Monitoring tourism destinations: the challenge for a collaborative network: The case of SMAT

Francisco Dias[a], Gonçalo Gomes[b], Beatriz Dinis[c], Mariana Reis[d], Anita Deus[e], and Dulcineia Ramos[f], Ana Sofia Viana[g]

[a, c, d, e, f, g] *Polytechnic Institute of Leiria, Centre of Tourism Applied Research (CITUR)*
francisco.dias@ipleiria.pt

[b] *Turismo Centro de Portugal*
goncalo.gomes@turismodocentro.pt

Abstract

"If you can't measure it, you can't manage it". This aphorism comes to our mind whenever we are concerned with the sustainable tourism planning and management of a destination. Indeed, without an efficient monitoring system engaging all stakeholders and covering all the tourism activities, it's impossible to perform a rigorous assessment of tourism impacts. In order to achieve the twofold goals of tourism management is necessary to practice: competitiveness and sustainability. The goal of this paper is to present the Tourism Observatory of Central Portugal (TOCP) and the strategies used to surpass the most evident difficulties during the initial stage of data collecting process implementation. The relevant eight attributes to this Observatory can be described, namely by: the frequency of the barometers, the information availability, the reliability of the methods, the geographical and sectorial scopes, the usefulness of the produced information as a support to forecasting and innovation and the guarantee of a long-term perspective. Moreover, this paper describes the methods of data collecting, the functionalities of an online platform, the structure of stakeholders' network and its coordination, and the relevant indicators that are assessed. Although the European Tourism Indicators System (ETIS) stands as the basic reference for the TOCP, some relevant adaptations were introduced, like for instance in cases when the official institutions do not have the statistical data required for the core indicators. In particular, the lack of statistical data seems more evident at local/municipal level. In consequence, the monitoring model described in this paper presents and discusses the approach adopted to deal with lack of statistical data. This approach consists of generating a rhizomatic and collaborative network of tourism stakeholders, each of them providing specific inputs to the monitoring system.

Keywords: tourism observatory, monitoring system, indicators, tourism destinations

1. Introduction

The knowledge on the complex realities of tourism is a priority when it comes to the planning and management of tourism destinations. As Machado (2017) mentioned, more and more there is a need for monitoring tourism activity, based on reliable and broad indicators, throughout a regular listening of all stakeholders (tourists/visitors, companies, local community and autarchies), in order to suppress the lack of information. That is why the implementation of a Regional Tourism Observatory will be an important support tool for destination management.

Tourism destinations need structures that can support, update and define criteria to position them on the market and to help in the decision-making process. It also needs qualified professionals as well as technological support to facilitate the management and treatment of the information (Valero, Díaz, González & Novo, 2013).

Furthermore, the indicators which are the base for monitoring tourism activity will help identify the weaknesses and strengths of the tourism industry. Once that is done, the next step is strategic planning – the guiding line for tourism development –, because it defines the course of action, with

strategies to achieve a set of predefined goals. Therefore, a Regional Tourism Observatory (RTO) must play an important role as an element that promotes different actions on behalf of tourism growth.

In the recent past, several tourism planning paradigms have emerged and they go beyond the traditions of urban and regional planning. They can be mainly divided into 3 types of planning: community-based planning, with the definition of goals and local development actions; incremental planning, for high levels of predictability and flexibility; and collaborative planning, where all stakeholders are allowed and encouraged to participate in the decision-making process (Timothy, 1998). In this paper, it is explored the tendency for a collaborative planning paradigm.

In times of extreme competition among tourism destinations, it is essential to aim for an integrative tourism development, where the only possible successful scenario is through cooperation between all participants in the supply area (Miočić, Razović & Klarin, 2016). However, this is also hard to accomplish, because, as Edgell (1990) pointed out, "there is no other industry in the economy that is linked to so many diverse and different kinds of products and services as is the tourism industry".

A collaborative approach, based on networking, may allow a valuable consolidation of best practices, resulting in improving the performance and profitability of all stakeholders. So, they should be encouraged to form clusters and to compete and cooperate in order to exchange and produce knowledge and hence to raise the overall competitiveness of the destination (Baggio, Scott & Cooper, 2010).

There are various definitions of a network. The simple and general definition states that a "network is a set of items, which we will call vertices or sometimes nodes, with connections between them, called edges" (Newman, 2003: 167). Hall (2005: 179) defines a network in a business context as "an arrangement of inter-organisation cooperation and collaboration". In a tourism destination context, it can be said that tourism is a network industry par excellence (Scott, Cooper & Baggio, 2008) and because of that, interdependence is essential (Mill, Morrison, 1985; Leiper, 1990; Bjork & Virtanen, 2005; Lazzeretti & Petrillo, 2006; Żemła, 2016) and collaboration as well as cooperation between different organisations within a destination create the tourism product (Pechlaner, Abfalter & Raich, 2002; Fyall and Garrod, 2005; Żemła, 2016).

2. Advantages and difficulties in the implementation of observatories

There are different models of observatories: national, regional and local. In this paper, it's presented the case of the Tourism Observatory of Central Portugal (TOCP).

In the world, there are various observatories related to the tourism industry, but not all of them manage the same information and also not all of them process data in the same way. Mainly, it depends on the conditions, interests and characteristics of the distinctive destinations (Valero *et al*., 2013).

The implementation of a tourism observatory brings many advantages to destination management such as (Valero *et al*., 2013):

- Updated information on the main variables of the tourism destination offer;
- Knowledge about the characteristics of each visitor;
- Knowledge about tourism trends, both national and international;
- Evaluation of the tourism quality and visitors' levels of satisfaction about services related to tourism or in general;
- Stablishes comparisons with other destinations;
- Strengthens the points that constitute weaknesses for the destination.

These advantages enhance the role of the tourism observatory as a main support tool to tourism development and diversification of the tourism offer. The common goal of a tourism observatory is to improve the competition and positioning of a destination and its products and by assessing this information, it is possible to have a complete system that both the tourism business and local communities can use to their own benefit.

However, despite these advantages, it is also known that this process is still far from achieving the wished results, due to the following factors (Varra, Buzzigoli & Loro, 2012):

- The lack of social dialogue in the destinations;

- The social operators' unawareness of a destination vision as an integrated product of material and immaterial resources;
- The difficulty in creating a non-hierarchical governance of destination development processes;
- The management of relationships between stakeholders.

The problem here lies is the lack of an overall view of the socialization phase or public involvement and the phase of knowledge combination. We can't see the phases of the cycle as a separate management. It is necessary to integrate tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge so the cycle can be completed. There is also a lack of an effective use of information and communication technology tools (ICT) which could support and complete this process (Varra *et al.*, 2012).

3. Case studies

Before creating and implementing a tourism observatory, it may help to study other cases considered good examples for benchmarking. One of those cases is in the Tuscany region. This region is a part of the Network of Tourism Destination Observers that involves European regions, associations and universities and its main goal is to allow a harmonious and long lasting development of tourism.

Since 2007, many regions have been working together to build a significant network to concretely implement the principles of sustainability and competitiveness. In order to test these principles, the Tuscany region has promoted the establishment of 50 tourist destination observatories to create and test the NECSTouR[1] model. In this model, there are 10 pillars/objectives which will find their concrete application through social dialogue and participatory processes. They are the following (Magliulo, 2013):

- To limit the environmental impact of transport
- To increase the quality of life of residents
- To increase the quality of employment
- To reduce the seasonality of tourism flows
- To protect the cultural heritage
- To protect the environmental heritage
- To protect the identity of destinations
- To reduce and optimize the use of natural resources and water in particular
- To reduce and optimize energy consumption
- To reduce and manage waste

Magliulo (2013) states that these pillars are just some of the factors of competitiveness and sustainability of a territory and that a destination may have achieved them and still not be competitive, since competitiveness also depends on other factors, such as quality and prices of the goods and services offered. So he proposed an eleventh pillar – price competitiveness.

Essentially, these observatories will collect and select a series of statistic indicators to create an integrated system of information that will allow the monitoring and comparison of sustainable competitiveness of the different sub-regions of Tuscany and will support in destination management decisions (Magliulo, 2013).

There are also the case studies of Côte D'Azur, Rimini and the Portuguese National Tourism Observatory[2]. These cases were analysed and compared by Brandão (2007) and the comparison was based on three aspects: formal, political and technical.

The formal aspect, analyse the structure and organization of the observatories (Table 1).

A collaborative approach is also mentioned here, enhancing the fact that cooperation between stakeholders is a key-tool to tourism development and it must be encouraged.

[1] Network of European Regions for a Sustainable and Competitive Tourism

[2] The Portuguese National Tourism Observatory was created by resolution of the Council of Ministers nº 64/2000. However, it was extinguished in 2003 (resolution of the Council of Ministers nº148/2003). It is analyzed in this paper because of its model, which is conceptually interesting.

Table 1. Formal aspect of the observatories

Formal Aspect - Structure and Organization		
National Tourism Observatory	Côte D'Azur	Rimini
Independent structure articulated with the Ministry of Economics. It has an Executive Technical Unit that handles management, monitoring and investigation. The operationalization of activities is handled by Regional Observatory Units, education institutions and autarchies. The analysis is handled by the National Barometer of Tourism.	Structure managed by the Tourism Commission of the French Riviera. Associated, institutionally and financially, with the Region of Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, the Alpes-Maritimes General Council, the Departmental Union of Touristic Offices and with the National Park of Mercantour. Technically, cooperates with the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies, with the Chamber of Commerce of Nice-Côte d'Azur, professional associations and specialized consultancy offices.	Sectorial structure integrated in the Provincial Observatory System. The information is handled by the Service of Statistics with the collaboration of the touristic offices. Some studies are made in partnerships with other entities such as the Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Crafts and Agriculture, Universities, etc.

Source: Brandão (2007)

The political aspect explains the strategy and goals of these observatories (Table 2).

Table 2. Political aspect of the observatories

Political Aspect – Strategy and Goals		
National Tourism Observatory	Côte D'Azur	Rimini
Guided by 4 vectors: watch to know – knowledge; watch to evaluate; know and evaluate to parameterize; and watch, evaluate and parameterize to inform and communicate. <u>General goals</u>: • Greater knowledge about the tourism industry to support decisions; • Creation of a debate forum; • Diffusion of indicators and statistical variables; • Establishment of a national information network with a regional basis to support competitiveness; • Cooperation and partnerships between the private and public sector. <u>Specific goals</u>: • Analysis and diffusion of produced information to the several entities; • Monitor the sectors' evolution and delineation of short-term trends; • Execution of specific studies;	<u>General goals</u>: • Dynamic vision of tourism through a permanent observation system; • Production of information adapted to the regional reality; • Make an effort to accompany or anticipate the needs for information; • Create a statistical system that observes evolution and trends and considers the strategic needs of the destination; • Strategic and operational connection with DMO's; • Ensure reliability, pertinence, coherence and clarification of the data; • Reading and interpreting support system of the statistical data to incentive actions based on statistic information. <u>Specific goals</u>: • Support in national surveys as long as it is permanent and supplies a satisfactory regional analysis;	<u>General goals</u>: • Permanent record activity of phenomenon, systematically and continuously, through a rational and functional organization of the information; • Satisfaction of the information demand; • Diffusion and update of information on a regular basis to support decisions; • Cooperation with public administration and local actors; • Sensitize the citizens and companies to provide the data needed to make new information; • Creation of a management system of data; • Ensure efficiency in public administration, which is essential to the development and decisive to secure citizens' quality of life.

• Organization and participation of seminars and conferences; • Cooperation with public and private entities; • Diffusion of information on a regular basis.	• Adoption of international standards to ensure methodological coherence with national and international data; • Application of complementary surveys if necessary; • Systematic crossing of all data from surveys to achieve an exhaustive and coherent vision.	

Source: Brandão (2007)

Through this analysis is fair to say that the main goal of a tourism observatory is to produce information and knowledge of the tourism industry which will support the process of decision-making and management, in both public sector and private. Therefore, the collaborative approach is once more a key-tool for destination management. It is also important to monitor the evolution and trends in the tourism industry as well as monitor the need of information of the all stakeholders, in order to fill the existing blanks.

The technical aspect refers to the data these observatories collect (Table 3).

Table 3. Technical aspect of the observatories

Technical Aspect – Data		
National Tourism Observatory	Côte D'Azur	Rimini
Did not produce statistical data that could be used to compare with the other case studies.	Mainly focused on accommodation, air transportation, offer and demand of cultural, recreational and other leisure services and food and beverages. They also produce information about secondary homes.	Mainly focused on accommodation. The services of food and beverages, transportation, tour operators, travel agencies, tour guides, rent-a-car, recreation and other leisure services were totally neglected in their statistic operations.

Source: Brandão (2007)

The technical component of the observatories is very important and it is vital to access the produced information, consistency, validity and reliability of the data. However, it is conclusive that these entities based their evaluation mainly on the dynamics related to accommodation. This is something that happens a lot in the tourism industry and that with the Tourism Observatory of Central Portugal model is possible to repair.

4. Tourism Observatory of Central Portugal (TOCP)

The Tourism Observatory of Central Portugal is an independent service of the Regional Tourism Authority of Central Portugal, developed in collaboration with universities and polytechnic institutes of the region, such as the Polytechnic Institute of Leiria (IPL). The process initiated in 2017.

4.1. Vision and Mission

This Observatory wants to be a reference in terms of reputation and excellence in data collection and monitoring of the tourism activity of Central Portugal, contributing for the decision-making process based on knowledge. Its mission is to promote the knowledge on tourism activity (analysis, diffusion and progress monitoring), independently and responsibly, ensuring the reputation of its technical-scientific production, in order to contribute to the increase of competitiveness and to the development of a sustainable tourism in the region Central Portugal.

4.2. Organizational model

The TOCP will function as a network, open to the collaboration of all entities. Its organization model assumes the collaboration of business associations, through a Business Advisory Council and all of the universities and polytechnic institutes situated in the Central Region, represented in the Scientific Technical Council.

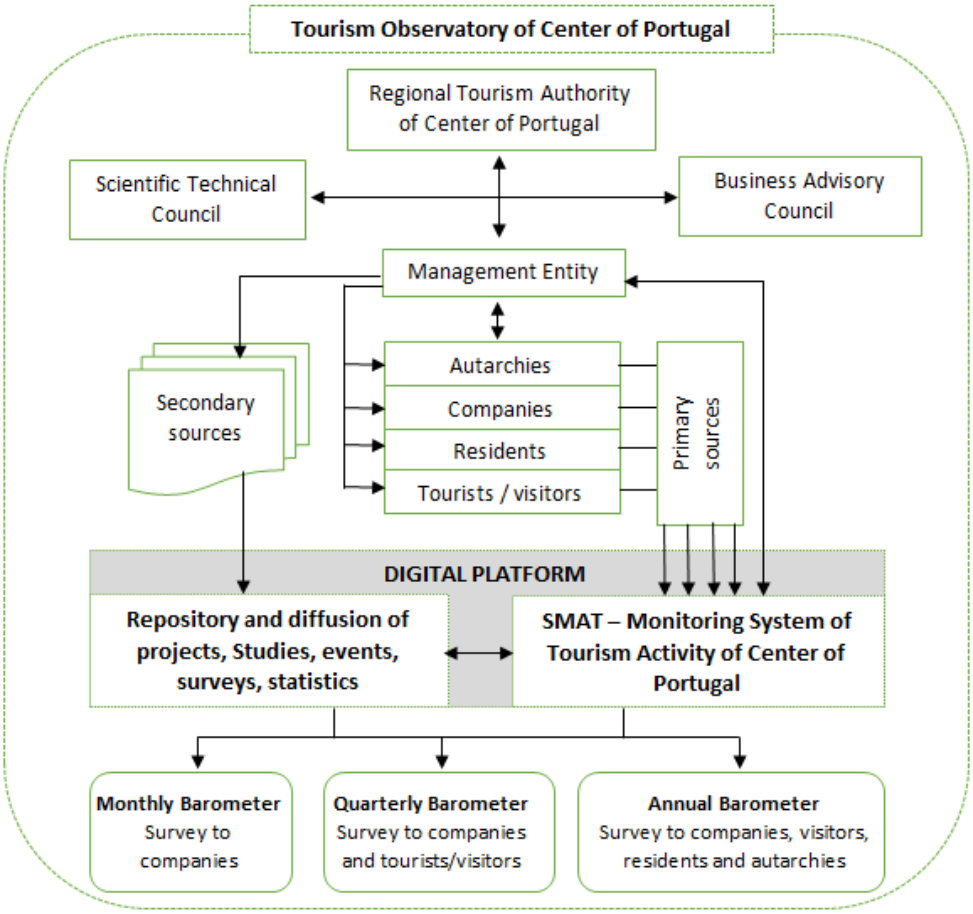
A role of great relevance is granted to the autarchies, which are encouraged to assist the Observatory Management Entity, suppling information as exhaustive as possible about the existent offer in their municipality, such as resources and tourist attractions and companies of the several subsectors.

The representatives of the autarchies also have a very important role when it comes to raising awareness of primary data "suppliers" (companies and entities of the industry), through a pre-set procedure for the effect.

As illustrated in the scheme below, the Observatory is going to provide statistical data and useful information derived from two types of sources:

a) **SMAT**[3]: will produce original data (primary), which is collected based on surveys and it will provide them in monthly, quarterly and annual reports.
b) **Repository of information**: will gather and provide information derived of secondary sources (National Statistics Institute, Eurostat, European Union, Tourism of Portugal, Directorate General for Cultural Heritage/International Council of Museums, Portuguese Association of Museology, Business Associations, etc.), such as projects, studies, events, surveys and statistics.

Table 4. Organizational model of the TOCP



Source: authors

[3] Sistema de Monitorização da Atividade Turística (monitoring system of tourism activity)

4.3. Operation vectors

Just as the Portuguese National Tourism Observatory, this one also has some operation vectors, which are the following:

1. **Monitor** – identify the gaps and needs of statistical data, in order to establish our own system of statistical production for the tourism in the Region Central Portugal (SMAT), compatible with the model proposed by the European Union, ETIS - European Tourism Indicator System.
2. **Inform** – monitor and specify the knowledge of tourism activity, locally and regionally, to create and develop appropriate levels of information transmission, in real time, to the agents that work in tourism in the Region Central Portugal.
3. **Educate** – monitor the dynamics of the job tourism market in the region, in order to identify the needs for education and professional qualification of all agents involved in tourism in the region.
4. **Guide** – observe local, inter-municipal and regional policies with impact in competitiveness and sustainability of the tourism industry, promoting an evaluation of tourism policies and creation of new policies, based on more and better consensuses, in a governance perspective.

4.4. Goals

The observatory shall concentrate, initially, on the satisfaction of needs of information from local and regional actors.

The deepest needs for information that actors in the tourism industry encounter, match the areas in which we find actual gaps in statistical data, such as:

- Profile, motivations, satisfaction and tourist behaviours;
- Demand and offer of specific tourism products;
- Quantitative indicators related to the tourism demand (such as, guests, overnight stays, seasonality, length of stay, market share);
- Indicators related with the offer (accommodation capacity and occupancy rates);
- Offer and demand of cultural, recreational and leisure services;
- Studies that inform us about the economic importance of tourism for the region.

To suppress these gaps of information, as well as equip managers and other actors of the tourism industry of a detailed knowledge about the tourism activity, the observatory has the following **specific goals**:

- Provide information through regular publications;
- Accompany the evolution and trends of the tourism industry;
- Maintain a data base continuously updated and with general access;
- Ensure reliability, coherence and pertinence of the produced information;
- Accompany the needs of information of the local actors;
- Conduct sectorial and sub sectorial studies, considered relevant in the decision makers perspective;
- Encourage the decision-making process based on produced information.

4.5. Observatory model

The goal of this model was to give a set of attributes to the Observatory that ensures its efficiency, so it was created a model of action that guarantees maximum efficiency of production and diffusion of information. This model (table 5) is in line with the conclusions of the study conducted by Ana Filipa Brandão (2007), intituled "Os observatórios do Turismo como meios de apoio à gestão e à competitividade", and can be briefly described like this:

Table 5. Observatory Model

Attributes	**Description**
Periodicity	Diffusion of a ***monthly barometer*** based on monthly surveys made to companies.
	Diffusion of a ***quarterly barometer*** based on surveys made to companies and consumers.

	Diffusion of an ***annual barometer*** that presents a global vision of the performance of the industry, including data from the surveys made to companies, clients, residents and autarchies.
Availability of information	***Easy and intuitive access to the information***: the observatory will have as support a digital platform that will provide information to all the interested parties in an approachable and intuitive way.
	Reduction of the dispersion of information: the observatory will function as a repository of information and studies produced by other entities for the region, and other studies that, even related to more extensive territorial units, can influence the development of tourism in the region.
	Information available on due time: the data will be provided in due time to help make political, strategical and management decisions.
Reliability of the methodologies	Adoption of procedures that favour ***reliability and coherence of produced information***. The sensitization of primary data "suppliers" will be an important aspect, raising awareness for the importance of transmitting correct and rigorous information.
Support for innovation	The observatory will conduct ***specific studies about innovative tourism products*** offered by the region, ***and about potential and emerging source markets***, where the desires, needs and motivations adapt to the specificities of the region.
Pro-activity	The observatory shall contribute for the ***anticipation of trends and behaviours*** of the markets and the changes in the macro and micro economic environments, in order to create competitive advantages against competing destinations.
Geographical coverage	The monitoring system (SMAT) will ensure the gathering of ***primary data on a regional level, with decomposition and analysis on a municipality and parish level***.
	For information about other administration levels (NUT II and NUT I), the Observatory will act as a repository of relevant data produced by other entities.
Sectorial coverage	The observatory will gather wide information that will allow us to ***evaluate and know the tourism industry on a global scale***, including all of the subsectors: accommodation, rent-a-car, tour operators and travel agencies, tour guides, commerce of tourism products.
Systematic and continuous nature	The observatory will ensure the ***systematic production of defined indicators***, avoiding a break of series, and, consequently, allowing a rigorous evaluation of the tourism activity in the region.

Source: authors

5. SMAT

This monitoring system of tourism activity (SMAT in Portuguese) is being conceived within a framework of a partnership between the Regional Tourism Authority of Central Portugal and the Polytechnic Institute of Leiria, through its research group on tourism destinations (NID), integrated in The Center of Tourism Applied Research (CiTUR).

5.1. Mission

This monitoring system has as mission the monitoring of the tourism activity in the Central Region based on suitable management indicators, while factor of competitiveness and sustainability of the destination, in their several components: economical, sociocultural and environmental; the optimization of the process of data collecting in the tourism industry, through a collaborative approach of networking, with a methodology perceived as credible, efficient and trustworthy; and finally, the provision in due time, to all interested parties, of periodical reports with valuable information.

5.2. Methodology

SMAT is a monitoring system that operates accordingly to the network model and its main goal is ***to give to the economic agents of Central Portugal rigours data, detailed and provided in due time, related to the tourism activity on a regional and local level***.

This monitoring system was developed after a diagnosis of the needs of information that the economic agents had, and it has as main reference the European Tourism Indicators System (ETIS), that establishes the guidelines of the European Union for the continuous monitoring of the tourism activity on a regional and local level.

SMAT will produce and provide monthly, quarterly and annual reports, giving clear benefits to all stakeholders, both in a local and regional level.

5.3. Regular studies – barometers

5.3.1. Monthly barometer

The monthly barometer will be based on a set of indicators related to the performance of the companies of the several subsectors of the tourism activity. To suppress the gaps of the official statistics, provided by the National Statistics Institute and based just on the accommodation sector, SMAT indicators will cover the following subsectors:

- Accommodation, considering the several typologies;
- Food and beverages;
- Transportation;
- Tour operators, travel agencies and tour guides;
- Rent-a-car;
- Cultural services;
- Recreational services (including touristic animation companies and maritime-tourist operators);
- Commerce of crafts and tourism products.

All business units, from these 8 subsectors, operating in the Central Portugal are being compiled and they will integrate the digital platform of the observatory.

With the collaboration of the representatives of the autarchies, the people responsible for SMAT will compile all business units in every municipality of the Central Region, and then will invite the managers of those units to participate monthly in the monthly barometer, creating awareness for the importance of participating and supplying trustworthy information about their companies.

To ***promote the participation*** and to obtain a high rate of adherence from the managers of the business units to the surveys, SMAT adopts a strategy of high professionalism, anchored in 4 elements:

1) Friendly and intuitive digital platform;
2) Simple survey, with the least possible number of indicators;
3) Raising awareness of the economic agents, enhancing that in a cost/benefit perspective, the advantages of participating overcome largely the required effort;
4) Guarantee of total anonymity but with abstention control.

SMAT wants to conduct exhaustive surveys to the companies and the ideal would be the participation of all of them. Consequently, the success rate of the surveys can vary between 0% and 100% (meaning, between "no businessman/manager answered and all businessmen/managers answered).

To avoid hypothetic answer inhibitions motivated for possible negative implications if the answer is sincere, and also to stimulate total sincerity of the respondents, SMAT created an electronic device that ***guarantees total anonymity***. It was developed a similar system to the one used in the banking system, which offers all warranties of non-breach of privacy in their online accounts. This system uses random passwords and an algorithm of discontinuity of data that will make impossible for someone to identify the answers given by the managers/businessmen to the online survey, no matter what.

Despite offering total anonymity, the digital platform will signalise, through change of status UN (business unit status), which companies answered and those who haven't. In the cases where the status

UN states "no filling on the stipulated period", the managers will receive an automatic reminder, creating awareness for the importance of answering and informing them that they have a "second chance".

5.3.2. Quarterly barometer

The quarterly barometer will have a wider content and will include information related to indicators of the tourism activity deriving from two sources:

a) Companies: this barometer will merge in quarterly series the statistical information related to the performance of the companies, gathered monthly.
b) Tourists/visitors: will sum up qualitative and quantitative data based on the surveys made to visitors, such as: profile, motivations, preferences, expenses, satisfaction and behaviours.

The survey made to the tourists/visitors shall be performed in the two months before to the publication of the report and it should count with the support of the autarchies' tourist offices.

5.3.3. Annual barometer

The annual barometer will be based on four sources of information: companies, autarchies, tourists/visitors and residents.

The annual report will join statistical data from all indicators related to the reporting year and will provide management indicators which are only possible to obtain from annual series, for example, seasonal varieties of the tourism demand and employment.

The report produced based on the annual barometer will include the indicators advocated in the European Tourism Indicators System (ETIS).

5.3.4. General characteristics of the regular studies

The data collecting will be based on surveys, with different periodicities, according to the type of respondents, as demonstrated on table 6.

Table 6. Characteristics of the Surveys

Respondents	Type of Survey	Periodicity	Means used	Responsible for data collecting
Companies	Exhaustive	Monthly	Digital platform	Tourism of Central Portugal, NID IPLeiria and autarchies
Tourists/ visitors	Sampling	Quarterly	App and conventional way	Tourism of Central Portugal, NID IPLeiria and autarchies
Residents	Sampling	Annual	App and conventional way	Tourism of Central Portugal, NID IPLeiria and autarchies
Autarchies	Exhaustive	Annual	Digital platform	Tourism of Central Portugal and NID IPLeiria

Source: authors

5.4. Before the regular studies

5.4.1. Inventory of resources and tourist attractions

Before starting with regular surveys to companies, the representatives of the autarchies must collaborate on the counting of resources and tourist attraction on a municipality level, by filling 4 online forms: natural resources and attractions; patrimonial and historical resources; ethnographical, handcrafted and gastronomical resources; and finally, events and scheduled occurrences.

5.4.2. Inventory of the several tourism subsector companies

In some of the pertinent subsectors, the companies that operate legally are very easy to identify through its registration number in Tourism of Portugal database. Thus, will be considered the following data bases of companies:

- Data bases for the sector of Accommodation (RNET and RNAL);
- Data base for the sector of the Tourist Recreation (RNAT);

- Data base for the sector of Tour Operators and Travel Agencies (RNAVT).

In the remaining subsectors, in particular, food & beverages, cultural services and commerce of products for tourists/visitors, the identification of the pertinent companies is not so easy. It is necessary to define criteria of eligibility and identify the suitable companies in each municipality, with the support of the representatives of the autarchies.

5.4.3. Filling and validating the records of "eligible company profile"

When the companies accept the invitation to integrate the corporate barometer, as said before, the managers of the business units fill and validate their record of "eligible company profile" and compromise to answer monthly to a survey with duration of a few minutes and with guarantee of total anonymity.

6. Conclusion

It has been made clear that tourism destinations need structures that can support, update and define criteria to position them on the market and to help in the decision-making process based on knowledge and a Tourism Observatory is definitely an important support tool to destination management. However, despite all its benefits, it is important to consider some of the problems that we encounter, such as the lack of social dialogue in the destination, management of relationships between stakeholders and the lack of vision when it comes to integrated products.

In analysing several systems of destination organizations, there are 3 basic elements of interest: actors, relationships and resources (Knoke and Kuklinski, 1991). According to Pavlovich (2003a), such dense ties between these three elements encourage conformity, acceptable action, and inclusion, and so they encourage destination cohesion. Together, they define a network.

Within the various definitions of network, it's important to notice that in a tourism destination context, the tourism industry is seen has a network itself (Scott, Cooper & Baggio, 2008) and so, it is the collaboration between all stakeholders that creates the tourism product (Pechlaner, Abfalter & Raich, 2002; Fyall & Garrod, 2005).

In this paper, it is presented the Tourism Observatory of Central Portugal that will function as a network, open to the collaboration of all entities. A collaborative approach will provide a range of benefits to its members and it will fulfil the needs for information that the actors in the tourism industry encounter, due to the gaps in statistical data. Furthermore, it will help raise the overall competitiveness and sustainability tourism in the region Central Portugal.

For this, SMAT – a monitoring system – is being developed to monitor the tourism activity in the region based on suitable indicators, while factor of competitiveness and sustainability of the destination, in their several components: economical, sociocultural and environmental. It has as main reference the European Tourism Indicators System (ETIS). This monitoring system will produce and provide monthly, quarterly and annual reports, giving clear benefits to all stakeholders, both in a local and regional level.

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