

The Strategy of Tourism Products Complementarity in Destination Promotion: Eurocity Chaves-Verín



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Abstract The process of tourism destination governance should result from the link between local authorities, communities, and the business sector, aiming at the sustainable development of the region on the economic, environmental, and social levels. Another essential factor is the complementarity of tourism products, especially when combined with an innovation factor. The Bio-Healthy Plans aim to ensure complementarity in the supply of all the region's resources: mineral-medicinal water, gastronomy, wines, nature, culture, health and well-being, as an innovative product, fostering the “rediscovery” of natural mineral water consumption as part of healthy diets and programs. Tourism governance also has a fundamental role, by preserving local identity and interests in a sustainable way, since sustainability is the basis for the local development of a territory. The main objective of this article is to understand the tourism potential of the border destination Eurocity Chaves-Verín as a health and wellness destination and the importance of the tourism offer complementarity visioning the sustainable governance of a tourism destination. A qualitative methodology was used, by conducting interviews with public and private entities. The literature review discussed concepts of tourism governance, the complementarity of tourism products, tourism and health and wellness activities, and bio-healthy plans. The results show that the thermal offer, despite being perceived as unique in the destination, is not mentioned as the main purpose of the visit in the Destination Tourism Monitoring study. The goal of promoting the destination with the integration of all tourism products offered in the region is consensual. Additionally, the importance of

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involving all stakeholders in the strategic planning, the destination promotion, and the design of innovative tourism products is recognized.

Keywords Tourism products · Healthy plans · Eurocity · Governance · Tourism strategy

JEL Classification Z32

1 Introduction

The border between Spain and Portugal (commonly known by locals as Raya/Raia) was established by the Treaty of Lisbon in 1864 and the additional decision of 1926; in terms of rhetorical organization, the border is represented as a historical fact, where the closeness of the relationship between the region and the border is stated, and the existence of the border in this area has marked the way of life of the different peoples established here throughout history (Prokkola & Lois, 2016). Many studies have recognized the importance of remaining border lines and border culture as tourism attractions and as resources for regional tourism development (Gelbman & Timothy, 2010; Liberato et al., 2018, 2020; Nilsson et al., 2010; Prokkola, 2007, 2010; Timothy, 2001), but the issue of border heritage remains understudied (Prokkola & Lois, 2016).

At the EU's internal borders, municipalities and other actors take advantage of the border location for the development of tourism attractions. Local actors have the primary role in implementing these projects and managing border heritage, but the EU determines the priorities of the initiatives (Amante, 2010; Liberato et al., 2018; Lois, 2013; Prokkola, 2010).

Water, History, Culture, Nature, Gastronomy, Wine, Health and Wellness Tourism, and the complementarity between them can effectively culminate in the growing competitiveness of the destination, being the regions associated with the provision of health and wellness tourism services able to develop complementary tourism products, based on the diversity of endogenous resources present in their territory (Liberato et al., 2020), as is the case of the Eurocity Chaves-Verín (Table 1).

In the study by Liberato et al. (2020), the authors consider that Thermalism, Health, and Wellness; Birdwatching Route; Ham BTT Route; Smuggling Route; Wine and gastronomy; and the Bio-Healthy Plans are the dominant products of the tourism destination. The thermal offer in the region complements the remaining products. The planning of the bio-healthy plans offer also intends to associate and complement all the other offers already planned in the region, enhancing globally the experience of tourism for this destination. Still, the inland tourism can integrate several products and tourism experiences in an articulated way and not only rural tourism products. It can eventually add thermal, nature, adventure, urban, and family tourism, among others, beyond the segmentation of the tourism system itself (Pereiro, 2019). Inland tourism is a strategy of diversification and multifunctionality of many

Table 1 Tourism resources of the eurocity

Nature	Historical-cultural	Gastronomic
-Water -Mountain plateaus of Trás-os-Montes -Tâmega River -Thermal and water route -Tâmega eco-fluvial path -Chaves Cycle Path - <i>Birdwatching</i> Route -Ham mountain bike route -(...)	-Historical, Artistic, Architectural, Cultural Heritage -Thermal Baths (Thermal Heritage) -Festivities and Pilgrimages -Crafts -Camino de Santiago (Way of Saint James) -Smuggling Route -Castles Route -National Road 2 (Km 0) -Urban route of Verín -Urban route of Chaves -Vidago urban route (...)	-Typical Gastronomy/Local Products -Wines from Monterrei and Chaves -Wineries and Gastronomic Fairs -Healthy Bio Plans -(...)

destinations and allows a territorial, social, and economic distribution of tourism benefits.

This research has the following general objective, within the framework of cross-border tourism: to understand the tourism potential of the border destination Eurocity Chaves-Verín as a health and well-being destination. As specific research objectives, it aims to understand if the Eurocity Chaves-Verín is perceived by stakeholders as a destination of Health and Wellness and discusses the creation of bio-healthy plans as a differentiating element of the destination.

The article is divided into three fundamental parts. The literature review discusses the strategic importance of the valorization of border territories as tourism destinations and the tourism resources that should be offered in a complementary way. The methodology presents the interview script applied to stakeholders in the Eurocity Chaves-Verín, and the subchapter of the results presents the different perspectives of the interviewees on the theme in the region. The conclusions frame the results in the literature and discuss prospects for the region, in the context, on the one hand of the complementary supply of tourism products as a strategy for enhancing the tourism experience, and on the other, its enhancement in a development perspective based on the pillars of sustainability in tourism.

2 Literature Review

The border, according to Lacoste (1993), is a line of separation and contact between two or more states, where the existence of a discontinuity between the spaces of each country is manifested, not only due to territoriality, but also due to cultural, religious, or other references; borders have been conceived as institutions that serve to mark the operation of barriers between states, impose control over the flow of

people, regulate border trade, or to indicate the platform and facilitate contact and exchange (Moral-Cuadra et al., 2019).

From a theoretical point of view, the definition of the border is no longer thought of only in terms of administrative lines and macropolitical institutional practices, but also considering the social, political, and cultural processes of border reconstruction and the different visions of the world and the other that come into play in local, regional, national, state, and international settings (Pereiro, 2014)

Understood, thus, the definition of the border, as a symbolic, social, and mental limit, it shows the meaning of the relations between us and the others. It marks not only a geographical space, but also a cultural, social, political, and economic one, affirming a certain national identity, associated with the idea of territorial sovereignty. It represents the exercise of power over a territory, symbolizes, and makes visible the power of the state on the margins creating specific and border cultures, as is the case of the Eurocity Chaves-Verfín: Border that was historically built with its inhabitants trying to shape and adapt themselves strategically, according to shared interests and needs.

One of the characteristics of borders is sometimes its ambiguity as a shared space, which creates hybrid identities, arising from intercultural sharing. These identities intend to present themselves as a unique tourism product in border regions, where the culture and identity of both sides of the border are related in an authentic way (in historical terms), as is the case of the Smuggling Route. This route is constituted as a tourism offer of the region, which geographically involves both sides of the border and the local inhabitants, who provide the experience of the history of their own trials experienced in times past.

In the Iberian case, a third country is identified, between Portugal and Spain, which is the “raia” (border), sculpted by the sculptor time and inhabited by humans who have suffered the wars between states and the often-threatening changes of political regimes. The “raia” is becoming a cultural and natural heritage, and consequently a tourism-culture product (Pereira & Pereiro, 2014), which is characterized by mobility and the experience of crossing borders. Border regions have established a unique cross-border cooperation (CBC), where tourism is the most popular objective of the fifty-four European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) operating in Europe (Studzieniecki, 2016).

Some authors consider that territorial cooperation is the basis of border tourism and its development between countries (Studzieniecki, 2016), which is directly related to the territorial development of the border region, with strategic actions at the level of spatial planning, and in some social and economic dimensions, defining long-term guidelines to reduce the barrier effect and improve territorial capital along the border space (Kurowska-Pysz et al., 2018). In the Strategic Agenda of the Inland Border Territories (2013), it can be read that local cross-border governance implies the search for alternative formulas to manage the problems of citizens and territories located in the border spaces, where the dry stripe of Portugal and Galicia can rely on a reinvention of ruralities in crisis, as a strategic point for the sustainable development of the region, namely for tourism enhancement. With the entry of the two countries

in the European Union, cross-border cooperation has become a development opportunity to compete by cooperating, in which it is assumed the need for this impulse to be carried out by local governments, as strategic nuclei for the development of their territories, and that they also carry it out in the format of cooperation networks and epistemic communities (or learning communities). This governance model aims to promote alternatives to traditional local development (public, private, and associative) and expand the territorial scope and dimension of the networks' strategic alliances and, consequently, the possibilities of participation in regional development projects, community initiatives, and strengthening social cohesion, promoted by the EU. Cross-border governance is presented and discussed as an alternative to the inland territories of Trás-os-Montes, favouring new centralities for the Iberian Northwest, which, complementary to the Euro-region Galicia-North of Portugal, allow to take advantage of the knowledge and cooperation possibilities in the NUT II of Galicia, North of Portugal, and Castilla y León (Eixo Atlántico, 2013). Governance deals with the processes and practices implemented by the political system and the public sector to address the social issues of the public and private spheres. Associated with this, although distinct, the concept of governance is understood as a form of collective awareness about the processes of governance that make decisions for the community. The strategic complementarity between governance and tourism results in Tourism Governance, the process of organizing tourism in which governments, communities, and the business sector of each tourism destination are involved. In tourism, governance essentially takes five forms: associative (association between the several entities), promotion, decentralization, networks, and also tourism policy. For an effective governance, it is necessary to stimulate the perception of social responsibility of the community, so that local people receive and participate in tourism, with the purpose of developing value in their region (Dominguez, 2018). One of the prerequisites for the viability of the network model by Dominguez (2018) is the adoption of a decentralized tourism planning management policy, with the involvement of local authorities to enable them to take decisions in situ, planning tourism where it is going to take place. For such decentralization to happen, it is essential to include "insiders" and "outsiders" in this process, since the borders represented on maps are no obstacle to interaction and reciprocal influence between local authorities and territories (Dominguez, 2018).

The public and private sectors must interact in tourism development according to a model of networked operation, with a global vision in which land borders do not determine or build human walls and ensure that local governance acts at each stage of the tourism process, so as to safeguard local identity and interests—economic, environmental, urbanistic, educational, entrepreneurial, and humanizing. Tourism Governance is, thus, allied to the ideals of sustainable development promoted by the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility, in which the ideal of sustainability is seen as a key to the local development of a territory, as well as to the preservation of its resources and the well-being of its population.

In the study conducted by Moral-Cuadra et al. (2019) with the objective of knowing the behaviour of border visitors in border destinations, it was found that there is a positive influence of border tourists' attitudes on the perceived value in the

border destination, as well as their satisfaction is positive with the border destination, and that there is a positive influence of border tourist satisfaction on their loyalty to the destination.

3 Methodology

The methodology used in this research includes two moments. It begins with the literature review, i.e., the theoretical study of the existing specific literature to understand the themes and concepts necessary for the development of the study. This is followed by the development of the model used for application to the case study: Eurocity Chaves-Verín. In the present case, the qualitative methodology was employed, using the exploratory scientific research technique throughout semi-structured interviews (Table 2).

Twelve interviews were conducted with representatives of destination management entities and companies operating in the tourism sector and in the Eurocity Chaves-Verín region (see Tables 3 and 4).

Table 2 General objective and specific objectives

General objective	Specific objectives
To understand the tourism potential of the border destination Eurocity Chaves-Verín as a health and wellness destination	1.1: Understand if the Eurocity Chaves-Verín is perceived by <i>stakeholders</i> as a health and well-being destination 1.2: Understand the creation of the bio-healthy plans as a differentiating element of the destination

Table 3 Interviews with the destination management entities

No. interviewee	Entity	Representative	Interview date	Interview duration
E1	CIM Alto Tâmega	First secretary	18/06/2020	In-Person 31:35
E2	Eurocity Chaves-Verín	Executive secretary	24/06/2020	In-Person 53:29
E3	Municipality of Chaves	Vice president	10/07/2020	In-Person 01:07:02
E4	Chaves Tourism Office	Councillor for tourism	10/07/2020	In-Person 40:05
E5	Monterrei Tourism Office	Information technician	14/08/2020	Written reply
E6	Municipality of Verín	Vice president	22/09/2020	Via zoom 18:20
E7	Tourism Office of Verín	Councillor for tourism	22/09/2020	Via zoom 14:24

Table 4 Interviews conducted with companies at the destination

No. Interviewee	Entity	Representative	Interview date	Interview duration
E8	Hotel Premium Chaves	Director	26/06/2020	In person 15:40
E9	Authentic	Manager	06/07/2020	Via Zoom 26:42
E10	Petrus Hotel	Director	10/07/2020	In person 42:13
E11	Parador de Monterrei	Director	28/09/2020	Written reply
E12	Parador de Verín	Director	28/09/2020	Written reply

4 Results

The interviewees are unanimous when they refer that the Vision of the destination is the thermal water. A joint work is being developed on both sides of the border, which provides a unique destination for health and well-being, based on excellence.

“Today we have managed to get the Municipality of Verín and the Municipality of Chaves to work together, they have a solid strength. There was once a division in what had to do with strategies and policies. Today the ambition is joint, it is collective” (E6). “The Eurocity coordinates the territories of Chaves and Verín with the brand image and offer for the territory” (E5). “We want to continue to have a destination positioning that crosses the border, in international markets, because we have tourism products such as golf and thermal tourism, which captivate tourists all year round, and we want to position the region as a safe destination, wellness, that will be well treated and that will have all safety issues ensured. We have many tourism products of excellence. To achieve excellence is not from one day to the next” (E2). “Slogan 25 h, one destination two countries, the idea of promotion is very focused on health, spas, trails, nature, and contemplation, and it is not currently focused on golf, gambling (casino), or museum visits. At this moment, it is focused on the water in its route and in complementary products” (E3). “I would say that for Alto Tâmega our vision is water and well-being territory. In practice, it is to recover the reasons why the territory was always visited since the historical phase of the Romans. People came to the territory because they recovered energy and they improved their health conditions. If we look at more recent times, Vidago and Pedras Salgadas also had this aspect of healing and promotion of well-being and health. So, what we want is that the territory is seen in this perspective, as a territory that promotes the well-being of people in its different aspects. The tourist will have this vision, and we should increasingly empower the actors so that it works in an integrated way; we, intermunicipal community, organize the offer in terms of systematization of products and then we should achieve the promotion everywhere, presence at fairs, video production, and sponsorship of many activities” (E1).

“Everything that is done in tourism must be done in a transversal way, we have the potential of the waters, but to the waters we must add other tourism resources in order to attract visitors” (E7). “It is a work that is being done. There is a perspective

throughout the region to design products very associated with wellness in a perspective of quality and more comprehensive than what would be wellness and treatment only. In a perspective of wellness promotion, it implies getting everything that is bio. Therefore, at different levels, we have this type of positioning and so does the Eurocity” (E1). “Thermal tourism is one of the most potentials in the region, so all potentialities are welcome for its development” (E5).

There are several entities working in the process of design and creation of products in the destination and territory, but the interests are common, “all aim at promoting tourism” (E3). And, at this moment, the main tourism product is the Thermal.

A variety of attractions in the destination and dominant products enhance the involvement of tourists and prolong their stay. “There is a wide variety of attractions from culture, history, sports, art, . . . , the idea of generating content, aims precisely at prolonging the stay, more attraction, and loyalty. The dominant products are the water and the treatments offered in the spas, complementing them with the gastronomic culture” (E12). “We could do more work, we need to bet more on some points such as nature tourism, and we focus on what is already a tradition, here in the hot springs and in Verín at Carnival, but Nature Tourism should be better used; to do mountain bike trials and canoeing, there should be a greater commitment” (E8). “There is a variety of attractions, but there is no one to enhance the activities that prolong the tourists’ stay, the dominant products are the thermal spas, gastronomy, and culture” (E9). “Many, in all segments, nature, culture, gastronomy, thermal, and active tourism, we have all the segments in the region, but they are not yet converted into products, designed in order to enhance the tourism experience” (E10).

It is considered by several interviewees that it would be positive to move towards an integration of promotion of the territory, i.e., to integrate all the municipalities of Chaves and Ourense, “within the strategies of the Eurocity” (E6) “expand the Eurocity EGTC to a Euro-region, or a Euro-regional Alto Tâmega Ourense EGTC” (E1).

The cooperation also exists in terms of the involvement of local business entities “we involve all the tourism companies” (E2). However, they consider that there is still a lot of work to be done and have difficulty in understanding the strategy adopted, even considering that “each one works on an aspect of an entire destination”.

It would be necessary to “improve promotion and communication at the destination, create and update tourism products” (E2), “invest in training the actors” to promote the destination, in a quality destination, and “it is necessary to know how to sell this quality in international markets”, which is a difficulty in the destination. The entities have difficulty in entering the large agencies to sell their products, so that “the help of the regional institutions would be necessary” (E9).

5 Conclusion

According to Cunha (2007), tourism attractions are mainly based on nature, history, and culture, but it is the natural elements or factors that mostly originate the structuring and organization of tourism destinations, which is distinctive for the Eurocity Region, for its high landscape value, and natural factors such as water. The term “wellness” was first defined as a state of optimal physical, mental, and social well-being. With the boom of wellness tourism in recent years, the diversification and quality standards of this product have increased tremendously. Standards that the destination highlights with an offer of unparalleled quality. The Eurocity has nine hot springs and a river (Tâmega) that crosses the region as an axis of union between the two sides of the border. A region of significant renown on the European continent, recognized due to its current use of water, either for treatment or as bottled water, being the most prominent hydro-mineral springs, Cabreiroá, Sousas, Fontenova, Fonte do Sapo, Caldelañas, Campilho, Vidago, Caldas de Chaves, and Vilarelho da Raia.

Wellness tourism has, thus, become a comprehensive concept that includes the following dimensions: self-esteem, exercise, spirituality, stress management, love, nutrition, emotion, friendship, self-care, work, social identity, local safety, and institutional and personal concern. And it covers some specific activities such as health promotion treatments, environment, healthy diet, relaxation, social activities, and the experience of unique tourism resources of the chosen destination. The wellness value of tourism destinations should be promoted through marketing strategies so that consumers begin to recognize the importance of healthier lifestyles. This recognition will lead to greater demand for those services and ways of being that contribute positively to their well-being and consequently to greater benefits for those destinations. Tourism can, therefore, be promoted as a healthy way of life, with positive benefits for tourists and residents (Pyke et al., 2016).

Wellness tourism allows achieving a balance between body and mind, and individuals achieve their psychological needs through leisure activities. Leisure activities bring obvious benefits to personal well-being as they can help reduce the pressure of life and work. The diversity of leisure experiences influences the quality of life and life satisfaction; leisure experience can improve life satisfaction and expand circles. In this respect, leisure can be considered a source of psychological well-being (Chen & Li, 2020). Happiness is an important psychological indicator of people’s quality of life. It can be assessed in terms of life satisfaction and positive and negative emotions on the psychological level. Happiness is the subjective degree of evaluating the overall satisfaction of individuals. Happiness also includes two dimensions, cognition and emotion (Chen & Li, 2020).

The basic research question proposed in this work was: Does the Eurocity Chaves-Verín identify itself as a Health and Well-being destination? Yes, it is identified, it has natural resources for that. It is seen by the agents of the destination as the main product, and, at this moment, there is a clear bet for the development of the destination. “Thermal tourism is one of the most potential in the region” (E5). The unique and differentiating aspect of the destination is the thermal wealth, it is inimitable, it is not

possible to replicate, and it is the nature that offers “The only one is the water, we have water at 76 °C, no one else does, so it is incomparable” (E1). “There are several differentiating aspects such as the thermal, gastronomic, and patrimonial wealth” (E5). “I would say that for Alto Tâmega our vision is the territory of water and well-being. In practice, it is to recover the reasons why the territory was always visited since the historical phase of the Roman occupation. People came to the territory because they recovered energy, they improved their health conditions” (E1).

Considering the Specific Objective 1.1: To understand if the Eurocity is perceived by stakeholders as a Health and Well-being destination, the interviewees consider the Health and Well-being tourism product as a differentiating element of the destination. Although there are many other very interesting tourism products, this one has the ability to make the connection between them. “Four Products: Thermal Water, Gastronomy and Wine, Nature, and Immaterial Cultural Product (Smuggling) and Material (Fortifications, Castles, and Fortresses) (E2). The interviewees refer that “the thermal issue is perceived as unique in the destination” (E9). “We intend the territory to be seen as a health and well-being destination” (E1). “It is the thermal tourism product. Chaves has the second largest thermal spas in the country, we have a very large mineral-medicinal water thermal component” (E1). “Thermal spas, tourists understand perfectly” (E10). However, Health and Wellness Tourism is not mentioned as the main purpose of the visit in the Destination Tourism Monitoring Study.

Specific Objective 1.2: Understand the creation of the bio-healthy plans as a differentiating element of the destination. The bio-healthy plans are created around the richness of the mineral-medicinal waters existing in the region. They promote the alliance of the practice of healthy lifestyle habits with the ingestion of waters, a healthy diet, and the practice of physical exercise. In the full promotion of a healthy body and mind, they can be implemented “at the destination or at home” (E2). Thus, they confer the characteristic of a differentiating product, since it includes water, local products, and local cooking methods, adding, in a differentiating perspective, the learning process at the destination and the continuing practice at home.

Allied to all the differentiating products of the region, to the historical-natural heritage, and to the historical-cultural heritage, we cannot fail to mention that the destination under study is a border destination. The tourism development of the Euro-region does not include only the attractiveness. It is necessary to aggregate and involve the agents and the local population in order to define development strategies of a border and cross-border tourism that is oriented to the Euro-regional, Iberian, European, and global markets (Pereira & Pereiro, 2014).

Being a border destination increases its attractiveness and competitiveness and provides more differentiation components. “Our differentiation is border tourism, border products, which allow tourists to know two countries in one destination, enjoy 25 h in one day in the Eurocity. This trip in time, by the difference in time zone, allows experiences that are not possible anywhere else as the case of the Smuggling Route, or the possibility of taking a route through the mineral-medicinal springs, uniting the thermal part of two countries around their springs, as differentiating products” (E2). Thus, borders and adjacent regions often function as popular tourism destinations and

attractions, and many regional tourism economies are based almost entirely on the existence of a political boundary (Timothy & Teye, 2009). This is most evident when borders themselves become an attraction and when they create unique advantages on opposite sides that make borders an important destination (Timothy et al., 2016).

“Border destination, the complementarities and contrasts that exist in this border destination” (E2).

For border tourism to be materialized, it is necessary that an integration process occurs between territories, with tourism appearing as a significant part of this integration, creating positive results for both regions: employment opportunities, improvement of the local economy, increase in the standard of living of the local population, and creation of new market opportunities (Liberato et al., 2018).

For this reason, the process of tourism governance of a destination should be the result of links between local authorities, communities, and the business sector, with a view to the sustainable economic, environmental, and social development of the region. The destination competitiveness must include its conservation. The governance models should be joint, providing for joint promotion, tourism policies, vision, image, and brand, with a view to positioning the destination in a unique and innovative way in the market and ensuring its competitiveness, within the specificity of its supply.

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