

Research paper

## Outdoor Tourism in the North of Portugal from the Perspective of Tourist Entertainment Companies

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** Based on the perception of those responsible for Tourist Entertainment Companies (TEC), the objective of the research is to contribute to the characterization of Outdoor Tourism (OT).

**Methodology:** Through 38 individual in-depth interviews, qualitative research was developed with managers of tourist entertainment companies. The interviews were analyzed according to the supply perspective. Demand motivation, nature, climate, seasonality, experiences, and risk were considered relevant aspects.

**Findings:** The interviewees suggested integrating everyone involved in a network to explore the region's potential, support activities and promote the region. The radical

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experience, adventure, and getting out of the routine, as well as the contact with nature and the landscape, were identified as motivations for the search.

**Research limitations:** Qualitative research through in-depth interviews is suitable for exploring new knowledge and identifying factors and their respective influences. Although this research work, the results showed that demand is mainly from the domestic market and is focused on the period between May and September (school vacations), making it essential to develop an offer suitable for the domestic market. However, the research is limited to the North Region of Portugal, and it brings together the most different needs, desires, and expectations for tourism demand.

**Practical Implications:** The promotion of the activity can be explored through the customers' previous experience. Therefore, the evaluations, testimonials, and word of mouth (WOM), should be added value that can be optimised through social networks and digital marketing.

**Originality/value:** The supply of complementary services can favour the creation of an integrated network and reinforce the supply chain's competitiveness. Besides, since nature is central to the continuity of activities, economic sustainability can be supported by balancing supply and demand, which results in social harmony without damaging the environment.

**Keywords:** Outdoor Tourism, Tourist Entertainment Companies, North of Portugal, Sustainable Development

## 1. Introduction

The diversity of demand for Outdoor Tourism (OT) regarding people's motivations relates to different aspects in terms of climate, nature, and geography. The North Region of Portugal brings together the most diverse needs, desires, and expectations for this tourism demand. Therefore, the objective to contribute to the characterisation of OT in the north of the country was defined, based on the perception of those responsible for Tourist Entertainment Companies (TEC) that supply OT activities, to increase the competitiveness of companies.

Some people look for OT to get out of their routine (Sand & Gross, 2019; Šimková & Holzner, 2014), relax or feel integrated with nature (Sand & Gross, 2019), while others favour the performance of a physical activity (Nieżgoda & Nowacki, 2020). Conceptually, OT includes the search for outdoor recreational experiences, combining tourism with natural, cultural, and human resources (Hao et al., 2016), which brings together researchers from different disciplines interested in outdoor and adventure activities (Sand & Gross, 2019). Sometimes OT is linked with: (i) adventure tourism (AT), which involves some risk, real or perceived (Chen et al., 2020), depending on the participant's expectation/perception, (ii) the characteristics of the place where the activity takes place (like the geography of the territory and climate), and (iii) the correlation between previous experiences and perceptions of risk on the part of the participant (Pomfret, 2006). These activities were identified as relevant because they produced physical and psychological effects considered beneficial for individuals' health (Sand & Gross, 2019) and well-being (Reid & Kampman, 2020) and,

consequently, of social groups. An example is the activities related to Adventure and Animation Tourism (AAT) (Chen et al., 2020).

Although there are convergent motivations with activities related to nature tourism, many individuals seek activities with a greater degree of challenge (Tsaur et al., 2013) in physical and/or emotional terms.

Outdoor activities also have some peculiarities. For example, the geographical dispersion (Booth, 2018) and the lack of integration of different interests and stakeholders (Musavengane et al., 2020), who do not always share common objectives (Musavengane, 2019), or simply are not fully integrated into the same system, make it difficult to manage the outdoor tourist product.

It should also be considered that the interference of climatic factors, such as excessive sun or rain, wind, heat or cold, has different degrees of importance, which may be associated with the activity and, consequently, influence supply (Dube & Nhamo, 2020). It is necessary to implement measures to ensure the sustainable development of OT.

According to Musavengane (2019), problems in the OT are mainly associated with the collaborative management of natural resources. The authors reported that there were: (i) divergent goals; (ii) complex decision-making processes; and (iii) distinct cost-benefit ratios depending on the different parties involved in the collaboration. Aiming at better collaborative management of natural resources, the author suggested that community-based projects should be inclusive, participatory, and centred on the vital elements of social capital.

Considering the previous mentioned aspects, the following research question was raised: is it possible to implement measures that sustainably ensure the development of OT? To find an answer to this question, the seven NUTS II regions of the Portuguese territory were considered, according to the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS) (European Parliament [EP] and Council of the European Union [CEU] EP CEU, 2017). Among these, the North region was identified for several reasons. Mainly for having obtained significant results in terms of attraction, but at the same time, having deserted rural areas and worse outcomes when compared to the more traditional tourism regions (Fernandes et al., 2020; Silva et al., 2020). According to the authors, this region has enormous potential for nature-oriented tourism.

Some of the significant difficulties in integrating OT relate to the competitiveness of companies, geographic dispersion, climate, and regulation/supervision of activities. These difficulties were among the main motivations to develop this research based on the perception of those responsible for TEC with OT activities. In this sense, through the implementation of tools that allow, in a systematic way, (i) to know the region, (ii) to articulate and integrate the different actors, public and private, and (iii) to follow the evolution of OT, it is intended to contribute to the characterisation of this type of tourism in the North region of the country.

In this sense, qualitative research was carried out through individual in-depth interviews with thirty-eight TEC managers inserted in the North of Portugal (NUTS II) to contribute to the characterisation of OT and understand its potential from the perspective of supply. The supply and the perception of motivations for demand were explored. Next, the theoretical foundation of this research will be presented as well as the methodology, results, and main conclusions.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

OT is a special destination product, which combines tourism with natural, cultural, and human resources (Hao et al., 2016). Therefore, it brings together researchers from different disciplines interested in outdoor and adventure activities (Sand & Gross, 2019).

This diversity makes it crucial to understand the motivations and expectations of demand (Du et al., 2016), to assist suppliers in the development and structuring of outdoor activities, considering the risk involved (Ayen, 2012), effort, heterogeneity (Rantala et al., 2018), and the participants' skills. Pomfret and Bramwell (2016) indicated that intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, such as socialisation, challenges, contact with nature or reaching the goal, result in different stimulus levels. The demand for OT is also conditioned by some cognitive aspects such as personality, attitudes, values, lifestyle (Šimková & Holzner, 2014) or by contrasting emotions, such as fear and joy, which can be replicated to several OT activities (Faullant et al., 2011).

Another critical factor is seasonality since it influences both demand and supply. Seasonality is difficult to be measured and can either be a barrier to OT or favour the recovery of natural resources (Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005).

In this research, the antecedents of long-term sustainability were divided into two main dimensions of factors: those related to supply, defined by entrepreneurs, and those related to the environment, without the possibility of human control. Furthermore, the cognitive decision process was considered important to understand demand motivations that can influence the sustainability of supply.

In summary, the supply was evaluated in terms of the activity, the environment and the risk involved, and the perception of demand was evaluated in terms of the reputation and image of the territory, motivation, the perception of risk, and the experience acquired.

### *2.1. Supply and demand of OT*

The activity itself, the motivation, the risk involved, the notoriety and image of the territory, the experience, and the environment (Sand & Gross, 2019) were identified as criteria for the characterisation of OT. Another important factor that affects this characterisation is seasonality (Saló et al., 2020), which is difficult to measure and can be understood either as a barrier to tourism development or as a factor in favour of the recovery of natural resources (Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005). For the long-term sustainability of activities, supply must be aligned with demand and both dimensions must act responsibly towards the environment.

Regarding the activities, they were grouped according to risk, effort and skills. Soft activities, which may involve some effort, commitment and risk, but do not require mental and physical preparation or specific training (i.e., participants do not need to be highly qualified to experience), and hard activities, which have a higher risk and require greater commitment and advanced skills (Doran, Schofield & Low, 2020).

The search for OT can also involve cognitive aspects, such as personality, attitudes, values, and especially lifestyle (Šimková & Holzner, 2014). The importance of the

place, the supply of activities, the perception of risk, assessed in terms of previous knowledge regarding the probability of something undesirable to happen or the uncertainty of a phenomenon happening (Aven, 2012), and the contrasting emotions experienced by nature and adventure were highlighted as motivational factors in the search for OT (Pomfret, 2006).

In cognitive terms, motivations can be as varied as possible. There are signs of enormous cultural differentiation in the choice of outdoor tourism products, and associated experiences, for the same nature tourism destination (Du et al., 2016). However, the affects and emotions associated with OT to explore nature through the senses provide rewarding experiences in carrying out these activities (Farkic, 2020).

In this sense, two primary emotions related to consumption, in general, were identified to influence satisfaction. Although specifically studied in mountaineering, they can be replicated in other OT activities: fear and joy, influenced, respectively, by nervousness (neuroticism) and extravasation (extraversion) (Faullant et al., 2011). According to the authors, joy directly affects satisfaction, mediated by the cognitive perception of personality traits. Fear has the opposite effect, totally mediated by cognitions, which can occur instinctively and reflexively, and fear responses drive cognitions and subsequent assessments.

However, distinguishing preferences and perceptions is a difficult task as there is a lot of heterogeneity between different groups (Rantala et al., 2018). Resilience, post-adventure growth, self-fulfilment, and transcendence were considered motivational factors to develop adventure activities, namely for a more extended period, which results in well-being (Reid & Kampman, 2020). Another relevant factor on the part of the supply was the identification of service providers, specifically guides (Mackenzie & Kerr, 2013). Guides can help integrate this network of service providers.

From a case study on mountaineering in Chamonix, France, Pomfret and Bramwell (2016) argued that there is diversity between groups. Differences and similarities exist and depend on age and gender, risk perception, individual skills, and previous experience. Furthermore, intrinsic and extrinsic motivations result in different levels of stimulation. For example, concerning baby boomers born between 1946 and 1964, the main motivations identified for participating in OT were fun, combating stress, escaping routine, and relaxing. Without disregarding the attractiveness of nature, the search for something different and, at the same time, promoting health was also considered a motivation (Naidoo, Ramseook-Munhurrin, Seebaluck & Janvier, 2015). Table 1 shows the main factors associated with OT.

**Table 1. The main factors associated with OT.**

<b>Theoretical dimensions</b>	<b>Variables associated</b>	<b>Source</b>
Characterisation of OT	Motivation	Sand and Gross (2019)
	Risk	
	Notoriety and image	
	Experience	Saló et al. (2020)
	Seasonality	Koenig-Lewis and Bischoff (2005).
Activities	Recovery of natural resources	Doran et al. (2020).
	Soft activities, which may involve some the effort, commitment, and risk, but do not require mental and physical preparation, or specific training)	
	Hard activities, which have a higher risk, require	

	greater commitment and advanced skills	
OT demand	OT can also involve cognitive aspects of personality, attitudes, values, and especially lifestyle	Šimková and Holzner (2014)
Motivational factors	Emotions experienced by nature and adventure	Pomfret (2006)
	Cultural differentiation	Du et al. (2016)
	Affectivity and emotion	Farkic (2020)
		Faullant et al. (2011)
	Perception of risk, individual skills, and previous experience	Pomfret and Bramwell (2016)
	Fun, combating stress, escaping routine and relaxing, the attractiveness of nature, health	Naidoo et al. (2015)
	Nature, challenges, places to relax or get out of the routine	Sand and Gross (2019)
Socialising or having unique experiences	Šimková and Holzner (2014)	
Characterisation of OT	Motivation	Sand and Gross (2019)
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Nature, challenges, places to relax or get out of the routine (Sand & Gross, 2019), socialising or having unique experiences (Šimková & Holzner, 2014) were identified as factors that may underlie the motivations for adventure tourism and outdoor activities, without disregarding the physical and emotional benefits for the health and well-being of individuals and groups that result from OT activities.

Aiming to explore long-term opportunities, Doran et al. (2020) suggested that the industry, especially tourism-related, offer mechanisms to help overcome possible barriers. The authors also highlighted the importance of preparing for the activity, developing skills, and creating a social friendship network to integrate all interested parties.

Finally, like other activities, tourism must be sustainable. By the way, the environment is the central resource of OT. If it is not preserved, it will hardly be maintained as an

opportunity. Therefore, the perception of local communities is very relevant for preservation and sustainability.

Sustainability favours tourism development which, in turn, contributes to the quality of life, an effective predictor of community involvement (Woo et al., 2015) and the valorisation of the region (Booth, 2018). Health, quality of life and well-being were some of the benefits of OT (Jirásek & Hanuš, 2020).

### 3. Methodology and Methods

The option to develop qualitative research (Lamb et al., 2019; Hair et al., 2015; Hair et al., 2019) is justified by the (i) difficulty in standardising the activities developed in TEC, which depend on independent external factors, such as the territory geography and the climate, (ii) the importance of knowing the specific factors of the Northern region of Portugal, (iii) market dynamics, which results from specific factors, such as seasonality (Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005) and (iv) diversity of the organisations involved, which mainly covers micro and small companies. All these signs of adequacy were confirmed from the objective's definition, which is to contribute to the characterisation of Outdoor Tourism in the north of the country, based on the perception of those responsible for tourist entertainment companies with OT activities.

Considering that the TEC are distinct and function independently, to know the characterisation of the region and evaluate the potential of OT, the data collection instrument, identified as the most appropriate, was the individual exploratory and in-depth interview (Batista et al., 2017).

Through 38 individual in-depth interviews, qualitative research was developed with managers of tourist entertainment companies. The interviews were analysed from the supply perspective. Demand motivation, nature, climate, seasonality, experiences, and risk were considered relevant aspects.

For the sample selection, several sources of information were used, such as the National Register of Tourist Entertainment Agents (*Registo Nacional dos Agentes de Animação Turística* (RNAAT)), the Portuguese Association of Companies of Congresses, Tourist Entertainment and Events (*Associação Portuguesa de Empresas de Congressos, Animação Turística e Eventos* (APECATE)) or the websites of the eighty-six existing city councils in the North of Portugal.

Regarding the analysis, to ensure the anonymity of the interviewees, companies were coded sequentially and according to the region. This codification used the initial letters of the region's nomenclature, according to the corresponding NUTS III, and a sequential number starting in 01 and ending in 38. Table 2 shows the distribution of activities developed by these companies in each NUTS III.

**Table 2. Activities developed by the interviewed companies spread over NUTS III in the North of Portugal.**

OT modalities/activities	NUTS III regions in the North of Portugal							
	AM	AT	TS	AMP	AVE	CAV	DOU	TTM
Hiking (trails and ecovias)	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
Mountain Biking	X		X			X	X	X
Stand Up Paddle (river)	X		X	X		X	X	X
Canoeing	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
Canyoning	X		X	X	X	X		

Rafting	X		X	X	X			
Surf/ Kitesurf/ Windsurf/Bodyboard	X							
Climbing	X				X	X		X
Fishing								
Paragliding and Hang Gliding								
Wildlife Viewing								X

**Note:** Alto-Minho [AM]; Alto Tâmega [AT]; Tâmega e Sousa [TS]; Área Metropolitana do Porto [AMP]; Cávado [CAV]; Douro [DOU]; Terras de Trás-os-Montes [TTM].

The sample allocated interviewees in proportion to the number of TEC existing in each of the eight NUTS III (Etikan & Bala, 2017), totalling 370 companies (176 in AMP, 52 in AM, 46 in CAV, 31 in DOU, 20 in AVE, 19 in the TS, 18 in the TTM and 8 in the AT). However, it was not possible to reflect this distribution in the interviews carried out due to the availability of the TEC. In AMP, the number of interviews fell short of what was planned. In AM, about twice as many were carried out. Considering this universe of TEC distributed in the eight NUTS III regions, it was expected that 47.6% of them were included in the AMP, which was not possible due to their availability to be interviewed. On the contrary, AM doubled the number of TEC initially planned. Nevertheless, to be representative, Deterding and Waters (2018) suggested a minimum of thirty interviews. Information saturation was reached after the thirty-eighth interview, when the responses among the interviewees began to be similar, without adding new information (Neuman, 2014).

The interviews carried out between February and April 2020 (duration between 60 and 90 minutes) were operated in three modalities, depending on the availability of the interviewees and the global pandemic scenario (COVID-19): (i) face-to-face interviews, which occurred at company headquarters; (ii) telephone interviews; and (iii) interviews using online chat software, such as Skype or Zoom.

The main objects of study were the activity developed, the supply and the perception that companies have a previous relationship with clients. With these dimensions in mind, a script was structured (Kallio et al., 2016), formed mainly by open questions, divided into three groups: (GI) issues related to the activities of companies/regions; (GII) issues related to the main aspects of demand perception; and (GIII) issues related to the main aspects of the supply.

The qualitative analysis of the results was based on textual (Kuckartz, 2014) and systemic analysis of the content of the interviews (Lombard et al., 2002; Mayring, 2004; Milena et al., 2008). However, some quantitative techniques were also used to identify patterns, such as analyses based on descriptive statistics, such as means and percentages, considering relevant factors when mentioned by most respondents (Xiao & Smith, 2006).

Qualitative content analysis began with identifying and quantifying keywords and/or their meaning in terms of context (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Codes were created to reflect the key concept. This initial codification resulted in categories and their respective relationships in terms of theoretical dimensions (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This coding was used mainly to analyse aspects related to the perception of demand motivation. Codes were created to reflect the key concept, which involved nature, experience, and aspects related to culture and socialisation. Aiming at anonymity, the



companies were coded, following the identification logic of the region, associated with a sequential numerical order.

The textual analysis was structured according to the supply (activity, environment and risk involved) and demand (notoriety and image of the territory, motivation, risk perception and acquired experience). The antecedents of long-term sustainability were divided into the environment (territory, climate, and seasonality) and supply (employees involved). The consequences were grouped into economic (price and variety of supply), social (employability and local community) and environmental (resource preservation) dimensions.

As this is a qualitative study, to assess whether, in the perception of those responsible for the TEC, the notoriety and image of the region would have a positive or negative association, the analysis used a simplified interval scale, with symmetric values as a function of zero. The assigned value results from the sum of all the values perceived by each TEC responsible, having considered the following scale: (-2) for the perspectives considered extremely negative; (-1) for perspectives considered negative; (0) for undefined perspectives; (1) for perspectives considered positive; (2) for perspectives considered extremely positive. The territory's notoriety, real and potential, was evaluated, nationally and internationally, in terms of its image and recognition.

Likewise, to understand the perception of the degree of risk by each TEC representative, the analysis used a scale with increasing values from zero to three, with zero being the value attributed to the absence of risk and three being the highest risk value. The value attributed to the risk results from the sum of all the values perceived by each TEC responsible divided by n (equation 1), having considered the following scale: (0) for the perspectives considered without risk; (1) for perspectives considered with low risk; (2) for perspectives considered as a medium risk; (3) for perspectives considered to be at high risk.

$$\frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n (0a + 1b + 2c + 3d) \quad ; \quad i = 1, \dots, n \quad (1)$$

Where:

- (a) is the number of answers with perception considered without risk;
- (b) is the number of answers with perception considered with low risk;
- (c) is the number of answers with perception considered as a medium risk;
- (d) is the number of answers with perception considered to be at high risk.

And:

- (0) is the multiplying factor of the number of answers with perception considered without risk;
- (1) is the multiplying factor of the number of answers with perception considered with low risk;
- (2) is the multiplying factor of the number of answers with perception considered as a medium risk;
- (3) is the multiplying factor of the number of answers with perception considered to be at high risk.

Qualitative studies are complex, and the subjectivity of the research must be surpassed by the researcher (Booth, 2018). The analysis must be rigorous, reliable, and objective (Hao et al., 2016). The researchers' subjectivity can be minimised by systematising the procedure in data organisation (Kassarjian, 1977). Systematisation is crucial, but a little

flexibility is suggested (Davitti, 2019) to explore new facts, especially when describing a social phenomenon (Jewitt & Leder Mackley, 2019).

**4. Presentation and results analysis**

Regarding the supply, among the eleven (11) modalities of OT presented in this research, it was found that most regions offered activities related to hiking (walking trails and eco paths), mountain biking, canoeing, canyoning and stand-up paddle (SUP) in the river. It can be assumed that they are important activities for companies in the North region, as well as the rafting and climbing modalities that were present in half of the regions.

On the other hand, wildlife observation, surfing and kitesurfing/windsurfing were modalities found in only one of these regions. Considering that there are different nature parks and protected regions, it can be assumed that the observation of wildlife restricted to one region may be related to demand. However, the restriction of surf and kitesurf/windsurf's supply can be associated with demand and result from the supply's competitiveness factors. Factors such as geographic location, in regions with better conditions, territory, and climate, or in regions more recognised by the market, were considered important aspects of influence, promoting relocation or interfering with competitiveness among competitors. The networks in which these companies are inserted were also considered influential aspects.

Finally, it is worth noting the lack of representation of some activities among the respondents' activities. In this sense, activities such as fishing, paragliding, and hang gliding were not included among the activities of the interviewed TEC. Therefore they were not considered in this work.

The textual analysis was categorised from the perspective of supply, according to the activity, environment and risk involved. From the perception of demand by the interviewees, according to the performance, motivation, the customer's (real or perceived) perception of risk, and the experience gained. In addition, the territory, climate and seasonality were categorised in the dimension of the activity background for sustainability. In contrast, the price, the breadth of supply, employability, local community involvement and preservation of resources were categorised in the dimension of the activity consequences for long-term sustainability. Table 3 presents the analysis of the interviews based on this categorisation.

**Table 3. Categorisation of the indicators associated with motivation.**

Respondents' perception of demand			
Variable	Factors influencing demand	Key expressions	Number of TEC that reported the factors
Motivation	Nature	Nature; Landscape	23
	Cognitive experience	Experience; Radical experience; Different activity; Relax	14
	Cultural	Gastronomy; Historic sites	5
	Socialisation	Contact with other people	4

Without disregarding the importance of culture and socialisation (referenced by 5 and 4 TEC, respectively), aspects related to nature and experience were the most reported (referenced by 23 and 14 TEC, respectively), a fact consistent with the activities within

the OT framework. However, the perception of risk related to the likelihood of falls and accidents was reported differently by the TEC. In the interviewees' perception, the risk was considered low (1.03), since the majority (65.79%) considered there was no risk or a controlled risk, while 26.32% considered there was a moderate risk (four companies were not considered in this analysis due to the lack of an adequate response). The low risk was associated with the probability of falls and accidents due to the environment or the performance of the activity. Despite carrying out activities in territories with little control by the company, only one respondent considered the risk high.

Another significant variable for demand was the region's notoriety and image. Aiming to understand the notoriety of the North Region as an OT destination, demand was asked to perceive the image of the territory. The result obtained, of sixteen values, allowed to consider that the region had very positive notoriety and image in the interviewees' perception, despite the several improvements to be implemented (Table 4). This transcript demonstrates the perception of notoriety: "In general, it is a "rough diamond". Foreigners appreciate *Rio Paiva* immensely, but there is still much to explore. Whoever comes to the North thinks it is an authentic region" [ATS02]. According to the interviews, the region's notoriety and image analysis was evaluated as very positive, with eleven values being attributed to the result.

According to respondents, there are always improvements to be implemented. Improvements were grouped according to similarities, forming theoretical dimensions of the constructs. The analysis identified and quantified the concept by identifying keywords or similar expressions, highlighting the main themes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Considering these dimensions of the formative constructs and respective indicators, Table 4 categorised the improvements to be implemented.

**Table 4. Categorisation of improvements to be implemented.**

Construct dimension	Indicators and respective concepts of improvements to be implemented	Keywords (negatively associated)	Referencing (quantity)	
Structural and support aspects for the use of resources	Available structure to support the use of resources	Structure; Exclusive spaces	13	25
	Preservation of natural resources and spaces	Maintenance; Cleaning; Preservation	6	
	Support for the development of activities	Activity support; Signage	5	
	Public transportation	Public transportation	1	
Organisation and processes	Bureaucracy	Elimination of barriers	2	21
	Practical training	Professional qualification	3	
	More Offers	Create different activities	1	
	Greater promotion	Greater promotion	6	
	Integration of companies and other stakeholders	Integration; Coordination; Awareness	9	
Network (Community)	Community support	Abandonment of the population	1	2
	Environmental education	Environmental education	1	

In the perception of most respondents, structures and processes are key points to be improved. The use and maintenance of resources, as well as support for the development of activities, were identified as relevant aspects in terms of structure. In terms of process, evidence pointed to the importance of integration and promotion.

In addition, for 84.21% of respondents, there is a need for improvement on public management, which is mainly considered non-existent or disjointed. The evidence points to the different institutions involved in the regulation, support and inspection that hinder the public management of spaces in an integrated manner. However, this perception is the opposite in terms of regional management: 86.84% of respondents considered that they participated in the management.

Considering that there are aspects related to both supply and demand, influencing OT in Northern Portugal, this research organised the data and distinguished whether the prevalence of influence would be associated with the supply or with the perception by those responsible for the TEC, concerning the demand for OT in the North of Portugal.

*4.1. Aspects related to the North Region characterisation and the offer of Outdoor Tourism*

In general, TEC offered a wide range of activities, on average four per company, mainly in the Douro region, *Douro International* Natural Park and *Peneda-Gerês* National Park [PNPG] to practice different outdoor modalities. The *Douro*, *Minho* and *Paiva* rivers offer excellent conditions for practising different aquatic modalities (e.g., rafting, canoeing and canyoning) whereas, at the coastal level, *Viana do Castelo* is dedicated to the practice of modalities such as surfing, kiteboarding and windsurfing.

At the top of the activities developed by TEC (Table 5), trails appear as the main one (63.2%), followed by canoeing (39.5%), BBT/downhill and rafting/canyoning (26.3%).

**Table 5. Activities developed by TEC.**

Activity	Companies interviewed that develop the activity	
	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Trails	24	63.2%
Canoeing	15	39.5 %
Mountain Biking (BTT)/Downhill	10	26.3%
Rafting/Canyoning	10	26.3%
Surf/Bodyboard/SUP/Wind/Kitesurf	9	23.7%
Climbing	4	10.5%
Ecovia	2	5.3%
Wildlife Viewing	1	2.6 %

Although most TEC offers this set of activities, the vast majority stated that they have a 'core product', determined by the annual demand or strategic location about the available natural resources. This research assumed that trails, canoeing, BBT/downhill and rafting/canyoning might be important for the OT of Northern Portugal. However, most companies claimed to have activities considered 'star product', whether due to annual demand or supply, often influenced by the strategic location with available natural resources. The activities mentioned by respondents as being the most relevant for the TEC are described in Table 6.

**Table 6. Main activities/modalities in the TEC portfolio.**

TEC/activities/NUTS III	Reason why it is considered the 'star' activity
Hiking Trails (AT06, TTM08, TTM11, DOU13, DOUR15, AM22, AM23, AM27, AMP31, CAV34, CAV35, CAV37)	<p>“They are the focus of the company”.</p> <p>“Part of the company and of what we want to sell/bet on. Hikes are a sustainable offer with less environmental impact. We made a match between demand and supply”.</p> <p>“Sales volume... the company's genesis”.</p>
Rafting (AM24, AM25, AMP31, AMP33, AMP32)	<p>“It is the genesis of the company. The company started with rafting”.</p> <p>“Due to local conditions. The Minho River, which in the summer season is the only one where rafting can be practised. It is our star activity”.</p> <p>“They are the most important activities regarding the owners’ training (ex-military, sports, mountaineering). Rafting is the most profitable activity”.</p>
Canoeing/Kayaking (AM20, AM26, AMP31, AVE38, CAV34, DOU17, TTM10, TTM11)	<p>“There is more demand and customers like the places where they practice (Douro)”.</p> <p>“Due to the volume of participants”.</p>

Some interviewees also stated that modalities, such as 'climbing', are hardly sought after as a singular/individual experience. According to the interviews, to respond to this low demand, the offer may be associated with another activity, a “package experience” that matches an “adventure park” dynamics.

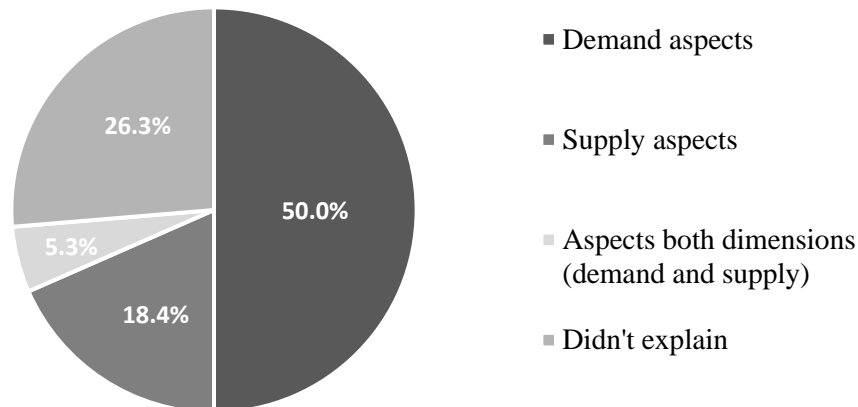
It should also be noted that the practice of specific OT modalities, such as walking routes, could also be developed outside the summer period, thus avoiding the atmospheric conditions typical of this season, with high temperatures. Although many sports can be practised throughout the year (e.g., hiking trails), the period of the least demand is between November and March (part of autumn and all winter).

*4.2. Aspects related to the perception of the demand and potential of OT, from the perspective of TEC*

The perception of demand was consistent with the assumption that the offer must be in line with the client's needs, desires and expectations, as shown in some interview passages (e.g., “...because it is the most wanted for our target market” [AM20], “The demand for these activities is greater” [AM21], “They are the most sought-after activities” [AM29], “...because they are more in demand and are simpler to organise” [TTM08]).

When asked openly about the justification that determines the most important activities, while 50% of companies described aspects related to the demand, only 18.42% of companies described aspects related to supply and 5.26% aspects related to both dimensions, supply, and demand. Figure 1 shows the dimension of supply and demand as a factor that justifies the relevance of the company's main activities.

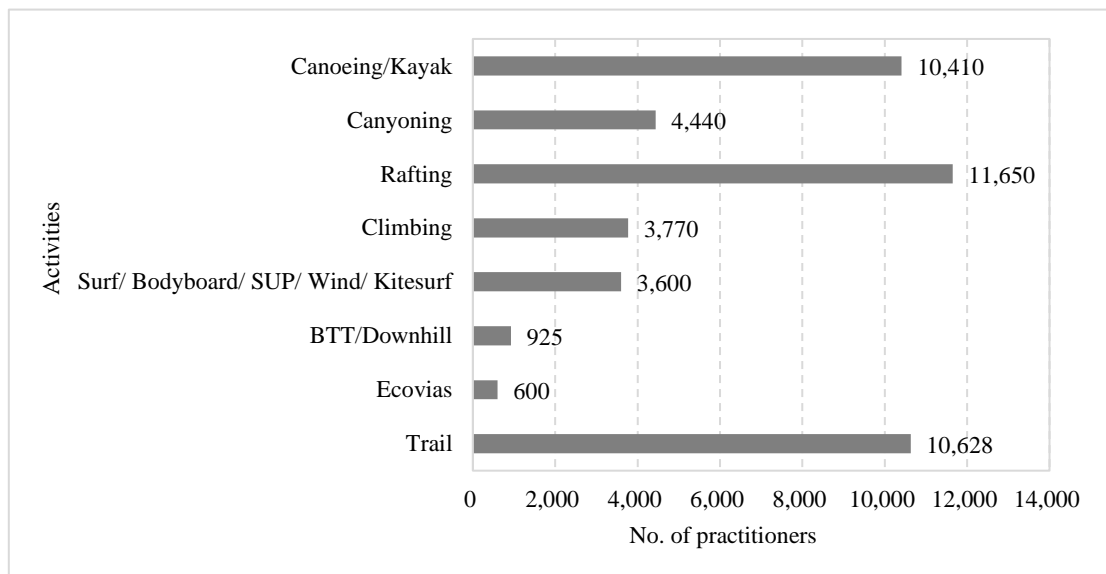
**Figure 1. Factors that justify the most relevant activities for the company.**



Although all respondents answered the question about the most important activity(ies), 26.32% did not explain why a particular activity was the most relevant.

Concerning the number of outdoor practitioners, those linked to the aquatic environment (river and sea totalling 31,130 practitioners) were considerably higher than those practising on land activities (hiking trails, ecovias, climbing, mountain biking/downhill totalling 13,593 practitioners), which reflects the relevance of these activities to TEC (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Number of annual practitioners by outdoor activity (2019).**

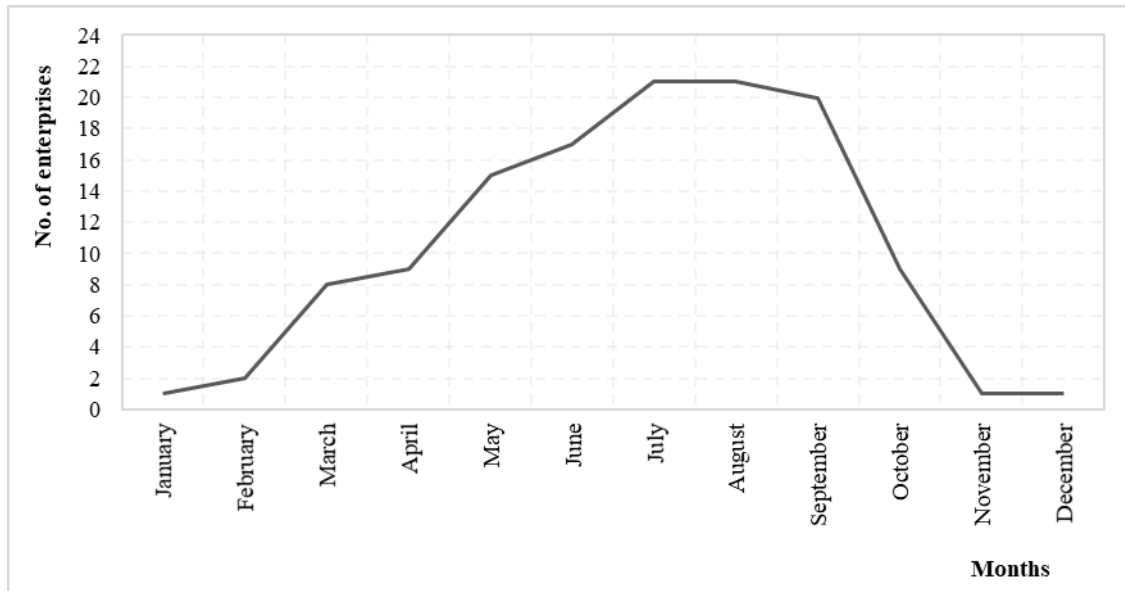


According to the figure above, the trails, canoeing/kayaking and rafting are activities with higher demand, according to the interviewees' perception. This perception was considered validated based on the tacit knowledge of the interviewees about the activity, as they are the main stakeholders and/or responsible for the companies.

Regarding demand, seasonality is an important factor for tourism, especially for OT, where the climate and territory can aggravate seasonality. To study seasonality, rails

were identified as a reference activity, as they are present in the offer of most companies. The period of greatest demand in the hiker modality (namely on the trails) was distributed mainly between March and October, which reflect the importance of the climate in spring and summer (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Distribution of demand for the trail activity along 2019.**



Seasonality has consequences for the organisation of the company since the majority, 68.42% of the companies interviewed, have one, two, or three employees and hire services according to demand, which results in precarious contracts.

Regarding nationality, 73.7% of companies highlighted the demand for individuals with Portuguese nationality. Next, French people and individuals from the Netherlands (39.5%), German and Belgian (34.2%), and Spain (31.6%), were the most highlighted nationalities.

The high demand in the period between May and September, associated with greater demand from individuals of Portuguese nationality, namely in the periods of school holidays that, eventually, correspond to the holiday period in the Portuguese domestic tourist market, reinforces the evidence presented.

All respondents highlighted contact with nature as a motivating factor for OT. Specifically, 44.7% stressed the importance of contact with nature and 15.8% the landscape. In addition, around 13.2% of companies highlighted the radical experience, adventure and motivation to do a different activity, and 23.7% of companies highlighted sociocultural aspects. Only 2.6%, corresponding to a single company, emphasised authenticity or rest as aspects related to the perception of motivation by the demand side.

According to the perception of the interviewees, 65.79% of the companies highlighted the importance of couples with children when looking for activities, 35.79% underlined the importance of groups of friends or colleagues, 21.05% highlighted the importance of couples, and 21.05% argued about the use of activities by companies, with the objective

of integration. Only 15.79% of companies mentioned the demand by a single individual, and 7.89% reported having demand from schools and young people.

As for the form of purchase, all mentioned that there was a direct demand. Some companies explained the importance of channels such as websites or telephone contact, in addition to an on-site search. 47.74% of the companies also mentioned partnerships with agencies and operators or specific platforms related to tourism.

Regarding the antecedence, 39.5% highlighted the search on the same day. However, another 39.5% of companies argued that demand existed up to three weeks before, and 36.8% in the days before the activities were carried out. There are still those who buy a month in advance. In other words, the signs point to different segments on the part of demand. According to 52.63% of the companies interviewed, most searchers perform a single activity. It is possible to consider the search for two to three activities as important, highlighted by 36.84% of the interviewees.

Regarding loyalty, all companies reported that there are customers who return. Except for a single company, all the others mentioned the importance of the recommendation through social networks, evaluations, comments, and word of mouth as good practices, stating that “our customers are our greatest promoters” [AMP30].

Furthermore, it was not possible to identify a pattern of gender, qualification, or age group by the demand. The differences were not significant. There is demand from both genders, different age groups, and without qualification restrictions. The evidence pointed to many segments about these factors. However, there are characteristics in common: the vast majority emphasised that individuals are well informed, with some knowledge and financial capacity. It is possible to assume that the lifestyle associated with motivations is a crucial aspect of segmentation.

Additionally, adventure parks, whose commercial dynamics differ from a TEC due to their functional characteristics, manage to work in other periods, mainly with the internal market and a youth/student profile.

## **5. Discussion**

Nature promotes a physical experience and explores the social and cultural aspects of the experience (Sand & Gross, 2019). Similarly to these authors, this research found that contact with nature was highlighted by the interviewees, being considered one of the main motivations for demand. Also, other results of this study are in line with previous research that put forward different motivations as an intrapersonal challenge for novice adventure tourists (Tsaur, Lin & Liu, 2013), and strengthening personal self-esteem.

Consistent with Chen et al. (2020), the results of the exploratory research provided evidence of adventure, as well as getting out identified by Niezgoda & Nowacki (2020), as reasons for motivating demand. Furthermore, like Doran et al. (2020) mentioned, social networks and distribution channels enhance competitiveness.

Seasonality caused by the seasons, for example, can influence demand (Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005). However, this effect may be in the opposite direction. For some individuals, the heat in summer can be perceived as an unpleasant sensation, potentiating a new demand for autumn or even the winter tourism season. Therefore, the



interviewees highlighted seasonality as a concern but also as an opportunity to be exploited. Barriers like natural obstacles in the region (Booth, 2018) or achieving sustainability to guarantee the continuity of OT activities. In this research, seasonality was considered also a barrier.

Finally, the interviewees suggested that the client can promote the activities through word-of-mouth and sharing recommendations through positive evaluations as referred by other studies in the literature such as the one of Rahimizhian, Ozturen and Ilkan (2020).

## **6. Final Considerations and practical implications**

To contribute to the characterisation of OT in the north of the country, based on the perception of those responsible for TEC with OT activities, qualitative research was developed through in-depth individual interviews with distributed TEC companies in the various NUTS III in the North of Portugal.

Among the most significant assumptions for the characterisation of OT in this region, the research considered the importance of geography, involving location and climate, as well as the perception of the demand relevance for the supply exploration. Considering that: (i) most people in demand are of Portuguese nationality; (ii) the greatest demand is in the period between May and September (school holidays and demand from domestic tourism); and (iii) couples with children were highlighted, followed by groups of friends or colleagues, although the international market is significant, it is essential to develop an offer suitable for the domestic market.

Respondents considered that the region has enormous potential, which is still to be explored. In the perception of demand by the interviewees, there is still a lot to be done. The region has untapped potential. The image was considered good, but it is necessary to support TEC and promote the region internationally, and the risk was considered low, mainly associated with activities and the environment. According to the interviewees, safety standards are designed to guard against the risk and insurance for what cannot be taken care of.

In addition to the demand on the spot, it is suggested that this exploration be planned, so that the services offered are complimentary, fostering more collaborative strategies than competitive strategies. The use of partnerships, social networks, or other distribution channels, such as websites or telephone, reinforced the supply's competitiveness.

Regarding motivation if, on the one hand, the contact with nature and the landscape reinforces the role of the territory in the perception of demand and, consequently, in the supply of OT. On the other hand, the radical experience, adventure, and opportunity to get out of the routine were highlighted aspects of demand motivation. Furthermore, the climate and seasonality were considered factors influencing sustainability and breaks with little activity were seen as crucial for preserving the environment.

According to the interviewees, the customers themselves can carry out the promotion, emphasising the importance of evaluations, testimonies, and word of mouth. The creation of a network was also suggested for integrating those involved and preserving resources.

In terms of consequences, the price and variety of the supply were not valued. Still, the need for integration and creation of a network was suggested, including preserving

resources. Furthermore, in terms of employability, the evidence pointed to some social imbalance. Employees may be hired precariously, depending on demand, and, in crisis, it is possible to have unemployment and social instability.

Concerning distribution, in addition to local demand, the use of partnerships, social networks, or other distribution channels, such as websites or telephones, reinforces the competitiveness of supply. Promotion can also be carried out through customers, valuing evaluations, testimonials, and word of mouth.

As this is qualitative research, the results allowed us to know the perspective of TEC from the North region about the previous year's experience. Still, they did not allow to make inferences with other regions. In addition, the interviewees' views may differ from the perspective of other stakeholder groups, and the identified factors must be validated. In this sense, it is suggested to carry out quantitative research to confirm the significance of each of these factors, as well as inner influence relationships, especially the factors associated with the perception of demand.

Finally, the interdisciplinary approach must seek to overcome seasonality but mainly pursue sustainability in governance, economic, social, and environmental dimensions. Economic sustainability can be found through balancing supply and demand. Moreover, this balance can have an impact on social sustainability. However, it is necessary to pay attention to the preservation of the environment, as nature is central to the continuity of activities in OT.

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