

Extreme sports and the natural world – ‘New Extremos Portugal’: A case study

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Keywords | Extreme sports, Sustainability, Natural world, Leisure and recreation, Environmental education, New Extremos Portugal.

Objectives | This study explores the interplay between extreme sports and the natural world in which they take place. It has been widely assumed that extreme participants treat nature only as a means to an end and, therefore, it is valuable only for its human uses. More often than not, the natural world is envisaged either as battleground or playground where physical prowess is tested, courage is under fire, constant darings and competition are on display. In contrast, it is sought to demonstrate that extreme sports and sustainability have the same philosophical framework: humanity is simply a part of the natural environment. Instead of focusing on the negative outcomes of extreme activities sought by risk lovers and adrenaline seekers, the potential presented by extreme sports to strive for a more sustainable tourism is highlighted. The authors discuss different concepts of nature, depending on the stakeholders, to adumbrate different perspectives of sustainability and how this wide concept could be implemented in Portuguese businesses, particularly to educate young entrepreneurs who are gradually changing tourism in Portugal. By discussing how extreme sports practitioners may be one with nature, instead of trying to overcome it, it is tried to show how new concepts of leisure, sports, and tourism are intertwined.

Methodology | Using the case study as a research methodology that fits in educational research backgrounds due to the flexibility with which it provides researchers, the authors try to shed light on how a decision or a set of decisions are taken, how they were or can be implemented, and with which results. Concurrent with the case study methodology, tools from anthropology, psychology, and tourism are used in order to present a holistic insight of extreme sports and its practitioners. Interviews with the different target audiences of *New Extremos Portugal* were carried out, providing qualitative and quantitative data on motivation for the different activities undertaken, as well as ecological awareness *in situ* were collected during a professional Master’s training placement of Ecotourism at *New Extremos Portugal*. The use of different, rather holistic, tools provided an important perspective to elaborate this study and explore how

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sustainable tourism can generate social, economic, and environmental benefits for local communities, while also creating transformative experiences for tourists. The main goal of the Master's training was to improve and transform *New Extremos Portugal* into a more sustainable recreation enterprise.

Main results and contributions | In order to have a greener, more environmentally aware extreme sports practitioner and, on the other hand, more environmentally-friendly providers, the results of a SWOT analysis, a cost/benefit analysis, and target-audience analysis provided economical, social and cultural bearings, contributing to deploy new tourism policies in a near future. Based on the *Sustainable Policy and Sustainable Charter* drawn at *New Extremos Portugal*, it is explored how economic and social behaviour can be transformed in tourism, a vital and resilient activity, even in difficult times. This study may be pioneer in its field in Portugal and establish itself as a model on how the booming business of recreation enterprises can take action to become more sustainable, changing their philosophy and mission with little investment.

Limitations | Considering the time constraints of a professional master's training placement and the Portuguese cultural misconception of trainees as fodder for cheap labour, this exploratory study has a limited scope in terms of strategy implementation. This tentative study provides a partial vision of which changes of a recreation business will have to undergo in order to become more sustainable. Extreme sports, as well as leisure and recreation in Portugal are widely spread, but the costs of such endeavours may dishearten the cohorts of youngsters for whom such activities are not affordable, thus narrowing the spectrum of organized and supervised extreme sports target-audience. It is up to other researchers to explore the vast untapped potential of this field of expertise, involving greater financial means, more time and participants than the present authors could provide.

Conclusions | Sustainable tourism promotes the entwining of man and environment through manifold activities ranging from extreme sports to the scientific study of ecosystems. Recreation enterprises are part of this alternative niche, hence the importance of having sound sustainable management practices presently valued by our society at large and by the ministry of economy in particular. Underpinned in the national tourism strategic plan, there is a strategy to be followed nationwide that corroborates the importance of sustainable tourism as a path to explore through the supply of a plethora of guidelines. Unlike other recreation enterprises, *New Extremos Portugal* has a vast array of structures and equipment beyond recreational activities that involve event organisation, workshops, professional solutions for vertical work, spaces tailored for customers' needs in indoor space and *Extremos Park*, shopping online through *Extremos Store*, as well as strong partnerships that allows it to be open all year long fighting seasonality. The suggestions offered by the master's internship towards the building of a sustainable policy aimed at improving the green behaviour of the enterprise, by developing a strategic diagnostic so as to beware of the risks and explore to the fullest the potential and opportunities laid out in developing *Extremos Green*, will provide a new vision for the entrepreneurial segment. Hence, *New Extremos Portugal* has the possibility of gaining more prestige and attracting greener tourists by defending the value of sustainability, a solution that will compensate the green refitting costs with benefits that outlast for generations.

More and more tourism enterprises choose sustainable practices and even more ethically-prone tourists value the adoption of green behaviours, basing their choices on an organic way of life where the principles of solidarity among generations are abide. This study explains in detail how this can be done.