen to be accessible from this major waterway, and are also its greatest legacy apart from the water itself in such a dry environment. In many respects, the other modern tourism attractions and resources have also received a major boost in popularity through association with this river (rafting, trekking and fishing)." (Cooper, 2009, p. 92)</p> <p>. "In many European cities, riverbanks are a preferred location for hotels and restaurants primarily because river settings attract customers by providing them with an interesting view and creating a relaxing setting for dining, accommodation and other activities. Recreational parks and golf courses also make use of local streams where these are available to increase their attractiveness and profitability. Over the last few decades, waterways have become more prominent as sites for recreation and leisure activities." (Erfurt-Cooper, 2009, p.95)</p> |

Following the literature review, nautical tourism comprises those vacation activities or events that involve travelling for pleasure combined with sports practices in a water environment: mainly freshwater, saltwater, seas, oceans, rivers and lakes.

In a review of marina development and management in Europe, Williams and Baldauf (2019) noted that Spain and France have some of the largest and most popular marinas on the continent, including Empuriabrava in Spain and Port Camargue in France, which boast over 5,000

and 5,010 berths respectively. According to a study by Williams and Baldauf (2019: 132), “Italy has the highest number of marinas in the Mediterranean; Greece has the greatest potential for development in nautical tourism considering the length of its indented coast and islands; Dutch marinas and waterways are located below sea level; Marinas in England are among the best of European marina systems; Germany has a number of marinas inland and the on the coast of north Europe; Norway has the highest number of marinas in Europe, and also the most ice-covered marinas; Croatia has the marina Frapa in Rogoznica, the world’s best marina in 2006 and 2007.” The quality, achievement and diversity of the European market could be transparently presented on the global demand market (Luković, 2012). Nautical tourism in the Mediterranean is highly dynamic and developed. The marina industry has been developed through its marinas, tourist organizations, and all other participants in the industry. The mild Mediterranean climate gives, especially for tourists from the cold North of Europe, the opportunity to go on vacation almost all year round. Nevertheless, the summer season remains particularly popular, creating a strong seasonal character in nautical tourism (Vázquez, 2020). The average size of a marina, in terms of berth number, is 430 berths per marina (Shkurupiy, 2019). In the Mediterranean, there are over 1,000 marinas including sports, private, and commercial marinas. Considering the charters industry, charter companies have thousands of boats and yachts and approximately 500 mega yachts (Luković, 2012). The Mediterranean cruise industry stands out in terms of ports for tourists from cruise ships, in relation to high-quality destinations that attract tourists from around the world. Small and traditional cruising is a developed and important segment of small business growth in the Mediterranean coastal area (Luković, 2012), for example, the Italian Costa company stands out as a local Mediterranean cruise company.

The European Atlantic coast is exposed to strong winds and waves, also reach 0.08 m to 0.20 m in sheltered areas (Bertin, 2014). The author reinforced that under these conditions, ports and marinas are built within a strong breakwater system that protects the port from the sea. In this region, nautical tourism is very well developed despite the climate, which is a consequence of the high degree of development of countries in this part of Europe (Masselink, 2016). Concerning the number of marinas and the climatic conditions, it is relevant to highlight the 486 high category

marinas with a total capacity of 168,408 berths and an average 346.5 berths, in this part of Europe (ADAC, 2019).

The Baltic Sea is an arm of the Atlantic Ocean, enclosed by Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, Sweden and the North and Central European Plain. In the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) conditions for effective cooperation were created at the end of the 20th century when integration processes intensified (Luković, 2012). Currently, the BSR is the first macro-region of the European Union to implement a transnational strategy, in which tourism is recognized as a development priority. Creating an effective tourist destination management system has become a key challenge in this process (Luković, 2012).

In 2016 three BSR destinations succeeded to be in the top ten destinations of WTO (WTO, 2017); this includes Germany, the Russian Federation and Poland. According WTO (2017), although all three countries only have a fraction of their tourism destinations located along the Baltic Sea coastline, there is a clear indication about the relevance of the coastal tourism for the overall national tourism: in Germany, 17 percent of all overnight stays are recorded in the coastal provinces of Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Schleswig-Holstein while in Poland 43 percent of all overnight stays are generated in the two coastal regions of Północno-Zachodni and Północny.

2.3.2 Nautical Stations

In contemporary times, the development and promotion of nautical stations has become an important aspect of coastal tourism in many countries (Zahedani et al., 2019; Brito, 2019). Nautical stations (NS) are specialized tourism destinations that cater to water-based activities, often have a strong emphasis on sports and also the stations provide facilities, equipment, and training to visitors who are interested in participating in water sports (Oliveira, 2018). The NS may also host competitions and events that attract both professional and amateur athletes (Sardá, 2019).

Nautical stations have emerged as an important tourism destination in Portugal and Spain in recent years (Amaral, Rodrigues & Cravo, 2020). The concept of nautical stations, or "stations nautiques" in French, refers to coastal towns and cities that have been designated as centers for water-based tourism and recreation (Station Nautique, 2021). These stations offer a range of

activities such as sailing, fishing, and other water sports, as well as accommodation, restaurants, and other services for tourists and travelers. According with the previous document the concept of nautical stations represents a unique and exciting approach to coastal tourism, offering visitors a range of experiences and opportunities to explore the natural beauty and culture of coastal regions. In France, the organization "Station Nautique" works to support and promote the development of nautical stations across the country, with a focus on providing high-quality services and experiences for visitors (Station Nautique, 2021).

In Portugal, Nautical Stations are considered a strategic product, "with a coastline of excellence, with potential for surfing recognized worldwide and other sports and nautical activities; vast marine biodiversity; natural and infrastructural conditions for tourist cruises. Portugal offers a combination of sun and sea with beaches (579) and marinas, ports and recreational docks (52) of recognized quality" (Portugal Tourism Board, 2017: 18). Some of the lines of action of the National Strategic Plan for Tourism 2027 are based on the axis of valorization of the territory with the affirmation of tourism in the economy of the sea: "i) Reinforcement of Portugal's position as a destination for nautical, sport and leisure activities associated with the sea, on the entire coast and as an international reference surfing destination; ii) Dynamization and valorization of infrastructures, equipment and services to support nautical tourism, namely, ports, marinas and nautical centers; iii) Nautical activities for enjoyment of the sea connected to diving, sailing, canoeing, observation of cetaceans and seabirds, fishing, sightseeing tours and beach activities that integrate sustainability in the nautical culture of the sea; iv) Promotion of 'routes of experiences' and tourist offers around the sea and nautical activities; v) Coastal enhancement actions, including the requalification of marginal areas and the appreciation of beaches; vi) Tourism projects including health tourism' projects associated with the therapeutic properties of the sea; and vii) Appreciation of seafood associated with the Mediterranean diet" (Portugal Tourism Board, 2017: 18).

According to Pereira et al. (2022), namely the initial findings of a larger research project about NS in which this dissertation is integrated, the strategic objectives associated with the establishment of strategic alliances in nautical stations in Portugal are: to organize tourism offers, enhancing governance, promotion and marketing, and to improve environmental sustainability.

Additionally, the research examined environmental sustainability practices, revealing the significance of environmental education initiatives as part of those practices. The research findings suggest that nautical stations have a significant impact on boosting the competitiveness of tourist destinations, and that strategic alliances are key to expanding their presence in the nautical tourism market. Consequently, the authors recommend that nautical station managers should investigate the benefits of collaborative marketing through strategic partnerships in order to enhance the overall customer experience (Pereira et al., 2022).

Effective decision-making processes are also highlighted as a key element of successful nautical station development (Fédération Européenne de Destinations Touristiques Nautiques (FEDETON, n.d.). This association emphasizes the need for long-term planning and investment in infrastructure and services to ensure the sustainable development of nautical tourism and the growth of nautical stations as key tourism destinations. The decision-making process for developing and promoting nautical stations involves a range of stakeholders, including local governments, tourism boards and private businesses (Zahedani et al., 2019).

The communication strategies, such as social media and online marketing, have been found to be important for promoting nautical stations to potential customers (Calvo-Porràl & Lago-Peñas, 2020). Shahin et al. (2021) also highlighted that valuable communication strategies and selling processes are also key components of this process, as stakeholders must work together to create a compelling and attractive vision for their nautical station. Additionally, studies have shown that factors such as safety, comfort, environmental sustainability, and cultural attractions are all important considerations for customers when choosing a nautical station (Liu & Pratt, 2020). Ensuring the success and sustainability of nautical stations requires attention to these factors, as well as the quality of facilities and services provided (Amaral, Rodrigues & Cravo, 2020). In this line, the FEDETON, prepared a declaration in 2012 that addressed the concerns of the nautical tourism sector regarding the integration of sustainability. The declaration proposed ten objectives, including the preservation of coastal ecosystems, protection of natural areas and endangered species during nautical activities, reduction in the consumption of natural resources, waste, and polluting products, promotion of environmental education and awareness, innovation in the management and marketing of nautical products and services to promote environmental

sustainability, and the introduction of environmental criteria in the management policies of involved organizations..

Nautical stations, such as the one in Sines, Portugal, offer visitors a range of activities, services, and experiences related to water-based tourism and recreation. These stations often involve partnerships between local governments, tourism boards, and private businesses, who work together to promote and develop the station as a destination for travelers (Brito, 2019). In the case of Sines, the development of the nautical station was seen as a catalyst for sustainable tourism development in the region (Brito, 2019). The decision-making process for the development of the station involved a range of stakeholders, including local and regional authorities, private businesses, and tourism organizations. Effective communication strategies and selling processes were also key components of this process, as stakeholders worked to create a vision for the station that would appeal to a range of travelers (Brito, 2019). Overall, the Sines nautical station represents an example of how nautical stations can contribute to sustainable tourism development in coastal regions. By offering a range of activities and services, and by working together to create a compelling vision for the station, stakeholders can attract visitors and promote the natural and cultural assets of the region.

Despite of the relevance of this area, while their origin and their cultural, social and geographical impact are the subject of numerous studies (Bessy & Hilairret, 2002) often conducted on the Atlantic coast, it is clear that the management of nautical bases is little studied. The inclusion of nautical tourism as a strategic product for Portugal is essential for valuing the product, both in tourism and in sport” (de Brito, 2020) that deserves to be the focus of research.

The aim of this research is to analyse the Portugal Nautical Stations strategic alliances namely to analyse the decision-making process, value proposal of the NS, the communication strategy and the selling process.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Chapter 3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology aims to answer questions about how the study was conducted. It starts by providing the context of the case, which is the NS Portugal project. This project aimed to develop a collective strategy to promote the development of the nautical sector in Portugal. The case study focuses on the Portuguese nautical stations (PNS), which is a network to enhance the value of nautical resources available in the region. The chapter also outlines the data collection and analysis process, namely the process of analysis of the official application forms used to certify nautical stations and its dimensions such as decision-making process, value proposal, communication strategy, and selling process. The data was analysed using a deductive content analysis method, where the data was coded by item representing each dimension, followed by an inductive content analysis method to codify subcategories in each dimension. Intercoder reliability procedures were followed to ensure the accuracy of the analysis.

As the aim of this research is to analyse the Portugal Nautical Stations strategic alliances, an exploratory and descriptive study developed through qualitative approach was elected. This type of approach is focus on the process, on the contextual understanding and is related with natural settings (Bryman, 2012). In this line, the case study was the method selected to understand the process associated with the development of nautical stations strategic alliances as it allowed answering questions such as “how” (Yin, 2014).

3.1 Context of the Case

To recognize the potential of the nautical sector in Portugal, the Business Association of Portugal, in collaboration with the Fórum Oceano (FO), undertook a project called Nautical Portugal (Fórum Oceano, 2019). The main objective of the project was to develop a collective strategy to promote the development of the nautical sector in order to compete in the global market. FO aimed to create, promote, develop and certify nautical stations in Portugal (Fórum Oceano, 2019). FO is a private non-profit corporate body that aims to promote the maritime economy. Its mission consists of strengthening the dynamic of strategic cooperation between actors-companies, R&D centers, higher education institutions, public administration bodies and promoting the competitiveness of the major value chains that use the sea and marine resources as central elements

of their activity in order to contribute to sustainable economic growth, exports and employment and to increase the relative importance of the economy of the sea in the national economy (Correia, 2018). In line with this cluster, the FO Association participates in several international networks concerning the maritime clusters (e.g., European Network of Maritime Clusters; Blue Tech Cluster Alliance; European Federation of Nautical Tourism Destinations; Wild Sea Europe) (Correia, 2018). It is important to highlight the role of FO Association which is in charge of the Nautical Stations certification and network development in Portugal. The Regulation for the Certification of Nautical Stations (NS) of Portugal (Morais de Brito & Cordeiro, 2020), states that nautical stations are, for the most part, coastal destinations and nautical tourism with an excellent opportunity to reorient some sun and beach tourism destinations. Alongside, there are conditions in the interior of the territories for the certification of NS, in stable water plans, namely rivers, lakes and reservoirs of dams. For potential visitors, the network offering, under the name of NS, guarantees the quality of the tourist product and the services provided, as well as information support and reservation of accommodation and services, in terms to be defined by the agents that compose it (Morais de Brito & Cordeiro, 2020).

3.2 Case Study

The case study focuses on the Portuguese nautical stations (PNS), which is an organized network aimed at enhancing the value of nautical resources available in the region (for further details <http://www.forumoceano.pt/index.php>). The PNS network encompasses various NS and which of them offer a plethora of nautical activities, as well as essential amenities like lodging, dining, and other services that appeal to tourists. The key objective of PNS is to offer a comprehensive and diversified experience, built on a collaborative framework among players who provide an organized tourism product or service.

Actually, Portugal has 30 nautical station certified, namely: Alto Minho, Castelo do Bode, Esposende, Faro, Odemira, Estarreja, Lagos, Monsaraz, Moura, Murtoza, Oeste, Ovar, Vagos, Macedo De Cavaleiros, Matosinhos, Povia de Varzim, Vila do Conde, Vilamoura, Vila Verde, Vila Nova de Foz Côa, Sines, Sesimbra, Portimão, Litoral de Cascais, Avis, Ilhavo, Cabeceiros de Basto, Baixo Guadiana, Aveiro, Alijó. At the beginning of this study, there were 26 certified

nautical stations in Portugal, spanning from the northern to the southern coast and inland waters. To gather data for the study, was developed a protocol in partnership with FO. In this process FO make the connection with the several NS in order to invite the 29 NS certified to participate in the study, allowing FO to share with the research team the official application forms used to be a certified NS. The sampling was a non-probability sampling, namely a convenience sample (Bryman, 2012) due the fact that just 17 NS allowed the access to the official application forms.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The official applications forms were composed for several dimensions but in this study were analyzed the following dimensions: decision-making process, value proposal, communication strategy and selling process All 17 certified NS transcripts/official application forms were imported to NVivo for analysis with a new standalone project created for this purpose named Nautical Project. To group responses of each Nautical Station to the same question, the data was coded by item representing each dimension a deductive content analysis. According to Bardin (1977: 38) “the content analysis appears as a technique conjunction of communications’ analysis that uses systematic procedures and description objectives from the message content”. An inductive content analysis method was used to codify the subcategories in each deductive dimension, starting with open coding to identify codes for the phenomenon under investigation by labeling words and phrases found in the text or transcript. The next step was axial coding, where common codes were grouped to create themes or categories. This process was conducted based on intercoder reliability procedures and followed the methodology outlined by Corbin and Strauss (1990).

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Chapter 4. RESULTS

This chapter presents the results related to the decision-making process, value proposition, communication strategy and selling processes of the strategic alliances in the NS of Portugal.

4.1 Decision-Making Process

In general, the decision-making processes are taken by the majority of the partners in a Nautical Station Council (4 occurrences), who approves the strategic guidelines and action plans. This is made up of one representative from each partner entity. However, the NS are also composed by a Coordinating Entity that chairs and ensures the dynamics of the NS. In most cases the coordinating entity is assumed by the municipality (12 occurrences). In some cases, there is a technical coordinator (NS1), in others a permanent secretariat (NS2). There is also models in which, the coordinating entity is a set of several municipalities (2 occurrences) as is stated in this quotation. “the coordinating entity of the [NS11] is the [name of the association of municipalities], which takes responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the Action Plan and monitoring the defined strategy, being also responsible, in all acts, for representing the [NS11]” (NS11). The dynamics of these processes are variable between the NS. The following quotations try to illustrate that: “composed by the EN Board (responsible for strategic alignment, approves the strategy proposed by the management structure). It includes all the [NS2] 's partners. Decides by qualified majority (2/3)” (NS2); “the decisions of the Nautical Council are made by majority vote of the representatives that compose it. The Nautical Station Coordinator has a casting vote” (NS7); “creation of an Advisory Board with regular activity, which proposes activities to the Coordinating Entity of the Nautical Station and participates in its organization and implementation” (NS17); or “the decision-making process will be the responsibility of the Coordinating Entity that will designate a managing entity, representative of the partnership and constituted by an odd number of partners, where the public entities should not hold more than 49% of the voting rights in the decision process. The technical team prepares an opinion for each matter under consideration, which must necessarily include a proposal for action of a positive or negative nature according to the conviction of the technician, which after being appreciated and validated by the coordinator will be sent for decision. The decision will be taken by the majority of the partners present” (EN1).

4.2 Value Proposition of the Nautical Stations

The findings related to the value proposition of the nautical stations showed the perception of the network about the main value add through the NS, namely: Aggregation of the region's tourism offer (11 occurrences); Diversity of the region's tourism (8 occurrences); Distinctiveness of the region's tourism offer (5 occurrences). Additionally, Innovation in products and services (3 occurrences), Reduction of seasonality (2 occurrences) and the Increase spending per visitor (1 occurrences).

TABLE 4.1. VALUE PROPOSITION OF THE NAUTICAL STATION

| Value proposition | Nautical Stations (n) |
|---|------------------------------|
| Aggregation of the region's tourism offer | 11 |
| Diversity of the region's tourism | 8 |
| Distinctiveness of the region's tourism offer | 5 |
| Innovation in products and services | 3 |
| Reduction of seasonality | 2 |
| Increase spending per visitor | 1 |

The “Aggregation of the region's tourism offer” was mention for several NS (5 occurrences) as an integration and valorization of the resources to the visitors. The following quotation expressed this:

“Aggregation of the region's tourism offer consisting of ten municipalities where the river, the sea and the mountain are natural elements that structure it. Provides an offer of complementary quality and integrated with each other that allows the visitor to enjoy a mosaic of experiences, according to their aspirations in a territory “(NS1).

“Diversity of the region's tourism” was a main value as it allows the provision of services to different types of tourists. The quotation in the NS10 application form stated that “a diversified offer for different nautical tourists, from the more adventurous to those who want to enjoy calmer experiences in the estuary and sea” (NS10).

The “Distinctiveness of the region's tourism offer” is mentioned by several NS, and some of them even refer that the NS should be a brand of excellence (2 occurrences). As an example, we present the quotation below:

“a nautical center of excellence centered on the [NS2] reservoir and the nautical activities the reservoir allows, taking advantage of and integrating the regional landscape and cultural surroundings, and enabling the creation of a distinctive brand linked to the reservoir” (NS2).

The value proposition related to seasonality was mention by the NS3, “in its value proposition, [NS3]will integrate a complete set of resources and attractions that exist in the territory, configured into new activities and experiences that will lead to a greater attractiveness of the destination throughout the year, thus contributing to the reduction of seasonality” and by the NS11, ” Diversity of the region's tourism, combating seasonality, increasing visitor spending, reference image, and quality”.

The innovation related with products and services is pointed out for the NS5, NS9, and NS16, as a way to meets the new challenges of the markets.

4.3 Communication Strategy

The communication strategy is focus in a set of actions, mainly to: organize press trips and fam trips, in order to create awareness of bloggers and specialized journalists (11 occurrences);

create NS tab in the Municipality platform (9 occurrences); participate in trade fairs (9 occurrences); create NS website (7 occurrences).

TABLE 4.2 COMMUNICATION STRATEGY OF THE NAUTICAL STATION

| Communication Strategy | Nautical Stations (n) |
|--|------------------------------|
| Create and internationalize the brand and logo of NS | 9 |
| Promote the NS on the FO, Nautical Portugal and FEDETON websites | 6 |
| Promote the NS in the partners' information and communication channels | 4 |
| Provide physical hosting and information facilities | 4 |
| Organize community seminars | 3 |
| Organize workshops for the NS enterprises | 4 |
| Offer activities – NS Open days | 3 |
| Create NS tab in the Municipality platform | 9 |
| Create NS website | 7 |
| Create promotional vídeos | 4 |
| Create flyers and promotional brochures | 6 |
| Participate in trade fairs | 9 |
| Invite ambassadors to NS - external public relations with top national and international practitioners | 5 |
| Organize press trips and fam trips | 11 |
| Promote of the NS in specialized magazines | 3 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Organize of national and international nautical events | 4 |
| Disseminate of the NS in social networks | 7 |
| Create a NS APP | 3 |
| Create merchandising materials (t-shirts, sweaters, caps, outdoor advertising, billboards, canvas and stickers in the participating partners) | 3 |
| Create a nautical agenda | 1 |
| Promote the NS in scientific events | 1 |
| Create a newsletter | 2 |
| Distribute press kits | 1 |
| Offer roadshows | 1 |
| Develop a data base of nautical advisors | 1 |

The results showed there are several actions with just one reference, for example, “development of a data base of nautical advisors” in order to develop a program with nautical advisors, in which satisfied tourists who promote the NS among their groups of friends win, as incentive, discounts on the next vacation; or the reference to the IREN Project - Internationalization of the Network of Nautical Stations Portugal, carried out by FO (NS14). Moreover, there are some NS with several and very specific actions in their communication strategy (3 occurrences), however, some of them has a scarce number of actions (3 occurrences).

There are some NS (3 occurrences) that see the Portugal Nautical Stations network as a leverage to the communication process, as a NS form pointed out “promotion actions based primarily on public relations actions, partnerships with other nautical stations” (NS4).

4.4 Selling Process

In the majority of the NS the selling process was done through direct reservations with the different companies of the destination (7 occurrences) because the NS do not have a platform for commercialization the services. In fact, in the initial phase of this certification process, most NS resort to direct booking processes with NS partner organizations, however, some of them making a commitment to create booking platforms after certification. For example: "NS commits to provide, within two years of certification, an accessible and comprehensive platform of all partners involved in the network" (NS9). The NS1 and the NS6 referred an integrated online sales platform as an integrated sales system that makes available the activities but also the accommodation, restaurant and other tourist services of the territory.

TABLE 4.3 SELLING PROCESS OF THE NAUTICAL STATION

| Selling Process | Nautical Stations (n) |
|--|------------------------------|
| Integrated online sales platform | 3 |
| National and international travel agencies and tour operators | 1 |
| NS platform integrated with the platform of the National Network of NS | 1 |
| Service enterprises in the host facilities of the NS | 4 |
| Direct reservations with the different companies of the region | 13 |
| "Coordinating Entity" manages the booking between the client and the companies in the region | 3 |

The "Coordinating Entities" take the leading role in the management of the platforms in that they are either responsible for the creation of the integrated online sales platform (2 occurrences) or because they are the booking managers through contact of interest on the respective NS website (3 occurrences). This process is explained in some application forms as follow:

“Through the [NS10] website the tourist can make reservations for the following products and services: nautical activities; complementary activities of nature tourism and cultural tourism and nautical support services. After the reservation request, the Coordinating Entity is responsible for managing the request with immediate contact with the operator and a response to the client within 24 hours. In this process, the technical team of the Nautical Station will be responsible for managing the reservations, and the steps are described below in a systematic way: 1. The booking request is made through the form available on the NS website. To make the reservation, the user must select the "Book" option and mark the desired service; 2. The form is received by the NS technical team; 3. The technical team analyzes the booking request and establishes contact with the service provider(s), in order to articulate and schedule the activity, finding alternatives, if there is no availability on the part of the provider(s). Please note that the booking confirmation may be conditioned by weather conditions or by the need for a minimum number of participants, which should be confirmed with the service providers; 4. According to the response of the service provider(s), the team confirms the availability or unavailability of the operator to the user/tourist; 5. The technical team sends email to the client to confirm the reservation and with the following information: - Data for payment of the reservation; - List of useful contacts; - Checklist "Code of conduct for users of the NS" - Satisfaction questionnaire about the experience” (NS10).

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

Chapter 5. DISCUSSION

This thesis aims to explore the strategic alliances for the NS in Portugal namely the decision-making process, the value proposition, the communication strategy and the selling process, are discussed in this chapter.

Regarding our results, we found that in general, the decision-making processes are taken by the majority of the partners in the Nautical Station Council, who approve the strategic guidelines and action plans. However, the dynamics of these processes are variable between the NS, as shown by the different quotations provided. This is in line with the Smith et al. (2021) study, in which the partnerships should establish clear decision-making processes and communication channels to ensure all partners have a voice in the decision-making process, as an effective decision-making process in partnerships involves a balance between collaboration and individual decision-making.

The results showed a clear structure in the decision-making process which is advocated by Shamsi and Khan (2012) as important to effective decision-making process. The authors argue that to achieve this is required a clear understanding of the organization's goals and objectives, as well as a structured decision-making process that involves input from all relevant stakeholders. They also emphasize the importance of having a diverse group of decision-makers who can bring different perspectives and experiences to the table. Ferreira et al. (2022) emphasize that effective decision-making in strategic alliances requires building trust among partners and fostering a culture of collaboration. They argue that trust is critical for promoting open communication, sharing of information, and joint problem-solving among partners, which can lead to better decision-making outcomes. In NS2, the decision-making process is composed by the NS Board, which is responsible for strategic alignment and approves the strategy proposed by the management structure. It includes all the partners and they decided by qualified majority (2/3). In NS7, the decisions of the Nautical Council are made by majority vote of the representatives that compose it. Also, in NS17, there is the creation of an Advisory Board with regular activity, which proposes activities to the Coordinating Entity of the Nautical Station and participates in its organization and implementation. Overall, results suggest that NS2 and NS7 have different approaches to decision-making, which may reflect differences in the organizational structure and goals of these NS. The article by Shamsi

and Khan (2012) emphasize the importance of effective decision-making in organizations and suggest several ways to improve decision-making processes. These include defining the problem clearly, collecting and analyzing relevant data, involving stakeholders, using decision-making tools, and evaluating the decision-making process. The authors argue that organizations can benefit from a structured and well-informed approach to decision-making, which can help them make better decisions and achieve their goals more efficiently. These insights could be particularly useful for organizations like NS2, NS7, and others that may face complex and challenging decision-making situations in their day-to-day operations. By adopting a more structured and informed approach to decision-making, these organizations may be able to make more informed and effective choices, which could ultimately benefit their stakeholders and contribute to their long-term success. Moreover, this study found the existence of different models of decision-making process.

In terms of the value proposition of the nautical stations, we found that the main value adds were the Aggregation of the region's tourism offer; Diversity of the region's tourism; Distinctiveness of the region's tourism offer. Additionally, Innovation in products and services, Reduction of seasonality and the Increase spending per visitor. This is line with Cappelli (2009) who proposes a territorial integration approach based on the Slot Model, which aims to enhance the value proposition of the tourism offer by promoting the integration of different territorial resources and actors involved in the tourism industry. This approach is similar to the value proposition of the NS, which emphasize the aggregation of the tourist offer of the territory and the creation of innovative products and services. This is relevant due to the fact that sport tourism offer is a bundle of several components (e.g. sport activities transport, lodging, and facilities, natural resources, culture) in order to create an experience in a destination (Elbe, Hallén, & Axelsson 2009; Woods & Deeganm, 2006; Woratschek, Zieschang, Beier, & Roth, 2005). Similarly, when comparing our findings to the Sustainable Sports Tourism Evaluation Framework proposed by Yang et al. (2018, cited in Lin et al., 2019), we find some similarities in terms of the importance of creating sustainable tourism products and services, reducing seasonality, and increasing visitor spending. However, our study focuses on NS, while Yang's et al. (2018, cited in Lin et al., 2019) framework is aimed at exploring potential sports tourism attractions in Taiwan. Another study in sport tourism context, Marketing Strategy and Willingness to Pay for Sport Tourism in the Kinmen

Marathon Event, also touches on some relevant themes, such as the importance of creating diversified tourism experiences and increasing visitor spending (Lin et al., 2019). The results highlighted the “distinctiveness of the tourism offer” which was mentioned by several NS. This is aligned with Lin (2019) focus on the marketing strategy and willingness to pay for sport tourism events and suggests a marketing strategy that emphasizes the cultural of the event to attract more participants and increase its value proposition. Yang (2018, cited in Lin et al., 2019) proposes a framework for evaluating sustainable sports tourism, which considers various factors such as environmental impact, economic benefits, social equity, and cultural diversity to establish a comprehensive evaluation system for sustainable sports tourism. This framework is also relevant to the NS, as they emphasize the importance of creating a diversified and distinctive tourism offer that can meet the needs of different market segments, while also contributing to the sustainable development of the territory.

Based on the results of the study, the communication strategy was focus on to organize press trips and fam trips, creating an NS tab on the Municipality platform, participating in trade fairs and creating an NS website. Also was pointed out, that the platform NS on the FO, Nautical Portugal and FEDETON web sites are a model of promotion on an international scale. In addition, authors as Akram et al. (2019) and Banalieva and Dhanaraj (2014, cited in Cullen & Parboteeah, 2015) advocate that the motivation to gain access to new markets prompts the firms to develop strategic alliances and recent studies showed that online platforms can help to promote maritime tourism (Han & Lee, 2020; Kim & Lee, 2021), The study by Lam-González et al. (2019) shows the relevance of internationalization the brand in the context of nautical tourism to create and increase competitiveness for destinations. Moreover, Lukovic (2013) highlighted the role of online platforms to increase the nautical tourism promotion. However, some NS have a more specific and comprehensive communication strategy channels (3 occurrences), while others have a scarce number of actions (2 occurrences). It is also important to stress that there are several NS with just one reference to their communication strategy, such as develop a program nautical advisor, the satisfied tourists, who promote the NS among their groups of friends, win discounts on their next vacation (NS7).

Comparing these results to the works of Coutinho (2021) e-marketing in sports tourism directly addresses communication strategy, specifically e-marketing strategies used by tourism

organizations in specific contexts. Although this study does not specifically focus on digital marketing, in line with Coutinho (2021), the creation of innovative products and services identified as a value proposition for nautical stations could be supported by digital marketing strategies, the author stressed that e-marketing in specific contexts of sports tourism provides a relevant role, namely the importance of using digital marketing tools to promote sports tourism destinations and create more personalized experiences for visitors. The approach to 5.0 marketing strategies must be integrated as part of the communication process in nautical tourism (Kotler et al., 2021).

In the majority of certification forms analysed the selling process is done through direct reservations in destination. However, some NS have committed to creating booking platforms after certification. Lin's study (2022) on marketing strategy and willingness to pay (WTP) for sport tourism provides insight into effective marketing channels for promoting sports tourism events. The study found that word-of-mouth recommendations from friends and relatives, social media, and official websites were the most effective marketing channels for the Kinmen Marathon. Similarly, NS can leverage social media and official websites to promote their services to potential customers.

An integrated online sales platform as an integrated sales system that makes available not just the activities but also the accommodation, restaurant, and other tourist services of the territory was already developed by some NS. Future studies could analyse and monitoring this cases studies in order to learn with the process, identifying facilitators and constraints, in order to prompt knowledge transfer with the nautical stations of the Nautical Portugal. For instance, NS10 provides a detailed explanation of the booking process on their website. Tourists can make reservations for nautical activities, complementary activities of nature tourism, cultural tourism, and nautical support services through the website. Coutinho's study (2021) on the role of e-marketing in the selling process of sports tourism highlights the importance of e-marketing in attracting potential customers, promoting events, and enhancing the customer experience. The study also identifies some challenges and opportunities related to e-marketing in the context of extreme sports events. NS can learn from this study and use e-marketing to enhance their selling process by developing effective communication strategies, leveraging social media, and creating personalized marketing approaches.

Based on these results, it is possible to infer the importance of the NS network in the destination competitiveness and the role of strategic alliances in facilitating penetration in the nautical tourism market. The decision-making process provides information on how decisions are made in the Nautical Station Councils and how the coordinating entities are responsible for monitoring the implementation of the strategy and the action plans. This information is relevant to the overall governance structure and vision of the NS. This is an added value of this dissertation. Additionally, value proposition and the communication strategy dimension discuss how some NS aim to add value to the clients and to communicate and promote which also be related to the governance vision. As Pereira et al. (2022) highlighted a vision of governance is a strategic objective associated with the creation of the NS. Overall, this study provides valuable insights into the decision-making processes and value proposition of NS, which can inform the development of tourism policies and strategies for the future. Although, due the possibility of value destruction (Lorgnier, 2014,) in some partners of the NS, also this variable should be study in order to better understand and improve these complex interactions. Future studies also could explore how digital marketing strategies can support the creation of innovative products and services in NS and also investigated about the evaluation of the costs and benefits of a communication and selling strategy in the context of the strategic alliances. It is worth mentioning that future research must go into the field to observe strategic alliances in action.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

Chapter 6. CONCLUSION

This study focuses on a pioneering project in Portugal related with a strategic investment in sport and tourism - NS. The focus is on the decision-making process, the value proposition, the communication strategy, and the selling process.

The results of this research will contribute to a better understanding of the strategic alliances in the nautical tourism industry in Portugal and provide insights into how NS can enhance their offerings and improve their competitiveness in the market. The findings can also be useful for policymakers, industry associations, and other stakeholders interested in promoting the development of the nautical tourism sector in Portugal.

6.1 Main Results

The findings reveal that the decision-making processes in NS are taken by the majority of the partners in a Nautical Station Council, composed of one representative from each partner entity, who approve the strategic guidelines and action plans. The NS also have a Coordinating Entity, which is usually assumed by the municipality, takes responsibility for chairing and ensuring the dynamics of the nautical station. In some cases, a technical coordinator or a permanent secretariat is also present. Moreover, this study found the existence of different models of decision-making process and the dynamics of these processes are variable between the NS.

The value proposition of NS includes the aggregation of the region's tourism offer, diversity of the region's tourism, distinctiveness of the region's tourism offer, innovation in products and services, reduction of seasonality, and the increase in spending per visitor. Some NS seek to be recognized as brands of excellence, while others promote the development of innovative products and services to meet market challenges.

Finally, the communication strategy of the NS mainly focuses on organizing press trips and fam trips, creating a NS tab in the Municipality platform, participating in trade fairs, and creating an NS website, among other actions. There are also NS with several and very specific actions in their communication strategy, such as the Creation and international valorisation of the brand and logo, Promotion on websites, Promotion of NS in partners' information and communication channels, and the provision of physical Hosting and information facilities, Organize community

seminars, Organize workshops for the NS enterprises, Offer activities NS Open days, Create NS tab in the Municipality platform, Create NS website, Create promotional videos, Create flyers and promotional brochures, Participate in trade fairs, Invite ambassadors to NS external public relations with top national and international practitioners, Organize press trips and fam trips, Promote of the NS in specialized magazines, Organize of national and international nautical events, Disseminate of the NS in social networks, Create a NS APP, Create merchandising materials, Create a nautical agenda, Promote the NS in scientific events, Create a newsletter, Distribute press kits, Offer roadshows, Develop a data base of nautical advisors.

The selling process involves an integrated online sales system that makes available activities, accommodation, restaurants, and other tourist services of the territory. In the initial phase, most NS resort to direct booking processes with partner organizations, with some of them committing to create booking platforms after certification. The coordinating entities take the lead in managing the platforms, either by creating the integrated online sales platform or by acting as the booking managers through contact of interest on the respective nautical station website.

This research creates an added value related to the decision-making process and, in this line, showed several models which are implemented in nautical tourism context. It also stressed the perception of the value proposition of the strategic alliances in the NS development. In a practical perspective it is important that marketers of NS being aware of the role of the e-marketing in this era.

6.2 Boundaries of the Work

The boundaries of this work were:

- i) the analysis of a limited number of dimensions of the official applications forms;
- ii) not analyzed all the NS applications' forms due the fact that they not allowed FO to share with the research team;
- iii) not included direct observation of the practices implemented by NS.

6.3 Perspectives for Future Research

A deeply analysis of the different models of decision-making process in the NS, as case studies, could improve the knowledge related with strategic process in sport tourism, allowing to

know/understand the constraints and drivers in nautical tourism which can inform the development of sport tourism policies and strategies for the future.

Future studies can further examine the role of strategic alliances in enhancing destination competitiveness, explore how digital marketing strategies can support the creation of innovative products and services in NS and investigated about the evaluation of the costs and benefits of a communication and selling strategy in the context of the strategic alliances. It is worth mentioning that future research must go into the field to observe strategic alliances in action.

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