

Decision Support Indicators for Municipal Investment in Low-Density Territories: A Case Study in the Portuguese Historical Villages



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1 Introduction

The lack of social, economic, and financial indicators regarding the different initiatives taken with the aim of reversing the increasing trend of human desertification in low-density territories, namely, within the network of the Portuguese Historical Villages (rAHP), has made decision-making a difficult process for potential investors in these areas, mainly the mayors of the municipalities in which the Portuguese Historical Villages (AHP) are located.

Thus, the present study, carried out within the scope of the project “PLowDeR—Framework para Análise do Impacto Económico e Social das Atividades Turísticas

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nos Territórios de Baixa Densidade: o Caso das Aldeias Históricas de Portugal”¹ (Santos et al. 2019) (PLowDeR—Framework for the Analysis of the Economic and Social Impact of Tourism Activities in Low-Density Territories: the Case of the AHP), aims to analyse investment decisions in these territories made by local mayors, providing a comparative analysis with the social, economic, and financial indicators collected using the indicator framework developed and proposed by the aforementioned research project. This analysis seeks to understand whether the decisions made were the most appropriate ones or if it was possible to make a different decision based on a set of objective indicators.

1.1 Economic/Financial Context

The development of low-density territories, namely, in the AHP network, depends on the effort made by citizens, enhancing investment in these areas with public and private money. Therefore, to allow citizens to fully enjoy such heritage, political decision-makers, through their municipalities and together with private investors, have to allocate budgets and channel appropriate funds to the development of these territories based on a well-informed intervention.

Public investment comes from the taxes paid by each of us. Thus, every citizen has the right to know what criteria were used to decide on public investment in these territories. Decisions regarding this kind of investment have to be scrutinised and transparent, and there should be accountability in these processes.

The evolution of the Portuguese tax system falls into two categories: direct and indirect taxation; the latter has significant weight in the country, exacerbating fiscal injustice for low-income populations (OCDE 2006). Thus, besides making public investment in these regions a rigorous, transparent process, specific tax measures should also be taken to encourage populations to stay in these territories, bringing new vitality and sustainable prosperity to inland regions.

1.2 Expected Contributions

This work aims to alert political decision-makers to the importance of basing their decision-making regarding investment in low-density territories not only on the intuition of local mayors but also on a set of appropriate indicators which provide a realistic picture of the social, economic, and financial situation of these territories.

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Therefore, decision-makers are encouraged to use the framework of indicators developed and proposed by the PLowDeR research project and also contribute with data which will allow the framework to provide annual indicators.

1.3 Work Structure

Following the introduction, which provides an overview of the present study, its relevance, and expected contributions, this work is structured into three further sections, ending with the conclusions, limitations, and proposals for future research.

The second chapter is dedicated to a literature review, providing a state-of-the-art evaluation of the relevance of public and private investment in low-density territories and analysing relevant documents for this work, namely, the minutes of the last town hall meetings, held in 2017, in each of the 10 municipalities where the 12 AHP are located. In addition, in these meetings the most important decisions are usually discussed regarding the main options of the plan and budget for the following year.

The third chapter is dedicated to the empirical study and provides a presentation and interpretation of the results obtained, aiming to answer the research problem. Previously, in this chapter, the research problem is identified and defined, as well as the study objectives and the methodology used.

Finally, conclusions of the study are presented, as well as the limitations of the empirical study and proposals for future work.

2 Literature Review

This chapter is dedicated to the literature review, and several observations are made regarding the public and private investment made in the infrastructures located in low-density territories, analysing its contribution to encouraging populations to stay in these areas. It also includes the analysis of the minutes of the last town hall meetings of each of the ten municipalities, held in 2017. Usually, these town hall meetings include the discussion of the main options of the plan and budget for the following year.

2.1 The State of the Art

According to Butler (1980), the tourism destination life cycle consists of different stages of evolution: exploration, involvement, development, and stagnation. After reaching stagnation, several scenarios can be considered: immediate decline, decline, stabilisation, reduced growth, or rejuvenation. This cycle is still valid today and can be of great use in understanding the development of a tourist

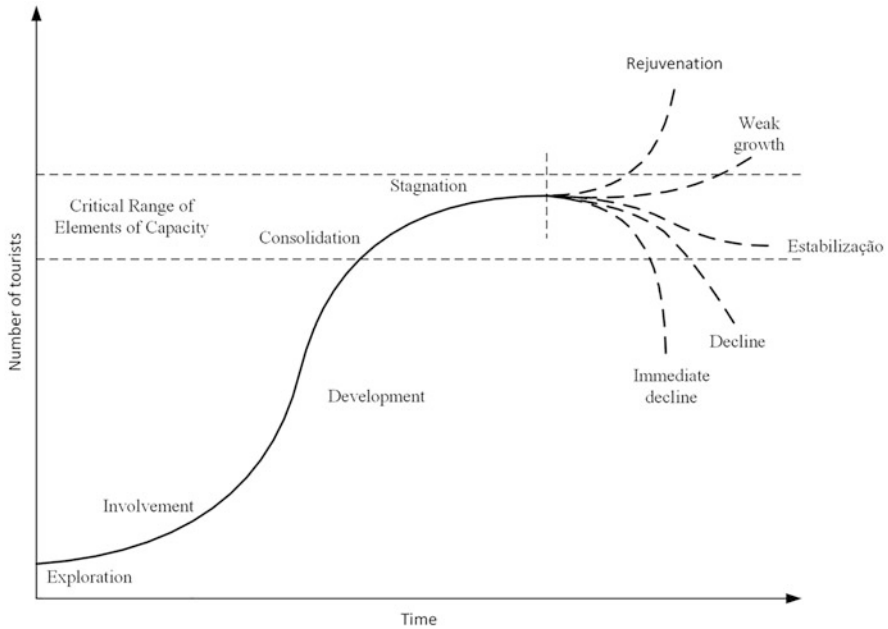


Fig. 1 Tourism area life cycle model [(Butler 1980, p. 7)]

destination, with the help of appropriate indicators, and thus in making better investment decisions (Fig. 1).

There is a real need to develop indicators which can be used to assess and validate quality of life in any context, particularly in low-density territories. According to Ribeiro (1994, p. 185), “quality of life is a global perception of personal life, and depends on the contribution of several domains and components”.

The distribution of the investment allocated to low-density territories has been made according to the size of population clusters, their needs regarding basic infrastructures, and the density and preservation state of the existing historic cultural heritage (Boura 2004). These investment distribution criteria should be developed based on previously identified needs, with a visible impact at the level of economic growth and improvement of the quality of life of people living in these territories.

A number of actions can be suggested, with impact on public or private investment and with the intervention of several stakeholders: investing in computing resources and telematics; investing in the valorisation of local features; investing in tourism, valuing biodiversity; investing in restaurants, valuing the historic cultural heritage; investing in endogenous resources; and intermunicipal investment (Favareto 2005).

In order to encourage populations to stay, local authorities have long relied on several programmes which include investing in these territories, though without much success, considering the continuous flow of migration (Moreira et al. 2007). According to the same authors, these investments do not often lead to the expected

results, probably because the decisions made were not based on indicators which could help identify the sectors requiring priority investment, encouraging populations to stay.

Sustainable tourism in low-density territories should favour quality rather than quantity, promoting the constant monitoring and assessment of results based on indicators and fostering proactive management strategies in order to generate benefits for the local populations (Carvalho and Correia 2007). According to Carvalho and Correia (2008), there is a belief that investment in rural areas is oriented towards the benefit of visitors, rather than the people whose daily life is in those areas.

Time has shown that the model used to allocate public investment to low-density territories has not led to sustainable development and has not prevented the phenomenon of human desertification. On the one hand, these investments have allowed the implementation of positive measures: rehabilitation of buildings and public spaces and improvement of accessibility and construction of equipment and infrastructures; on the other hand, it has also transformed those territories for the benefit of visitors rather than the local population (Pais 2008).

According to Branco et al. (2010), the fight against human desertification must include the implementation of policies which motivate people to go back to the rural world, by promoting the engagement of the population in the definition and implementation of such policies. In order to achieve this goal, there must be a set of indicators to help define those policies.

According to Ventura (2010), the development of rural areas, usually associated with low-density territories, assumes that local populations and municipalities are willing to collaborate in initiatives that increase and enhance local endogenous products, thus attracting private and public investment. The collaboration of local populations and municipalities may be enhanced if there are indicators to support a realistic strategy to attract public and/or private investment.

Low-density territories, namely, the network of Portuguese Historical Villages, have witnessed the growth of their visibility and reputation due to the investments made by both the public and private sectors. This means that the investments made have had a positive impact, and now it is necessary to introduce mechanisms that will help improve the decisions made by investors and reduce the risk of contrary results (Ferreira 2011).

In order to change the scenario presented by most of the low-density territories, several initiatives have taken place to mitigate the negative effects associated with these territories, rural exodus, and demographic aging. Therefore, several programmes and projects have been developed with the objective of revitalising these territories, motivating their populations to stay through the enhancement of public investment (Reis 2012).

Barca et al. (2012) question the future of regional development intervention and state that a development policy focussed on specific territories should consider that the knowledge needed to implement such policies is not readily available, as it must be developed through participative processes which involve all the stakeholders interested in these territories.

Reduced investment, either private or public, as a factor of creation of employment and equal opportunities, has had a huge impact on the (continuous) human desertification of low-density territories (Braga et al. 2013).

Rural development policies, in which low-density territories are included, seem to be strongly associated with the use of endogenous resources and practices based on collaborative networks which may be considered appropriate for the promotion of all its resources. This paradigm is focussed on the integration of these territories into other territories which are not affected by the evil of human desertification, and that is not an easy process. This is firstly because low-density territories are a priori in a less privileged situation as they do not possess critical mass, resources, skills, and infrastructures which allow them to be competitive (Matos 2013).

The implementation of investment, public or private, in low-density territories takes the following idea into consideration: the profile of the investment made was different from village to village according to their respective features and needs (Coutinho 2013). However, the author does not mention the identification of those features and needs, which clearly indicates the lack of a structure of indicators to help investors make their investment decision.

Public policies which reinforce investment in low-density territories are generally focussed on job creation, and recovery and implementation of new infrastructures, neglecting everything that concerns the lifestyle of the local population and the preservation of their habits and customs (Ventura 2013).

In order to allow the tourism sector to have a full, relevant role in the economic growth of low-density territories, it is necessary to recognise its importance and support the creation of appropriate policies for investing in and developing new business plans. This means that data on the role of tourism in these territories and its contribution to the local economy should be robust and convincing in order to provide some guidance and allow the tourism sector to grow, supervising its performance and adapting policies whenever required (UNWTO 2013). This process requires a set of indicators which take the surrounding environment into consideration, as well as existing pressures and the effort made to innovate and introduce endogenous products.

Until 2030, the population in low-density territories is likely to continue to present a negative growth trend, even though non-identified exceptions may occur. Therefore, these regions are likely to face a profound disarticulation and total desertification, unless public policies are developed and implemented in order to enhance the qualification and competitiveness of these territories, supported by the accuracy and transparency of public and private investment (Daniel et al. 2014).

The development of low-density territories depends on the growth of the national economy, making it necessary to allocate public funds to these regions to enhance their infrastructures, creating wealth and fostering local development (Rodrigues 2015).

The investments, with the help of several, mainly European, programmes, are made in different tourism areas (e.g. health and well-being, agritourism, hunting tourism, radical sports, wine tourism, olive oil tourism) and have enhanced the growth of exportations in the primary sector. These investments, besides the impact

in the primary sector, have also contributed towards the recovery of housing stock, historic resources, and infrastructures. However, this development has not been matched with similar strategies to help improve the lifestyle of those living in these territories (Fernandes and Carolina 2015).

Protected areas, such as the network of AHP, are unexplored tourist attractions, full of resources and heritage which can be valued in order to motivate populations to stay in these territories. To make this possible, these areas must offer something which differentiates them and enhances demand; it is necessary to make investments, both public and private, which may promote the endogenous products of these regions (Ramos 2015).

Ferrão (2015) developed a framework for low-density territories which includes several ecological risks, such as fires, which mainly affect these territories (lack of forest planning, destruction of ecosystems, isolation and dependency, limited capacity to attract people and investment).

Fernandes et al. (2016) carried out a project in mountain villages, which are very low-density territories, to analyse the selection of investment considering its contribution to revitalising these territories with the aim of keeping local populations.

Considering the next community support framework, supranational decision-makers are now faced with the challenge of maintaining, strengthening, or reducing the allocation of resources focussed on territorial cohesion. The measures taken will probably be under a more intense scrutiny, and the decisions taken regarding the investment made in low-density territories will be subject to additional requirements. Also for national political decision-makers, all decisions regarding the support of low-density territories should be subject to additional requirements (Santos and Baltazar 2016).

In this context, Martins (2016) seeks to understand how populations perceive the purpose of the investment made in the areas where they live, to analyse its impact, and to assess any disparities between the different population clusters that have benefited from that investment. In general, even though there are different impacts for each cluster, there is a clear benefit for visitors, due to the existence of trails and conditions to access and visit these areas more easily, thus promoting the local economy. Seasonality is still the main obstacle to the economy and the development of these territories. In the summer, there is a higher population flow (emigrants, tourists, people who were born there), whereas in the winter these areas are subject to a lower population flow.

According to Batista (2017), investors perceive low-density territories as a source of high-potential resources to explore, but there are also factors hindering the development and implementation of enabling measures, due to the lack of initiative among local populations and also due to the prevalence of conservative and traditional behavioural attitudes. Territory managers are permanently faced with multiple challenges associated with the search for motivating factors which may attract investors, in an effort to provide the right conditions to keep local populations and improve their quality of life. According to the same author, there is little information, involvement, and dialogue among the different stakeholders and, consequently, a lack of criteria in the decisions made by investors.

In order to meet the three main needs of these territories, namely, fighting human desertification and the lack of investment, improving competitiveness, and promoting job creation, Santos et al. (2019) developed a framework of indicators for low-density territories. The authors also observed that the sustainability of these territories depends on strategies based on endogenous resources and factors, and the promotion of innovative actions, leading to greater efficiency when used.

Santos et al. (2019) believe the assessment of the economic and social impact of tourist activities in low-density territories through the creation of an appropriate set of indicators could be a good source of information to create a consistent development strategy in these territories, contributing to better decision-making by investors.

2.2 Main Options of the Plans and Budgets of the Ten Municipalities Where the Network of the Portuguese Historical Villages Are Located

We have analysed the minutes of the last town hall meetings of the ten municipalities located within the network of the AHP, from December 2017, in which the main options of the 2018 plan and budget were discussed. These are key documents, of great relevance for each municipality, and even though they are different, they are strongly linked. The budget defines the revenues and expenses within legal limits and expectations, whereas the plan options define the application of most of the expenses considered relevant within the overall expenditure. These documents reflect the will and accountability of the executive power, including the actions and work considered necessary for the maintenance and development of better living conditions for the local population.

After analysing the minutes of each town hall meeting in which the main options of the 2018 plan and budget were discussed, the most relevant parts were selected for this work in order to assess if there was a possible link with the indicators collected by the PLoWDeR project team for the same year (2018).

3 Empirical Study

The present chapter aims to identify and explain the research problem and the methodology used and analyse the information found in the minutes of the last town hall meetings held in 2017, drawn up by each of the municipalities where the AHP are located. After that, the decisions regarding investment for 2018 in those municipalities are analysed in order to check if these are aligned with the indicators collected by the PLoWDeR project team for the same year (2018) or if those

decisions could have been different and better informed using the proposed set of indicators.

3.1 Identification of the Research Problem and Methodology

This section identifies and presents the research problem which guided our research work and also introduces the methodology used in our study.

3.2 Problem, Objectives, and Research Questions

The AHP network comprises 12 villages which share historic, heritage, and landscape features, including their inland factor: Almeida; Belmonte; Castelo Mendo; Castelo Novo; Castelo Rodrigo; Idanha-a-Velha; Linhares da Beira; Marialva; Monsanto; Piódão; Sortelha; and Trancoso. These villages are located in three NUTS III (Beiras and Serra da Estrela, Beira Baixa, and Coimbra Region), integrated in NUTS II Centre.

The purpose of our study is to understand if the decisions shaped in the general lines of the main options of the plan and budget approved in each town hall meeting are in alignment with the indicators collected by the indicators framework application proposed by the PLowDeR project. The aim is to help reverse human desertification in these villages and share some of the competitive advantages that can make these territories attractive and able to fix and attract population (Santos and Ferreira 2010).

According to Santos et al. (2019), the main objective of the PLowDeR project was to develop and present a framework of indicators to assess the social, economic, and financial impact of tourism activities in the AHP. This study analyses some of these indicators, concerning the decisions made by the municipalities where each of the 12 villages are located. This analysis was carried out using the content from the minutes of the last town hall meetings held in each of the municipalities in 2017. The main options of the plan and budget for the following year (2018, in this case) are usually discussed and voted on in these meetings. The information collected after the interpretation of these minutes was analysed using some of the indicators collected within the PLowDeR project for the same year.

Therefore, the main purpose of our work is to ascertain whether the decisions shaped in the general lines of the main options of the plan and budget approved in the town hall meeting are aligned with the indicators collected by the indicators framework application which was proposed by the PLowDeR project.

As previously explained, our main purpose is to answer the following question:

Is the framework of indicators proposed by the plowder project a useful tool to help political decision-makers decide about public investment in low-density territories?

3.3 *Research Methodology*

Regarding the methodology used, the present research is document-based, supported by a bibliography research in which the keywords are “investment”, “low-density territories”, and “historical village”. We mainly used three bibliography sources: scientific papers; professional papers; and technical reports. The objective of our bibliography research was to evaluate the state of the art of public and private investment in low-density territories and historical villages.

For the empirical study, the content analysis technique was used to analyse the minutes of the last town hall meeting held in 2017, collected from the websites of each of the analysed municipalities. The content analysis was made manually and was based on the narrative, descriptive, and interpretative analysis, mainly qualitative, since the idea was to analyse each minute from the perspective of the message conveyed to citizens.

3.4 *Analysis of the Minutes*

This section identifies the most relevant aspects found in the minutes of the last meetings held in 2017 in each of the ten municipalities where the AHP network is located. As previously mentioned, we selected these minutes because they reflect the discussions regarding the main options of the plan and budget for 2018 and, consequently, most of the investment decisions made in the municipality.

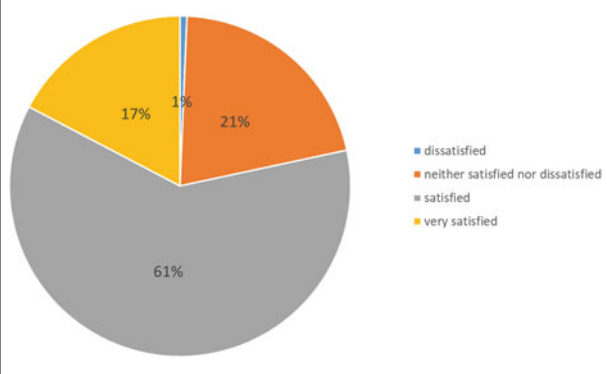
The main options of the plan and budget are key documents of great relevance for the municipality, and even though they are different, they are also strongly linked. The budget defines the revenues and expenses within legal limits and expectations, whereas the plan options define the application of most of the expenses considered relevant within the overall expenditure. These documents reflect the will and accountability of the executive power, including the actions and work considered necessary for the maintenance and development of better living conditions for the local population.

3.4.1 *Municipality of Almeida*

Analysis of the minutes of the town hall meeting held on 5 December 2017 shows the concern of the municipality of Almeida with the promotion of the potential of its Historical Villages. In this meeting, a suggestion was made to place billboards at the Vilar Formoso border to overcome the lack of information. If we establish a connection between this concern and the results obtained in the PLOWDeR project (see Table 1), it is possible to observe that there is still a considerable number of visitors who are “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied”, even though the vast majority feel “satisfied” with the amount of information available. Thus, we can conclude that

Table 1 Level of visitor satisfaction with the information available

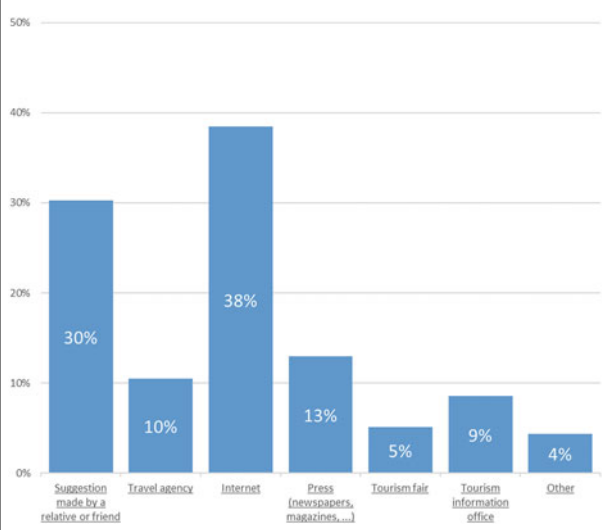
Regarding satisfaction with the information available for visitors, most respondents are “satisfied” (61%) or “very satisfied” (17%) However, 21% of respondents are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. These results show that the level of information provided can be improved so that a bigger number of visitors may declare themselves very satisfied



Source: Santos et al. (2019)

Table 2 Percentage of visitors per source of information regarding the tourism destination (AHP)

The number of visitors per source of information regarding the tourism destination is highly diversified However, the largest percentage of respondents reported using two main sources of information: “the Internet”, with 38%, and a “suggestion made by a relative or friend”, with 30%. The third most reported source was “the press (newspapers, magazines, etc.)” with 13%

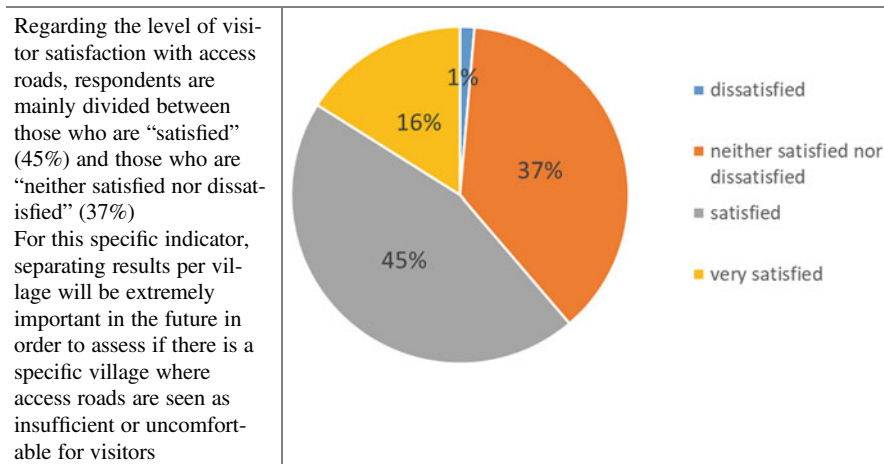


Source: Santos et al. (2019)

the decision made at the town hall meeting is aligned with the indicator “level of visitor satisfaction with the information available”.

However, it is important to consider that visitors use various sources of information when planning their journeys. Among the many sources of information used by visitors, the Internet seems to be the favourite source for those visiting the AHP. This fact indicates that the means used to promote the potential of a tourism destination should be supported by online channels, namely, through the use of social networks. This concern is also aligned with the indicator “percentage of visitors per source of information regarding the tourism destination” (see Table 2).

Table 3 Level of visitor satisfaction with access roads



Source: Santos et al. (2019)

A similar concern was also observed regarding the improvement of accessibility, a situation which was being solved through the submission of an application within the scope of the AHP. This concern is also aligned with the results for the indicator “level of visitor satisfaction with access roads” (see Table 3).

3.4.2 Municipality of Arganil

In their last town hall meeting held in 2017, the municipality of Arganil decided that the main options of the plan and budget for 2018 should include those projects considered strategic for the council. The issue of mobility was equally considered determinant and essential, through the improvement of the municipal road network.

Similarly to the results observed in the municipality of Almeida regarding the indicator “level of visitor satisfaction with access roads”, the concern with the improvement of the municipal road network is aligned with this indicator, as seen in Table 3.

However, taking mobility into account, the indicator “level of visitor satisfaction with the public transport network”, also collected within the PLOWDeR project (see Table 4), can actually make a difference in the global level of visitor satisfaction.

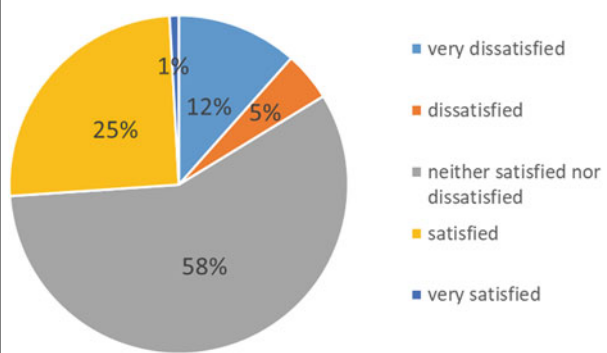
The municipality of Arganil highlighted the idea that the promotion of a territory is based on the diversity of the events offered to the population. Consequently, the municipality has promoted the organisation of several events which include a variety of social, cultural, and sports initiatives.

Therefore, the development of several projects in partnership with the Intermunicipal Community of Coimbra Region (CIM RC) and the Historical Villages of Portugal—Tourism Development Association (AHP-ADT) shows the importance of collaboration between municipalities and other entities for the

Table 4 Level of visitor satisfaction with the public transport network

Concerning the level of visitor satisfaction with the public transport network, the results reflect our expectations for this item. The most common answer among respondents was “neither satisfied, nor dissatisfied” (58%), and only 25% of respondents declared themselves “satisfied”. Similar to the previous item, separating results per village might reveal the origin of such dissatisfaction

Knowing a priori that the transport network is weak, this indicator should serve two purposes: in the immediate term, if the existing network allows visitors to reach a place where car rental is available, and in the future, pushing the improvement of the existing network and monitoring its development



Source: Santos et al. (2019)

sustainable development of these territories, offering their visitors tourist entertainment events which have an impact in the territory. Table 5 shows that there is room for much improvement regarding the “level of visitor satisfaction with tourism animation companies”.

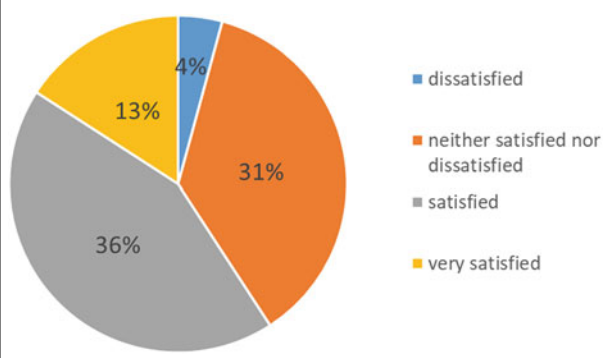
3.4.3 Municipality of Belmonte

In the town hall meeting held in the municipality of Belmonte on 22 December 2017, the party of lights, a Jewish event, was strongly highlighted due to its high levels of participation, respect, and tolerance and the right to be different which define Belmonte. It should be noted that this municipality is investing in the promotion of Jewish tourism to attract international visitors (see Table 6).

The municipality of Belmonte hosts one of the oldest Jewish communities in the world. This fact may have an impact on the type of tourists who visit this Historical Village. The indicators “percentage of overnight stays per tourist type (age group)”, which shows that the predominant age group is 46–55 (see Table 7), and the “percentage of overnight stays per accommodation type”, which includes

Table 5 Level of visitor satisfaction with tourism animation companies

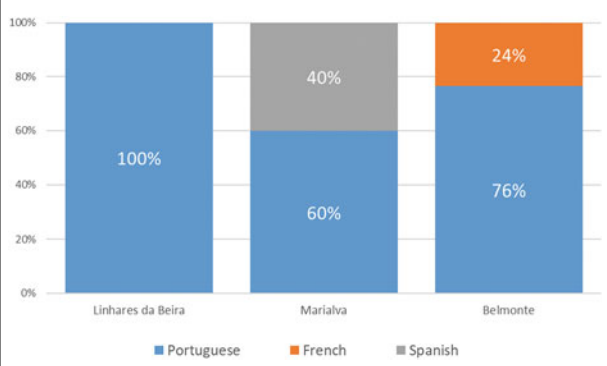
Regarding the level of satisfaction with tourism animation companies, answers are divided between “satisfied” (36%) and “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied” (31%), showing there is room for improvement in this tourism area within the network of the Portuguese historical villages



Source: Santos et al. (2019)

Table 6 Percentage of overnight stays per tourist type (nationality)

According to responding establishments, most tourists who stay overnight are Portuguese, regardless of the village. However, in Marialva 40% of tourists who stay overnight are Spanish, and in Belmonte 24% are French



Source: Santos et al. (2019)

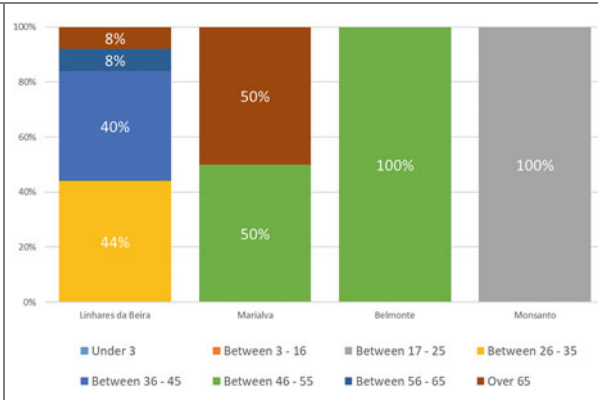
information about the preference of guests for furnished accommodation (see Table 8), could both indicate the existence of a specific type of tourism, such as religious tourism in this case, motivated by faith; this may help investors adapt their offer, taking this detail into consideration.

3.4.4 Municipality of Celorico da Beira

In the town hall meeting held in Celorico da Beira on 20 December 2017, the AHP *Smart Lands* application was discussed. The aim of this application is to create all the conditions needed to make WiFi networks of high quality available in historical centres and public spaces with a higher concentration of tourists. The level of visitor satisfaction with communication networks (mobile network, wireless) is not very high (see Table 9).

Table 7 Percentage of overnight stays per tourist type (age group)

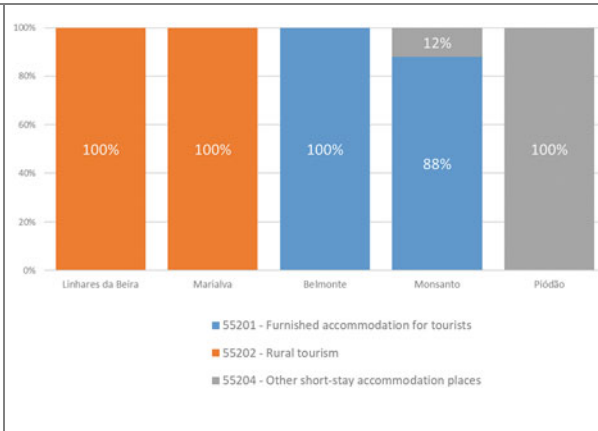
According to the responding establishments, the tourists who stayed overnight in Monsanto, during the analysed period, are within the lowest age group (17–25). By contrast, in Belmonte and Marialva, the tourists who stayed overnight are over 46 years old. In Linhares da Beira, the average age of tourists staying overnight is between 26 and 45.



Source: Santos et al. (2019)

Table 8 Percentage of overnight stays per accommodation type

All respondents who stayed overnight in Linhares da Beira and Marialva chose rural accommodation. In Belmonte, all respondents chose to stay in furnished accommodation for tourists. In Monsanto, 88% of respondents who stayed overnight chose furnished accommodation for tourists, and 12% chose short-stay accommodation. Finally, in Piódão, all respondents stayed in other short-stay accommodation.



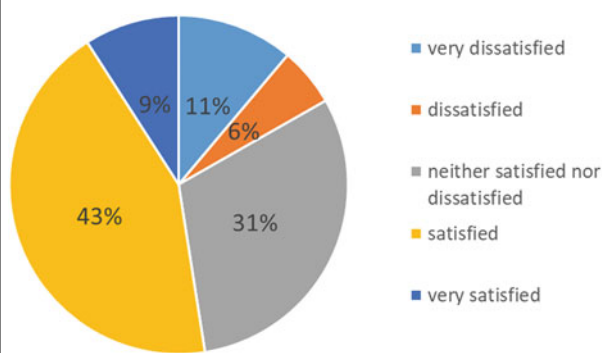
Source: Santos et al. (2019)

On the other hand, the promotion of the network of Portuguese Historical Villages shows that the Internet plays a major role when deciding on a place to visit. Therefore, the possibility of joining a network which provides access to the Internet for promotion purposes makes perfect sense. This can be observed in the indicator “percentage of visitors per source of information regarding the tourism destination (AHP)” collected within the PLoWDeR project (see Table 10).

Concerning natural heritage, another application was also mentioned, contemplating the creation of infrastructures, namely, walking pathways and interpretation trails along the Mondego river. A combination of history and built heritage with contemporary features seems to stand out, thanks to the practice of paragliding.

Table 9 Level of visitor satisfaction with communication networks

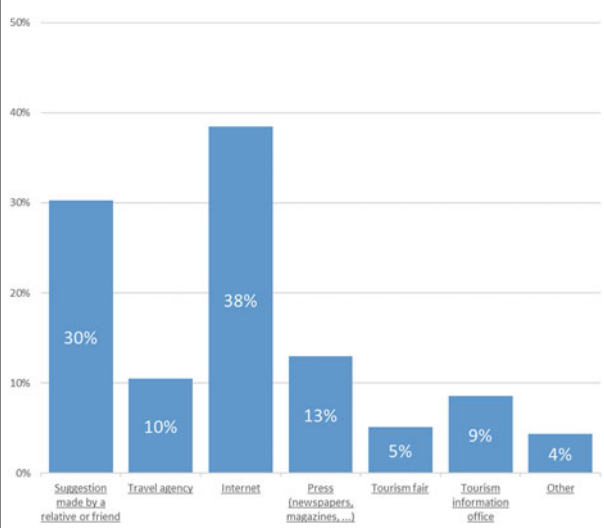
Regarding satisfaction with existing communication networks, answers are varied, even though the majority falls into the “satisfied” (43%) category, followed by 31% of respondents who are “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied”. From the visitor’s perspective, this is clearly an issue which can make a difference in the global satisfaction with the destination, given the variety of answers when compared with global satisfaction



Source: Santos et al. (2019)

Table 10 Percentage of visitors per source of information regarding the tourism destination (AHP)

The number of visitors per source of information regarding the tourism destination is highly varied. However, the largest percentage of respondents report using two main sources of information: “the Internet”, with 38%, and “a suggestion made by a relative or friend”, with 30%. The third most mentioned source of information was “the press (newspapers, magazines, etc.)” with 13%



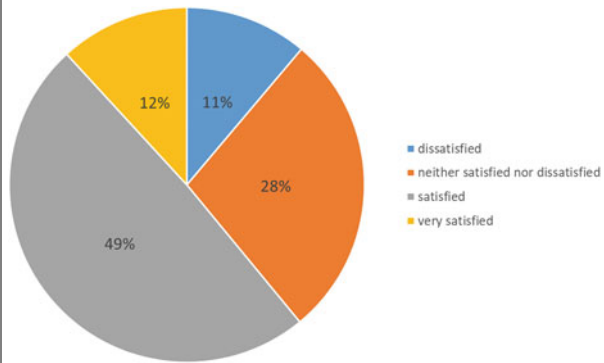
Source: Santos et al. (2019)

The indicators “level of visitor satisfaction with the quality of sports activities practised”, Table 11, and “level of visitor satisfaction with cultural activities”, Table 12, show a relative lack of sports facilities in some villages. The construction of walking pathways and interpretation trails, including cultural and sports infrastructures, may help reverse this situation.

Table 11 Level of visitor satisfaction with the quality of sports activities practised

Most of the responding visitors (61%) are satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of the sports activities practised, a percentage slightly lower than other items

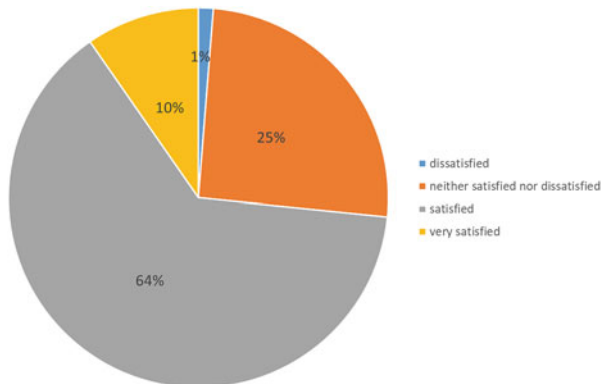
This result may reflect the relative lack of sports facilities in some of the villages of the AHP network, as observed in the field by the research team members



Source: Santos et al. (2019)

Table 12 Level of visitor satisfaction with the quality of cultural activities

Regarding cultural activities, most respondents (74%) said they were satisfied or very satisfied. Even so, 25% of respondents were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. These results suggest that the AHP network should try to understand the reasons underlying these perceptions in order to improve the cultural activities offered



Source: Santos et al. (2019)

3.4.5 Municipality of Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo

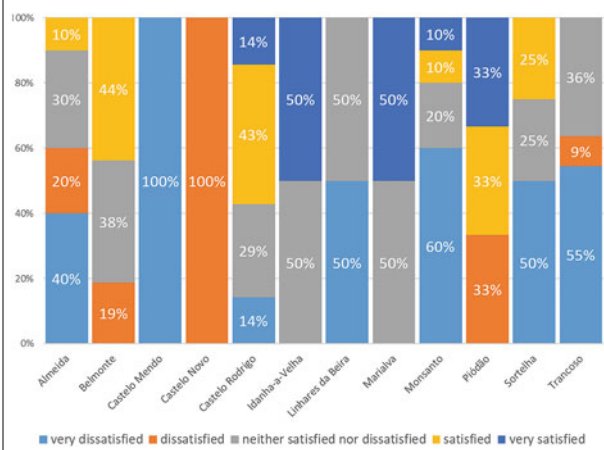
In the town hall meeting held in the municipality of Castelo Rodrigo on 12 December 2017, the promotion of sustainable tourism was reinforced, focussing mainly on people and their quality of life and well-being. To accomplish this goal, it is necessary to implement direct support policies to help producers promote endogenous products, as shown in Table 13, which reflects the indicator “level of satisfaction of local tourism economic agents with the promotion of their business”. There is still a considerable percentage of economic agents who are not satisfied with the promotion of their businesses.

The municipality of Castelo Rodrigo is aware of its invaluable richness and is keen to preserve its cultural, natural, building, religious, and gastronomic heritage through initiatives/events which enhance its promotion/value, as shown in Table 14,

Table 13 Level of satisfaction of local tourism economic agents with the promotion of their business

The level of satisfaction of the responding local tourism economic agents with the promotion of their business is highly variable. The economic agents of Castelo Mendo are “very dissatisfied” with the promotion of their businesses (100%), followed by the economic agents of Monsanto, with 60%, and Trancoso with 55%. All the responding economic agents of Castelo novo are “dissatisfied”

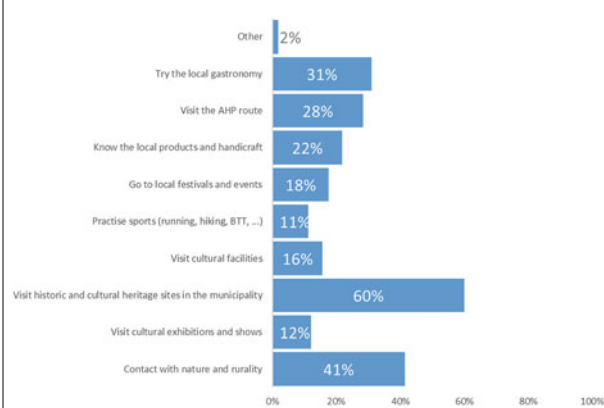
The responding economic agents of Idanha-a-Velha and Marialva are those who show higher percentages of satisfaction (50% said they were “very satisfied”)



Source: Santos et al. (2019)

Table 14 Percentage of visitors attracted by the AHP network according to motivation

The motivation of the responding visitors is essentially connected with the historical and cultural heritage of the council, followed by the fact that visitors want to be close to nature and rurality. It can also be seen that visitors are motivated by the local gastronomy, because of the level of participation in festivals and local parties, including the practice of sports



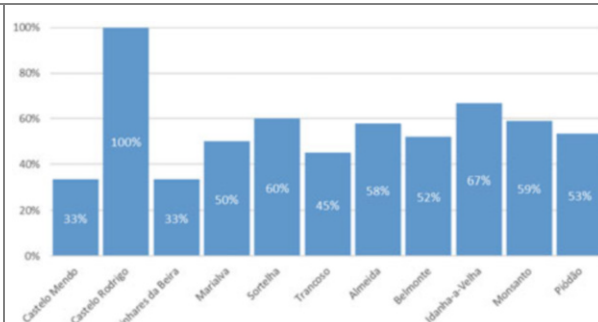
Source: Santos et al. (2019)

indicator of the “percentage of visitors attracted by the AHP network according to motivation”. The vast majority of visitors have different motivations related to historical and cultural heritage, as well as nature and rurality.

In order to attract more tourists who are willing to spend more days in the council and visit different spots of interest, enjoying the variety of local products and the

Table 15 Percentage of collaborators in the tourism sector with knowledge of foreign languages in the tourism destination

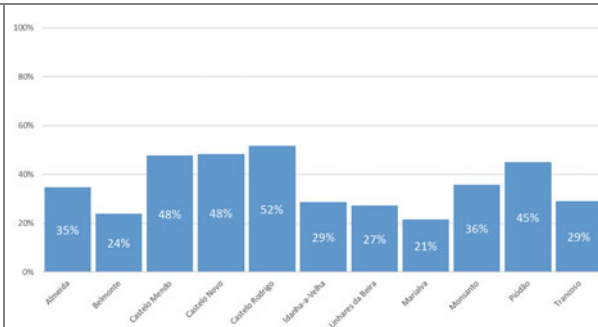
According to the responding entities, all the collaborators in the tourism sector in Castelo Rodrigo have knowledge of foreign languages. However, in Castelo Mendo and Linhares da Beira, only 33% of their collaborators have language skills. Besides these two tourism destinations, Trancoso also has a percentage lower than 50% regarding collaborators with language skills. The remaining villages show values around 50% and 67%



Source: Santos et al. (2019)

Table 16 Percentage of residents who participate actively in tourism activities

According to the responding residents, there is a median percentage of residents who actively participate in tourism activities. The highest percentage is 52% (in Castelo Rodrigo) and the lowest is 21% (in Linhares da Beira and Marialva)



Source: Santos et al. (2019)

landscapes, the municipality decided to proceed with the restoration of some monuments. The indicator “percentage of collaborators in the tourism sector with knowledge of foreign languages in the tourism destination” (see Table 15) and the indicator “percentage of residents who participate actively in tourism activities”, shown in Table 16, may be a reflection of what has been done for the municipality and what can still be done. These are good indicators to support investment decisions.

3.4.6 Municipality of Fundão

In the town hall meeting held on 14 December 2017, the municipality of Fundão highlighted the need to promote strategic sectors, such as culture and tourism, with the contribution of entities and organisations with a relevant role in the development of the region, such as Collective Efficiency Strategies (EEC PROVERE) and AHP-ATD, among others. The creation of territorial brands as a unifying element to foster the promotion of territories is a strategic investment in collective efficiency. This bet can be seen in the indicator “percentage of tourism economic agents who use the AHP brand of the tourism destination” (see Table 17). This indicator shows the percentage of economic agents per village who use the AHP brand. In Castelo Novo, it was not possible to identify the use of the AHP brand, meaning there is still a lot to do in this domain.

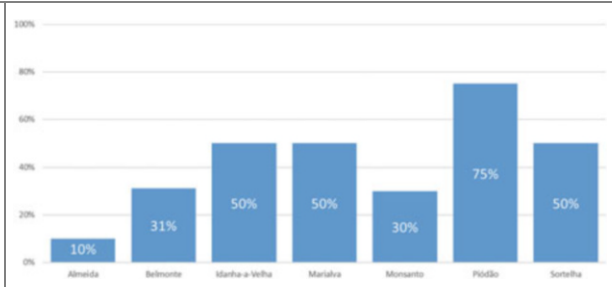
3.4.7 Municipality of Idanha-a-Nova

In the town hall meeting held on 29 December 2017, the municipality of Idanha-a-Nova maintained its mission to build a council centred around people, with the collaboration of local associations and institutions, parishes, businesses, and parish councils.

These partnerships allowed the municipality to submit an application, together with the AHP-ADT, to provide the AHP network with a WiFi infrastructure. This shows the importance given to the promotion of information about a specific place and the benefits it may bring to those who live there. Such relevance can be found in

Table 17 Percentage of tourism economic agents who use the brand of the tourism destination (AHP)

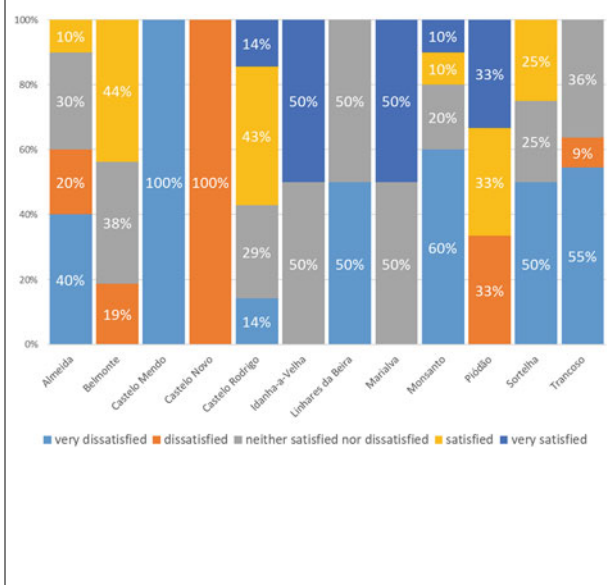
The number of the responding tourism economic agents who use the AHP brand varies depending on the village. Piódão is the tourism destination that uses the AHP brand most (75%). Three other villages use the AHP brand similarly (50%), namely, Sortelha, Marialva, and Idanha-a-Velha. It is also possible to observe that 30% of the economic agents of Monsanto use the AHP brand, with a lower percentage (10%) for the economic agents of Almeida.



Source: Santos et al., (2019)

Table 18 Satisfaction of local tourism economic agents with the promotion of their business

The level of satisfaction of the responding local tourism economic agents with the promotion of their business is highly variable. The economic agents of Castelo Mendo said they were “very dissatisfied” with the promotion of their businesses (100%), followed by the economic agents of Monsanto with 60% and Trancoso with 55%. All the economic agents of Castelo Novo feel “dissatisfied”. The economic agents of Idanha-a-Velha and Marialva are those who show higher percentages of satisfaction (50% reported feeling “very satisfied”)



Source: Santos et al. (2019)

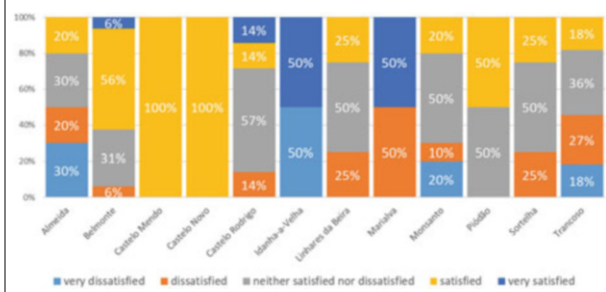
the indicators “level of satisfaction of tourism economic agents with the promotion of their business” (see Table 18), and “level of satisfaction of economic agents who are satisfied with the available information about the tourism destination” (see Table 19), and also the “level of visitor satisfaction with the communication networks” (see Table 9).

These indicators show the level of satisfaction of local tourism economic agents with the promotion of their business, as well as the level of satisfaction of the economic agents with the information available about the tourism destination, and the visitor satisfaction level with the communication networks (mobile network, wireless). As can be observed, regarding the first indicator, economic agents are totally dissatisfied, there is a great deal to be done; regarding the second indicator, they are completely satisfied. In the third indicator, the level of visitor satisfaction is not very high. We can thus conclude that a significant effort has been made concerning communication networks and the information available, but there is still a lot to be done regarding promotion.

The municipality of Idanha-a-Nova aims to be the capital of well-being. However, the indicator “level of satisfaction of residents in the tourism destination with the impact of tourism on the community” (see Table 20) shows that even though the percentage of residents in Idanha-a-Velha who are “satisfied” and “very satisfied” stands at 81%, in Monsanto the percentage stands at 68%. These results suggest that the municipality must maintain its strategy to improve the well-being of the local population.

Table 19 Satisfaction of the economic agents with the information available about the tourism destination

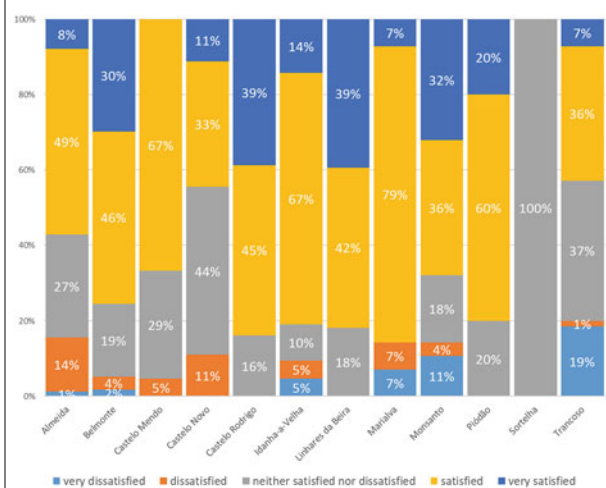
The level of satisfaction of the responding tourism economic agents with the information available about the village is highly variable. Of the economic agents of Idanha-a-Velha and Marialva, 50% are “very satisfied”. The other 50% are either “very dissatisfied”, such as Idanha-a-Velha, or “dissatisfied”, such as Marialva. The responding economic agents located in Castelo Mendo and Castelo Novo are globally satisfied with the information available about the tourism destination, followed by Belmonte, with 56%, and Píodão with 50%



Source: Santos et al. (2019)

Table 20 Level of satisfaction of residents in the tourism destination with the impact of tourism in the community

Most of the responding residents feel satisfied or very satisfied with the impact of tourism, with the exception of Sortelha, where the responding residents feel indifferent to the impact of tourism



Source: Santos et al. (2019)

3.4.8 Municipality of Meda

In the town hall meeting held on 22 December 2017, besides other relevant issues, the municipality of Meda highlighted the fact that some parts of the trail “Grand Route 22” need to be cleared.

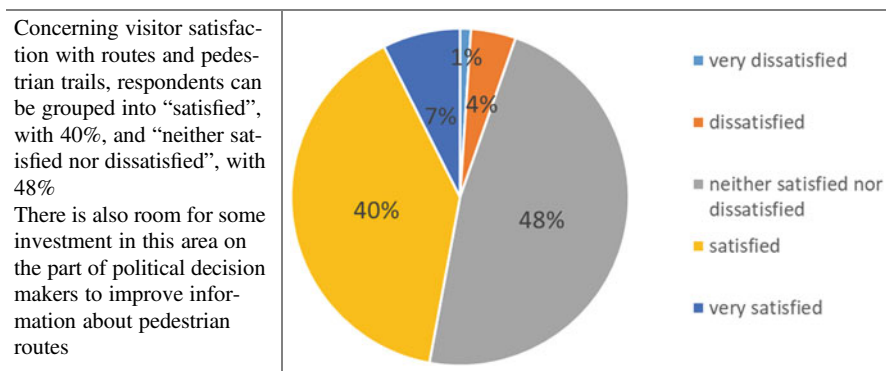
The indicator “level of visitor satisfaction with routes and pedestrian trails” (see Table 21) shows that most of the visitors (53%) do not have a positive opinion. The municipality should thus take measures regarding this domain. The existence of indicators may facilitate decision-making on the part of investors.

3.4.9 Municipality of Sabugal

In the town hall meeting held on 22 December 2017, the municipality of Sabugal identified as its main mission the promotion of the local economy through the valorisation of people and their territory and improvement of service quality, for both local residents and visitors.

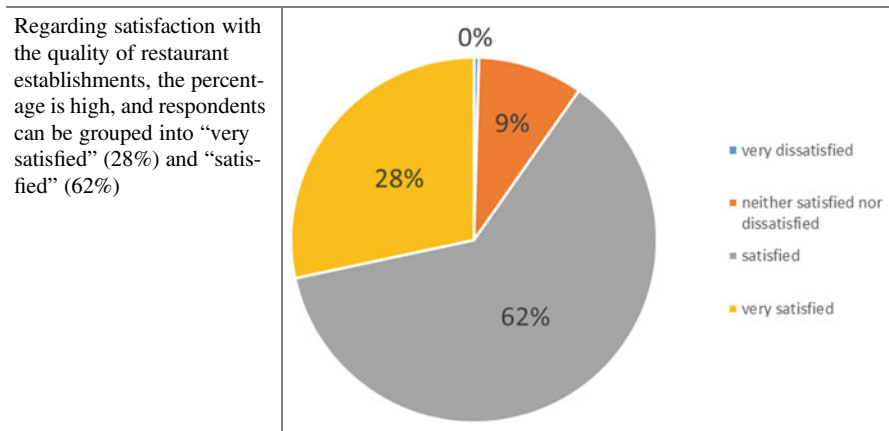
Among others, the following indicators show the levels of visitor satisfaction with the AHP network: “level of visitor satisfaction with the quality of restaurant establishments”; “level of visitor satisfaction with the quality of beverage and similar establishments”; “level of visitor satisfaction with the quality of accommodation”; “level of visitor satisfaction with cultural activities”; and “level of visitor satisfaction with the global experience” (see Tables 22, 23, 24, 25, and 26). Based on objective indicators, the municipality could probably define its investment decision in a more objective manner.

Table 21 Level of visitor satisfaction with routes and pedestrian trails



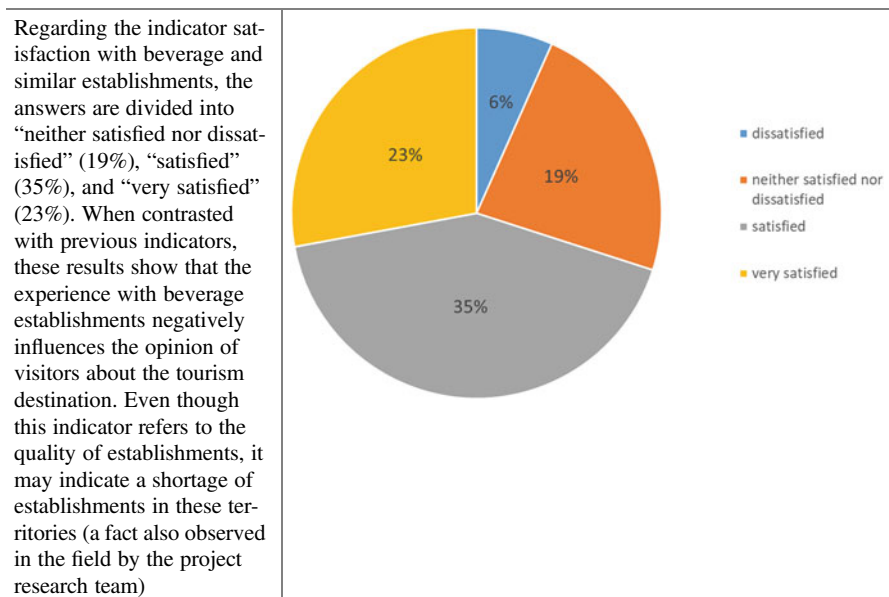
Source: Santos et al. (2019)

Table 22 Level of visitor satisfaction with the quality of restaurant establishments



Source: Santos et al. (2019)

Table 23 Level of visitor satisfaction with the quality of beverages and similar establishments

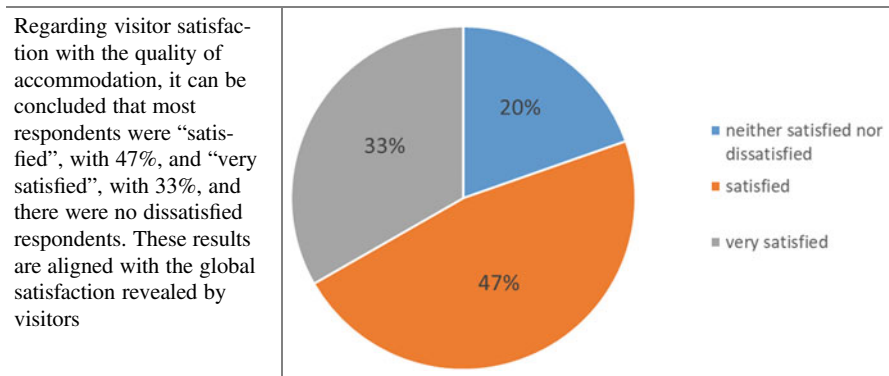


Source: Santos et al. (2019)

3.4.10 Municipality of Trancoso

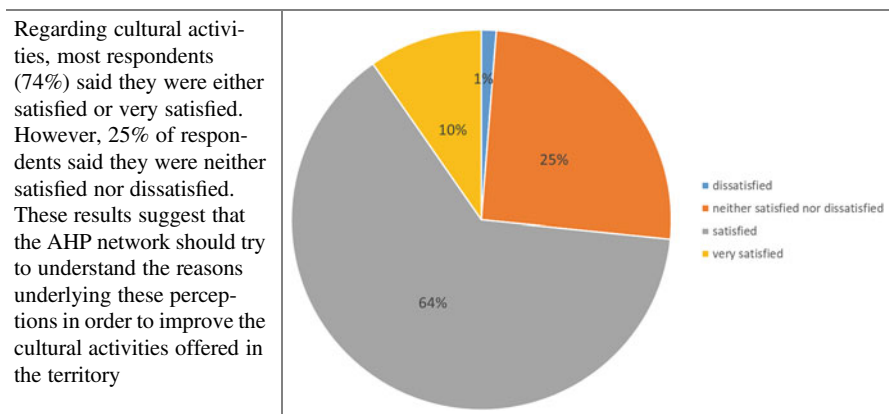
In the town hall meeting held on 14 December 2017, the municipality of Trancoso highlighted the refurbishment projects for important buildings located in the historic centre of Trancoso, within the scope of tourism and heritage. Some buildings were mentioned in the meeting, such as the old National Republican Guard building, the

Table 24 Level of visitor satisfaction with the quality of accommodation



Source: Santos et al. (2019)

Table 25 Level of visitor satisfaction with the quality of cultural activities



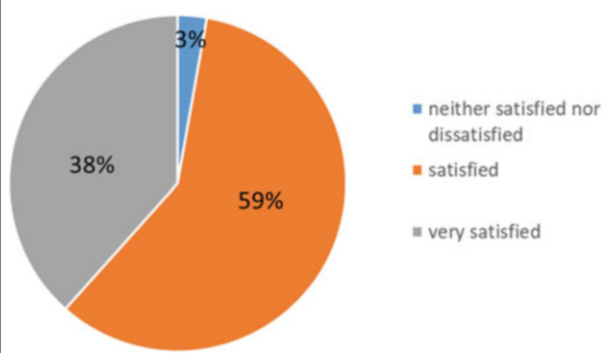
Source: Santos et al. (2019)

Ducal Palace, the Council Building, and the construction of the Centre for Development and Social Innovation. These investment options are supported by the indicator “percentage of visitors attracted by the network of AHP according to motivation” (see Table 27).

Attention was also given to the environment and mobility, highlighting future help and support in the prevention and fight against forest fires, including investment on the improvement of the road network. These options are also supported by the indicators “level of visitor satisfaction with communication networks” (see Table 28) and “level of visitor satisfaction with access roads” (see Table 3), since its improvement allows, generally speaking, a quicker support of the issues and concerns shared in the town hall meeting.

Table 26 Level of visitor satisfaction with the global experience

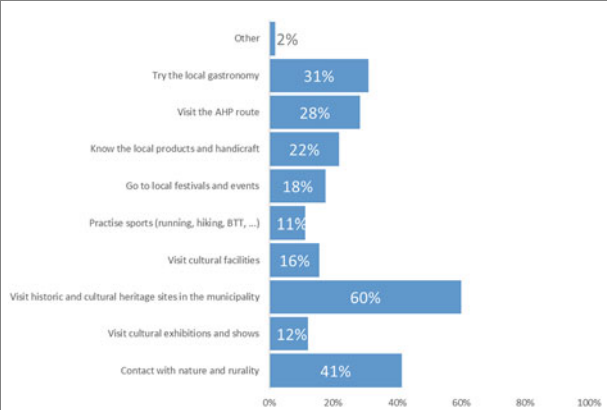
97% of respondents are either satisfied or very satisfied with the global experience of visiting the AHP



Source: Santos et al. (2019)

Table 27 Percentage of visitors attracted by the AHP network according to motivation

The motivation of the responding visitors is essentially connected with the historic and cultural heritage of the council, followed by the fact that visitors want to be close to nature and rurality. There is also great motivation to try the local gastronomy, participate in festivals and local parties, and the practice of sports



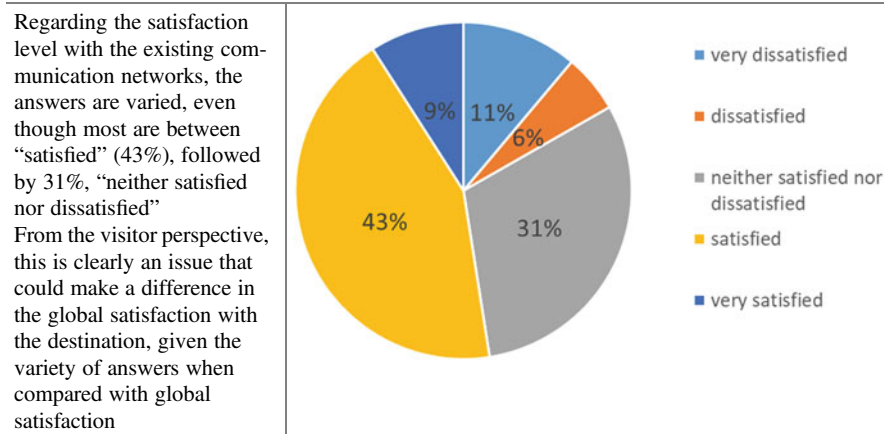
Source: Santos et al. (2019)

4 Final Considerations

Considering the analysis of the minutes of the last town hall meetings held in 2017 in the ten municipalities where the network of the AHP is located, which supported our empirical study, we can conclude that all the municipalities are willing to invest in and improve this network, according to their budgets. They believe this network is a way of increasing the number of visitors to their territories and, consequently, having an impact on the local economy and quality of life, and maintaining the population. Our empirical study provides a detailed analysis of the decisions made by each municipality concerning the main options of the plan and budget for the following year, namely, 2018.

The analysis carried out allows us to conclude that there is a connection between the indicators related to the level of satisfaction with tourism animation companies,

Table 28 Level of visitor satisfaction with the communication networks



Source: Santos et al. (2019)

access roads, communication networks, transport network, and global experience. Hence, the existence of such indicators will contribute to more informed decision-making and, consequently, greater efficiency and efficacy. In the absence of a framework, the decisions made are exclusively based on the experience and intuition of the political decision-makers. Therefore, these municipalities may obtain a significant competitive advantage if they use the framework of indicators proposed by the PLOWDeR project and if they actively contribute to the collection of the data needed to produce indicators on a regular basis over time. This will allow the creation of a database which may facilitate more efficient analyses and better-informed decision-making.

This work was based on the minutes of the last town hall meeting of each of the municipalities comprised by the AHP network. This could be seen as a limitation, since there was no longitudinal analysis, which may offer more detailed interpretations.

As a proposal for future work, we would like to pose a challenge: to carry out a similar analysis for a longer period of time.

The indicators framework, and consequently the analysis developed in this work, could be extended to other situations, such as schist villages, wine villages, etc., considering the fact that these villages are also mainly located in low-density territories. Therefore, this study could be extended to vast territories, allowing various other conclusions to be made about the role of public investment decided by municipalities, in order to understand the relevance of their role in the development of the inner part of the country, mainly low-density territories.

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