

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS OF TOURISTS: A FACT OR A MYTH?

Patrícia Oom do Valle
University of Algarve

Manuela Guerreiro
University of Algarve

Júlio Mendes
University of Algarve

The Algarve is a mature destination in the south of Portugal and is mainly well-known for its offerings of sun and sea. Aside from its problem of strong seasonal changes, the region also faces strong competition from other nearby destinations that has impacted its need to better attract tourists. As regional stakeholders have recognized the necessity to diversify the tourist experience, a strong effort has been dedicated to the development of complementary tourist products, with special attention on eco-tourism. Within this context, the present study used data from a survey of tourists who visited the Algarve during December 2010 (low season). An analysis was done to determine the extent to which tourists visiting the region would actively search for nature-relative activities and the profile of these individuals. In particular, the study aimed to understand whether these tourists share environmentally friendly values or, instead, are typical tourists who have chosen the Algarve based on its traditional attributes of appealing climatic conditions and beaches. Depending on whether nature-based tourism in the Algarve is a fact or a myth, strategies for repositioning the destination must be adapted, new tourist products must be proposed and communication campaigns need to be rethought.

Keywords: Tourism destination, Nature-based tourism, environmentally friendly values.

JEL Classification: L83, M1, O1



INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980s, seaside destinations that have conventionally offered the product of *sun and beach* have felt the need to become more competitive, as they faced a strong seasonality problem and had to adapt their offerings to the new motivational tendencies of tourists (Valle, Guerreiro, Mendes and Silva, 2011). In fact, tourists nowadays are more proactive and search for more authentic and diversified experiences (Gale, 2005), which forces destinations to rethink and restructure what they have to offer (Sedmak and Mihalic, 2008). Nature-based tourism has recently received attention among mass tourism destinations as a complementary product to *sun and beach*, especially during the low season (Valle *et al.*, 2011).

This reality applies to the Algarve, which is the most important tourist region in Portugal, and is usually seen as a seaside destination. Like other coastal destinations, and due to its climate conditions, *sun and beach* is its most important tourist product (Valle, Pintassilgo, Matias and André, 2012). However, the Algarve suffers from competition with destinations that have similar characteristics, such as Spain, Tunisia and Greece. Therefore, there has been a growing consensus among regional stakeholders that a more wide-ranging set of tourist products is necessary, especially products that take advantage of the inland of the region. Aside from beaches, the Algarve actually has a vast interior area that can provide exciting and rich experiences to tourists. Individuals, who want to explore natural resources or do nature-based activities, can go horseback riding, fishing, experience safaris, do nature walks and enjoy agricultural experiences. Local tourism authorities believe that there is a portion of tourists that is more environmentally aware and that wants to visit the inland areas, searching for nature-based experiences.

Using data from a survey conducted during the low season of 2010 in the Algarve, this study aimed to determine the extent to which this premise is a reality or, instead, whether it is a myth. It also endeavoured to provide a better understanding of the relevance of nature-based activities to the tourist experience in the region. Within this scope, four specific objectives were pursued. Firstly, the study intended to investigate whether tourists traveling to the Algarve visited the inland areas and, if that were the case, whether they were interested in alternative experiences that differed from the traditional ones associated with *sun and beach*. Secondly, it was intended to identify the types of nature-based activities that strongly interested these tourists. A third specific objective was to assess whether a visit to the inland areas was associated with more

satisfaction and willingness to revisit the area, as well as recommendations to the Algarve region. Finally, the study aimed to understand the extent to which nature and the countryside are important motivators for visiting the Algarve in comparison to other possible regions, especially among tourists who visit the inland areas.

The fact that the main motivator to visit destinations has been for decades identified as a mono-product (*sun and beach*, in the case of the Algarve) does not mean that tourists restrict their activities to a unique area and engage with only those that are offered in that area. If, on the contrary, the needs and expectations of “new” tourists are really changing and becoming more comprehensive, tourism destination planners should be aware of this new reality when they promote and manage their destination.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Nature-based tourism

According to Williams and Buswell (2003), tourism consists of three components that include travel, accommodation and participation in activities at the destination. Activities like hiking, nature photography, safaris or fishing can be considered as tourism activities that take place in a natural environment.

The erosion caused by traditional mass tourism has contributed to the growth of some specific forms of tourism, most of which are more environmentally friendly (Eadington and Smith, 1992). Furthermore, the lack of innovation in traditional mass tourism destinations has resulted in less attractive tourism products that have not considered the new requirements/desires of contemporary tourists. According to Akama and Kieti (2003: 73), “postmodern social and economic changes, especially in the developed countries in the north, have enhanced the value of natural areas and the promotion of nature-based tourism and recreational activities.”

In this context, nature-based tourism activities have registered a growth rate that has ranged from 10% to 12% per year (Higgins, 1996; McKercher, 1996; Neto, 2003; Ties, 2007). The World Tourism Organization (WTO, 2002) considered these activities as a subcategory of global ecotourism and put forward that, in 2000, this subcategory represented a market of 10% to 15% of global tourism activity.

There has been no clear and consensual definition of nature-based tourism in the literature (Khan & Su, 2003). Initially defined as travel to

undisturbed areas that require respectful considerations of nature (Boo, 1990), nowadays it includes other areas that can be affected by these kinds of activities, namely the environment, society, economy (Swarbrooke, 1999) and culture (Figgis, 1993) of the region.

According to Wilson (1992: 23), nature-based tourism is a “temporary migration of people to what they understand to be a different and usually more ‘pure’ environment.” As Tangeland and Aas (2011: 822) pointed out, these include “tourism products that are based upon activities that take place in a natural environment.” Many of the activities connected with nature-based tourism can be enjoyed free of charge and include tourism products like trekking, hiking, rafting, climbing, nature photography, wildlife safaris and camping. Tangeland et al. (2013: 364), in turn, considered nature-based tourism as a “specific type of rural tourism.” Other researchers have used synonymous terms like ecological, sustainable, green, alternative, responsible or mountain tourism.

The increasing number of visitors who have been interested in these kinds of activities has contributed to diversifying the forms of nature-based tourism activities (Poon, 1993; Urry, 1990). This phenomenon has led to an increasing concern about the negative impacts of tourism on some especially fragile environments (Buckley, 2007). As Lindberg and Hawkins (1993) pointed out, it is vital to achieve a balanced use of natural resources in order to ensure its conservation and, at the same time, the well-being of local residents. Fillion, Foley and Jacquemont (1994) emphasized that this kind of tourism requires responsible behaviour from visitors, who must be environmentally conscious.

General environmental awareness

The problems raised by modern society about our natural environment are well known, with ozone depletion, acid rain and deforestation being only a few examples. A more widespread concern with environmental issues has developed as the breadth of general ecological problems has been increasingly brought to the public’s attention. Diverse measuring instruments have been proposed to evaluate general environmental awareness (Maloney and Ward, 1973; Maloney, Ward and Braucht, 1975; Weigel and Weigel, 1978). Nonetheless, as Stern et al. (1995) discussed, the New Environmental Paradigm (NEP) Scale (Dunlap and Van Liere, 1978) is the most extensively used scale. The NEP Scale “measures a constellation of attitudes that represent the respondents’ adherence to a worldview of the relationship between humanity and the environment” (Vining and Ebreo, 1992: 1582). The

NEP arose in opposition to the Dominant Social Paradigm (DSP) (Dunlap and Van Liere, 1978), which highlighted progress and growth instead. The NEP Scale was first proposed as a unidimensional measure with 12 items, but additional research has shown that it is a multidimensional concept (Albrecht, 1997, Noe and Snow, 1990; Shetzer, Stackman and Moore, 1991). Consequently, subsets of NEP items were considered in some studies as measures of three different dimensions: balance of nature, limits of growth and humanity over nature (Albrecht, 1997; Valle, Reis, Menezes and Rebelo, 2004; Valle, Rebelo, Reis and Menezes, 2005; Vining and Ebreo, 1992).

In the tourism literature, Dolnicar, Crouch and Long (2008) have provided a good review of the characteristics of environmentally friendly tourists and concluded that most studies in this field are focused on the ecotourism sector, and have ignored the results of environmental behaviour from other research areas, such as psychology. In a more recent study, Dolnicar (2010) proposed that both socio-demographic and psychological factors are predictors of pro-environmental behaviour. In particular, this study showed that income and moral obligation affect the environmentally friendly behaviour of tourists on vacation. In another recent study, Mehmetoglu (2010) showed that, in a holiday setting, environmentally friendly behaviour was associated with the following characteristics: gender (female), household income, political orientation (liberal), environmental concern and personal environmental norms. On the contrary, fun and excitement values negatively affected pro-environmental behaviour. However, the studies that we reviewed on the environmental awareness of tourists did not reveal the extent to which these and other factors affected their search for nature-based tourism activities.

METHODS

Setting

Located in the south of Portugal, the Algarve is the most important Portuguese destination for tourists, as it is well-known for its sun and sea. As a result, this region's economy has become strongly dependent on the tourism industry. Although the climate conditions and beaches represent the main motivating reasons for visiting the region, the Algarve also offers interesting attributes that appeal to tourists, namely historical, cultural and architectural heritage; gastronomy attractions and natural and

rural landscapes (Mendes et al., 2011; Valle, Silva, Mendes and Guerreiro, 2006; Valle, Guerreiro and Mendes, 2010).

The Algarve has recently started to invest in a diversified set of products that is considered as strategically important for reducing seasonality problems and enabling accommodation units to maintain a reasonable occupancy rate throughout the year. Complementary products include golf, nautical tourism (which would take advantage of the marinas and port facilities), international conferences, culture-oriented tourism, health tourism and nature-based tourism (PENT, 2013). Authorities believe that this strategic diversification could potentially attract more tourists and/or encourage an increase in the average length of stay and daily expenditure (PENT, 2013). These aspects bring challenges to Destination Management Organizations (DMO) that need to understand tourists' receptiveness to new products and offer. While previous studies had already provided some insights on the importance of cultural offer in this type of destination (Valle et al., 2011), the remaining possible products, including nature-based tourism, are scarcely studied. In this sense, this study provides a first attempt to comprehend to what extent the type of tourist who visits the inland of the region really has a specific profile (motivations to visit the region, preferences regarding tourism experiences and degree of environment awareness), different from the typical "seaside" tourist.

Questionnaire and data

The data for this study came from 384 questionnaires that were given to foreign tourists who visited the Algarve region during the winter months in 2010. The sample size was determined based on the most conservative estimate of the sample proportion ($p = 0.5$), a 95% level of confidence and a maximum sampling error of 5% (Vicente and Reis, 1996). Two interviewers applied the questionnaire to tourists leaving the region at the Faro International Airport while they were checking out. The interviewers were suitably identified and the study's purposes were explained to the respondents. Data was collected using a systematic sampling procedure.

The questionnaire included four sections of interest to this study. Section I aimed to identify the motivations for tourists to visit the Algarve; section II sought to understand their environmental awareness using the NEP, which is composed of 15 items (Dunlap and Van Liere, 1978); section III investigated the activities that the tourists took part in during their stay and section IV included questions about their socio-

demographic characteristics (gender, age, nationality, marital status, educational qualifications and employment situation).

Data analysis methods

Data analysis included a preliminary descriptive analysis of the relevant questions that attended to the specific objectives of this study, in particular those that outlined the profile of the respondents and described their visit to the Algarve. Then, an Exploratory Factorial Analysis (EFA) was applied to the items that measured their environmental awareness to reduce the dimensionality of the original data set (15 items). To assess the reliability of the identified factors, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overall sample profile

The sample had the following socio-demographic characteristics: 54% were women and 46% were men. The age ranged from 16 to 82 years, with the majority of respondents (61%) ranging from 45 to 60 years old or older. The average age was 48 years, with a standard deviation of 17. The median age was 50 years and the mode was 65 years. Seventy percent of the 384 tourists who were interviewed were from the UK while 9% were from Germany, which was the second most represented country. In terms of professional status, 49% were still working, while 21% were retired. The marital status data illustrated that 66% were married, 26% were single and 7% were divorced. Most participants had a higher education degree (57%) and 40% had a secondary education degree.

Results detailing the tourist experience in the Algarve showed that 77% of the respondents had visited the region previously and only 23% was visiting the Algarve for the first time. The types of accommodation that they chose consisted of apartments (38%), hotels (21%) and their own properties (19%). Rural tourism was the least popular reason for the trip (selected by only 1% of respondents). The internet (41%) and travel agencies (17%) were the most common accommodation booking methods. Most respondents stayed at the destination for a week (54%), with an average stay of 12 days (standard deviation: 8 days). The median and mode were 7 days. In terms of the transportation methods used within the region, 31% of respondents rented a car, 20% preferred to use the bus

and 20% had their own car. The train was chosen by only 7% of respondents.

Visit to the Algarve

Most tourists stayed in coastal municipalities (63%), with Albufeira, Loulé and Portimão together hosting 40% of respondents. While all respondents visited the coastal area of the Algarve, 68% visited the inland region, with the most visited places located in the municipalities of Monchique, Silves and Loulé (Figure 1).

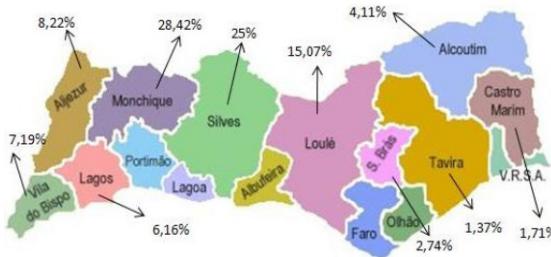


Figure 1. Areas Visited in the Inland of the Region

Among the tourists who visited the region for the first time (38.8%), only 13.1% travelled inland. This implies that, among the tourists who had visited the region one year ago (76.8%), 86.9% searched for experiences other than the Algarve’s sun and beach product. Table 1 shows the activities that the tourists who visited the inland of the region (referred to as “inland tourists”) and those that tourists who only visited seaside areas (referred to as “seaside tourists”) participated in. The most common activities were “nature walks” and “gastronomic experiences,” with these activities characterizing “inland tourists” more than “seaside tourists.” These two groups of tourists also engaged in “pedestrian tours,” “fishing” and “bike riding.” Such results conform with previous research that have shown that activities and resources that could potentially become tourism products in the Algarve inland should also be considered as complementary tourism products in coastal areas since “seaside tourists” search for a more diversified experience as well (Valle et al, 2011).

While there were no statistically significant relationships between overall satisfaction with the tourism experience and visits to specific

locations within the Algarve inland (independence tests: $p > 0.05$), recommendations to visit the region and repeated visits had statistically significant relationships with visiting the inland region (independence tests: $p = 0.003$ and $p = 0.000$, respectively). The greatest intentions to recommend visits to the region were expressed by visitors to inland Algarve (88.8%). The percentage was slightly lower among tourists who were in coastal areas (76.7%). A large portion (86.4%) of tourists who visited the inland was favourable to the idea of repeating their visit. This intention was not equally present among those who stayed in coastal areas (70%).

Table 1. Participation in Activities in the Algarve Region (Inland Tourists versus Seaside Tourists)

Activities	Inland tourists	Seaside tourists
Horseback riding	1.9%	2.5%
Fishing	11.9%	5.0%
Safaris	2.7%	0.8%
Hunting	2.3%	3.3%
Nature walks	46.4%	36.7%
Golf	18.4%	17.5%
Gastronomic experiences	45.2%	22.5%
Agricultural activities	3.1%	1.7%
Pedestrian tours	15.3%	10.8%
Bike riding	10.0%	8.3%
Other	18.4%	10.0%

Motivations

Overall, eight motivations for tourists visiting the Algarve region were assessed through a 5-point Likert scale: 1 – Not at all important, 2 – Not very important, 3 – Indifferent, 4 – Important and 5 – Very important. The results showed that the most important reasons for selecting Algarve as a tourism destination were sun and beach, nature and rural landscape (Table 2). These reasons scored the highest in the categories important and very important (86.8% and 77.7%, respectively). Other important motives for visiting the region were to visit towns and monuments (59.4%) and to have gastronomy experiences (56.5%). Sport events and activities as well as health and beauty related activities were the least considered motivations (27.4% and 24.3%, respectively).

Table 2, Motivations to Visit the Algarve (Distribution by Responses on the Likert Scale)

Motivations	(1)+(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(4)+(5)	Total	Mode
Nature and countryside	7.1%	15.2%	49.9%	27.8%	77.7%	100%	4
Sun and beach	6.0%	7.1%	47.5%	39.3%	86.8%	100%	4
Cities, towns and monuments	12.9%	27.8%	45.1%	14.3%	59.4%	100%	4
To visit family and friends	43.8%	17.4%	18.3%	20.5%	38.8%	100%	1
Sport events and sport activities	48.0%	24.6%	16.9%	10.5%	27.4%	100%	1
Gastronomy	19.7%	23.9%	41.7%	14.8%	56.5%	100%	4
Health and beauty	46.6%	29.1%	21.5%	2.8%	24.3%	100%	3
Learn Portuguese	37.6%	27.5%	24.8%	10.1%	34.9%	100%	3

(1) = Not at all important; (2) = Not very important; (3) = Indifferent; (4) = Important; (5) = Very important

Table 3 further compares the motivations of tourists who visited the inland of Algarve with those that only visited the seaside. The table presents responses by the sum of categories 4 (important) and 5 (very important). The findings clearly illustrate that “inland tourists” valued nature and countryside more than “seaside tourists” (88.8% versus 82.6%). However, with the exception of “health and beauty,” the former group valorised all motives strongly.

Table 3. Motivations to Visit the Algarve (Inland Tourists versus Seaside Tourists)

Motivations	Overall sample	Inland tourists	Seaside tourists
Nature and countryside	77.7%	84.0%	63.3%
Sun and beach	86.8%	88.8%	82.6%
Cities, towns and monuments	59.4%	64.8%	48.1%
To visit family and friends	38.8%	41.4%	32.7%
Sport events and sport activities	27.4%	27.9%	26.5%
Gastronomy	56.5%	62.7%	41.6%
Health and beauty	24.3%	23.3%	27.0%
Learn Portuguese	34.9%	42.0%	18.8%

Environmental awareness

To measure environmental awareness, the following five-point Likert scale was used: 1 – Strongly disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Indifferent, 4 – Agree and 5 – Strongly agree. For the purposes of data reduction, EFA was applied to the 15 items used to measure general environmental awareness. The use of this method provided four new dimensions (factors) that best represented the initial item, together accounting for 56% of the total variance. Both the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett’s test of sphericity indicated that the data was suitable for an EFA (KMO = 0.778; Bartlett test: $p = 0.000$). All items loaded reasonably strongly on one factor and the Cronbach’s alphas reported acceptable values, as summarized in Table 4. Taking into account the meaning of the corresponding items with higher loadings, factors were labelled as Man over nature, Limits of nature, Balance of nature and Need of a lifestyle change. These results are somewhat consistent with previous findings on general environmental awareness. Table 4 shows the results from the EFA and some descriptive statistics, including the percentage of responses in the response categories “agree” plus “strongly agree” (within the overall sample, among “inland tourists” only and among “seaside tourists” only), the mode and the median for each item (the numbers in parentheses).

Table 4. Environmental Awareness Items, *Loadings* from EFA and Descriptive Statistics

Items and Factors	Loadings	Overall sample	Inland tourists	Seaside tourists
<i>Man over nature</i> ($\alpha = 0.746$)		32.7%	30.4%	37.5%
1.Humans will eventually learn enough about how nature works to be able to control it	0.714	45.1% (4/3)	44.7%	45.0%
2.Humans were meant to rule over the rest of nature	0.663	21.2% (2/2)	16.4%	31.9%
3.Humans have the right to modify the natural environment to suit their needs	0.663	33.5% (2/2)	31.0%	38.4%
4.Human ingenuity will insure that we do not make the earth unliveable	0.660	45.8% (4/3)	48.2%	40.9%
5.The balance of nature is strong enough to cope with the impacts of modern industrial nations	0.630	21.2% (2/2)	17.3%	29.7%
6.The so-called "ecological crisis" facing humankind has been greatly exaggerated	0.576	29.6% (2/3)	24.9%	39.3%
<i>Limits of nature</i> ($\alpha = 0.653$)		73.6%	77.5%	64.2%

7. When humans interfere with nature, it often produces disastrous consequences	0.704	76.6% (4/4)	80.1%	67.9%
8. Humans are severely abusing the environment	0.676	78.1% (4/4)	83.4%	65.5%
9. If things continue on their present course, we will soon experience a major ecological catastrophe	0.584	66.2% (4/4)	69.0%	59.3%
<i>Balance of nature</i> ($\alpha = 0.673$)				
10. Plants and animals have as much right as humans to exist	0.769	84.0% (4/4)	86.1%	78.9%
11. Despite our special abilities, humans are still subject to the laws of nature	0.687	82.8% (4/4)	86.5%	74.5%
12. The balance of nature is very delicate and easily upset	0.590	76.1% (4/4)	78.2%	71.7%
<i>Need of a lifestyle change</i> ($\alpha = 0.727$)				
13. The earth is like a spaceship with very limited room and resources	0.722	61.4% (4/4)	63.1%	55.4%
14. The earth has plenty of natural resources if we just learn how to develop them	-0.580	79.9% (4/4)	81.4%	77.0%
15. We are approaching the limit of the number of people the earth can support	0.564	44.1% (4/3)	46.7%	38.5%

Factor 1 was labelled as Man over nature because it included items related to the legitimacy of human dominion over nature. High values for this factor would suggest that tourists expressed beliefs that humankind has the right to modify the natural environment and to rule over the rest of nature. Overall, agreement with the items included in this factor was low, ranging from 21.2% (in items 2 and 5) to 45.8% (in item 4). The last two columns of Table 3 show that “inland tourists” reported lower levels of agreement with this factor than “seaside tourists” (30.4% versus 37.5%), meaning the former group possessed a more environmentally friendly attitude regarding this dimension.

Factor 2, referred to as Limits of nature, included items expressing the idea that the exploration of environmental resources has limits that, once surpassed, can produce catastrophic consequences. Overall, tourists demonstrated high levels of agreement with the items included in this factor, ranging from 66.2% (in item 9) to 78.1% (in item 8). However, “inland tourists” expressed higher levels of agreement with this factor than “seaside tourists” (77.5% versus 64.2%), which implies that the former had a more positive environmental attitude concerning this dimension.

Factor 3 was named Balance of nature, and encompassed items that indicated the fragility of the balance of nature. This factor had the highest consistency among responses; the overall sample reported high levels of agreement with all items, ranging from 76.1% (in item 12) to 84.0% (in item 10). As in the previous factor, “inland tourists” expressed higher levels of agreement on this factor than “seaside tourists” (83.6% versus 75.0%), which suggests that the former had a more environmentally friendly attitude based on this dimension.

Finally, Factor 4 was labelled as Need of a lifestyle change because it included items that reflected the importance of considering the capacity of the planet in terms of available space and resources. In this factor, items 13 and 15 had lower levels of agreement than those included in factors 2 and 3 but still indicated an environmentally friendly attitude, which was reinforced by the high level of agreement in item 14. As in factors 2 and 3, “inland tourists” exhibited higher levels of agreement with this factor than “seaside tourists” (63.7% versus 57.0%), which shows that the former were more environmentally aware in this dimension.

CONCLUSION AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

In contrast to the belief that the *sun and beach* product is the main motivator for tourists to visit the Algarve, the present study showed that natural and rural landscapes, gastronomy, cities, towns and monuments are also important attractions (78%, 57% and 60%, respectively). Moreover, the results showed a stronger valorisation of nature and countryside among “inland tourists” compared to “seaside tourists.” Another relevant point was that nature-based walks and gastronomy-related experiences were considered as favourite activities for tourists visiting inland Algarve. Also of note was that intentions to recommend the region to others and to revisit the region had a statistically significant positive relationship with visiting the inland.

These results support a new reality that must be acknowledged in order to meet the needs of new market segments that have not, so far, been considered in the DMO’s communication strategies. Therefore, a concluding remark on the promotion of this destination is warranted. In particular, this study has implications in terms of design, development and promotion of new products to the region of Algarve. In effect, the study’s findings suggest that it would not be sustainable to promote the destination exclusively with a focus on the *sun and beach* product. More than ever, it is justified that the DMOs endorse an integrated management

of new products with existing ones, in order to effectively achieve the new tourists' expectations. In this sense, it would be necessary to reposition the strategy for the Algarve by differentiating it from the competition based on an integrated offer of sun and beach, nature, culture and gastronomy. As in many other times and circumstances, substantive decisions on this issue are necessary, taking advantage of all the opportunities offered by the market and intending to plan the future of the Algarve destination with vision, wisdom and good sense.

Another important finding from this study was that tourists visiting the Algarve reported a strong environmental awareness, as demonstrated by their recognition of the balance and limits of nature and the importance of considering these environmental limits. Moreover, tourists recognized that there are limits on the supremacy of man over nature. Another important finding was that the sense of responsibility to the environment was stronger among "inland tourists" compared to "seaside tourists." In other words, tourists who sought the interior of this region adhered more strongly to the values and beliefs represented on the NEP Scale. It could be assumed that these tourists were also more aware of the problems of nature and the need for its conservation, or even the need to practice more environmentally and culturally sustainable forms of tourism. This is an important finding since it shows that nature-based tourism in the Algarve is not a myth, but is, instead, a type of tourism that should receive more attention from individuals who are responsible for managing and promoting the destination. This information is particularly important for providing the necessary input to the development of strategies for repositioning the destination, either in terms of new product proposals, or of more effective communication with target audiences (current and potential).

At last, some research topics emerge from this study's findings. Firstly, it would be important to understand the functioning and the dynamics of regional and local partnerships. This would facilitate the design and implementation of programs and strategies in tourist destinations, able to promote new tourist products, integrated with the more traditional ones. Secondly, the issue of positioning and repositioning the anchor tourist products in destinations also deserves more research attention. At last, a deeper understanding of nature-based tourists, including their demand patterns, competing destinations, source markets, socio-economic characteristics and motivations to choose this type of destination, is required.

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REFEREED ANONYMOUSLY

Patrícia Oom do Valle (p@ualg.pt) is member of the Research Center for Spatial and Organizations Dynamics (CIEO), University of Algarve, Portugal. Address: Faculty of Economics, University of Algarve, Campus de Gambelas, Edifício 9, 8005-139 Faro, Portugal.

Manuela Guerreiro (mmguerre@ualg.pt) is member of the Research Center for Spatial and Organizations Dynamics (CIEO), University of Algarve, Portugal. Address: Faculty of Economics, University of Algarve, Campus de Gambelas, Edifício 9, 8005-139 Faro, Portugal.

Júlio Mendes (jmendes@ualg.pt) is member of the Research Center for Spatial and Organizations Dynamics (CIEO), University of Algarve, Portugal. Address: Faculty of Economics, University of Algarve, Campus de Gambelas, Edifício 9, 8005-139 Faro, Portugal.