

Holistic tourism: A new form of living and feeling tourism

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Objectives | Few studies tried to verify the prerogative that individuals can seek a spiritual fulfillment through tourism (Sharpley & Jepson, 2011). Although the concept that tourism is a spiritual journey (Willson, 2011), the spiritual dimension is included in new forms of tourism, such as wellness (Smith & Kelly, 2006; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006) or holistic tourism (Smith, 2003).

The holistic approach to life is based in a balance between wellbeing in the body, mind and spirit (Smith & Puczkó, 2009). In order to meet the challenging needs of tourists, holistic tourism offers activities that combine therapies and counselling, pathways to spiritual development, creative enhancement and many other routes to the reconciliation of body, mind and spirit (Smith & Kelly, 2006).

The present research project aims to deepen the study of a new form of tourism that is gaining market, especially as a luxury product. It is our aim to analyse the following concepts relating to holistic tourism: motivations and involvement of tourists to this kind of tourism, place attachment with the locations where they consume holistic tourism, and the authenticity that tourists recognized to those experiences.

Methodology | The motivation variables considered for the survey instrument construction will be chosen based on pre-established scales related to tourism motivation and holistic tourism constructs. A five-point Likert-type scale will be used as the response format for the motivation variables (being 1 “not important at all” to 5, being “extremely important”), which will be divided in push and pull motivations.

Involvement in tourism is the unobserved state of motivation, interest and excitement for a recreational activity or associated product (Havitz & Dimanche, 1997). Involvement influences the degree of commitment in which consumers are

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committed in different aspects of the process of consumption: product, demand for information, decision making and the purchase (Broderick & Mueller, 1999; Zaichkowsky, 1985). So, in this study we will measure the involvement of tourists with the product, with the decision, consumption and evaluation.

Place-attachment is an emotional connection to a particular environment (Low & Altman, 1992; Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001), an emotional investment to a place (Hummon, 1992), or as a way in which individuals value and identify themselves with a particular place (Moore & Graefe, 1994). Place-attachment is a multidimensional construct that incorporates three dimensions (Brown & Raymond, 2007): place-identity, place-dependence and place-memory (Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2003, 2004; Moore & Scott, 2003; Yuksel, Yuksel & Bilim, 2010).

Modern life generates uncertainty such that people seek authentic experiences as a means of revitalizing fragmented personal identity or existential authenticity (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006). Authenticity is a complex concept that is central in tourism research (Rickly-Boyd, 2012). Authenticity is the genuineness or realness of artifacts or events, and also a human attribute signifying being one's true self or being true to one's essential nature (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006).

Because holistic tourism activities, events and places are characteristically located in aesthetically pleasant and environmentally lush surroundings (Smith & Kelly, 2006), this research will be carry out in Azores, Portugal. This is a region with a great potential to develop holistic tourism for its outstanding peaceful atmosphere and natural beauty recognized by UNESCO. In fact the world's recognition of the incommensurable value of the Azores started years ago. In 1983, UNESCO named as World Heritage the Historical Centre of Angra do Heroismo, in the island of Terceira, and the Landscape of Pico Island Vineyard Culture, in the island of Pico, in 2004.

Main Results and Contributions | The new tourists want to live an experience, more than simply contact with cultures, people, landscapes or places. These travellers are "centered towards self transformation and constitute new ground for spiritual travel experiences" (Holladay & Ponder, 2012, p. 311).

Scholars argue that many individuals seek their spirituality through travel, specifically they travel to search a greater meaning in life trying to understand more about themselves as individuals (Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005). Despite this, there has been little research exploring how the spiritual movement influences tourists' experiences and motivations" (Willson, 2011).

Holistic tourism has gained force in the world as travelers search for activities and programs that bring balance to their lives. We hope with our study to analyze the main main predictors of holistic tourism consumption. Also to make a profile of these new luxury tourists, namely knowing what motivates them, how engaged are them with this tourism product, and their perception about the authenticity of the tourism experience.

Also, holistic tourism can be a key tourism product in many regions. Azores is a Portuguese region presenting all the ingredients to be an important destination for this kind of tourism. We hope to measure the place attachment that tourists build with the Azores in order to understand if this region has the conditions to become an holistic tourism destination.

Limitations | This research project have some limitations. The study could might omit and therefore not consider other specific relevant dimensions of the chosen constructs. On the other hand, the quantitative approach that will be used requires an individual to subjectively classify a set of predetermined attributes or to characterize stimuli using a standardized classification scale battery (Pike, 2007), which may be a suboptimal solution. Despite the advantages of flexibility and facility of use and codification of these structured techniques, there is the risk of omitting important constructs and of using constructs that are not the most important to respondents.

Conclusions | The growth of the holistic tourism suggests that there is an increasing desire to focus on the 'self' rather than the 'other', and in 'existential' rather than 'objective authenticity'. This represents a desire to escape but not in the classic way (i.e. escape from society turbulence). It's a desire and a need to escape but in order to find oneself (Smith & Kelly, 2006).

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