

Understanding Tourists` Behavior Regarding Sustainable Destinations in Portugal: An Application of the Theory of Planned Behavior

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Abstract:

In recent decades, Portugal, a country in the southwest of the European continent whose territory comprises a continental part and two archipelagos, has been asserting itself as one of the most competitive tourist destinations in Europe. Tourism is, in fact, a crucial activity of strategic importance to the Portuguese socioeconomic development, being responsible for generating significant amounts of revenue, creating jobs, business opportunities, and boosting different regions, both in the interior and on the coast of the country. As a result of several critical sustainability challenges, namely population growth, resource scarcity, food insecurity, climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution, there has been an evident growing global awareness of the urgent need to respect the environment and empower local communities, which resulted in a greater incentive for the development of sustainable tourism. Meanwhile, with the COVID-19 pandemic, responsible for causing significant socioeconomic impacts worldwide, the tourism sector had to reinvent itself, emerging in a more sustainable way. In fact, it was observed that during and in the post-pandemic period, characterized by some periods of social distancing and greater proximity to nature, tourists became more attentive and concerned with the tourism economic, social and environmental impacts, both for the current and the future generations. In addition to a greater demand for more sustainable hotels, tourists are also more concerned with their travel impacts, seeing an increase in the number of tourists who are willing to pay more for more environmentally friendly means of transport. This research study explores the tourists' behavior towards sustainable destinations in Portugal, through the application of the Theory of Planned Behavior and with the information collected through an online questionnaire. The results reveal that tourists` intention to visit sustainable destinations in Portugal is influenced by their attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control and sustainability awareness. Regarding the tourists` consumption behavior of sustainable destinations, this is influenced by their intention and perceived behavioral control, despite the existence of an intention-behavior gap. The results also concluded that tourists are willing to pay for sustainable destinations in Portugal.

Keywords:

Tourism; Sustainability; Theory of Planned Behavior; Portugal.