

DOES PORTUGAL NEED A SET OF SUSTAINABILITY INDICATORS FOR ITS TOURISM?

SERÁ QUE PORTUGAL PRECISA DE UM CONJUNTO DE INDICADORES DE SUSTENTABILIDADE PARA O TURISMO?

ABSTRACT Tourism was considered for a long time, a non-polluting industry, the so-called "industry without chimneys". However, as the world's population increased and technological developments allowed for more frequent travel, tourism grew and began to generate significant impacts, whether social, environmental or economic. Sustainability is therefore a key factor in current and future tourism development and rather than an abstract concept, it must be measurable.

Considering that sustainable tourism is a truly unrealistic objective for the foreseeable future, a more realistic target would be monitoring the performance of tourism and its trends through sustainability indicators.

Although difficult to define, indicators assume a priority role as instruments. Even considering that they are uncertain and imperfect models of the reality and are made of compromises among various factors such as relevance or scientific validity, they are still robust tools that promote sustainability.

Due to the current crisis, the Portuguese tourism sector is having an increasing importance in the economic development. In this paper, it is explained the importance (and need) of a system of indicators of sustainable tourism adapted to the Portuguese reality. A group where sustainability and the progresses made towards meeting the targets proposed in the PENT are evaluated.

RESUMO O Turismo foi considerado, durante muito tempo, uma actividade económica limpa e não poluente, a então designada por "indústria sem chaminés". No entanto, à medida que a população mundial aumentou e a evolução tecnológica possibilitou viagens mais frequentes, o turismo cresceu e começou a gerar impactos significativos, tanto sociais, ambientais, culturais ou económicos. A sustentabilidade é, por isso um factor determinante para o turismo actual e futuro. E a sustentabilidade, mais que um conceito abstracto, precisa ser mensurável.

Considerando que turismo verdadeiramente sustentável é um objectivo utópico num futuro previsível, um objectivo mais realista seria a monitorização de melhorias de performance do turismo e respectivas tendências, através de indicadores de sustentabilidade.

Sendo de difícil definição os indicadores assumem prioritariamente um papel relevante enquanto instrumentos. A sua insuficiência, enquanto representantes de modelos incertos e imperfeitos de retratar a realidade, não impede que, com eles se possam construir robustas ferramentas de promoção da sustentabilidade.

No contexto da actual crise, o sector turístico português tem vindo a merecer uma crescente importância para o desenvolvimento da economia. Neste paper, é defendida a importância (e necessidade) de um sistema de indicadores de turismo sustentável, adaptada á realidade portuguesa. Um grupo onde a sustentabilidade e os progressos no sentido do cumprimento dos objectivos propostos no PENT são avaliados.

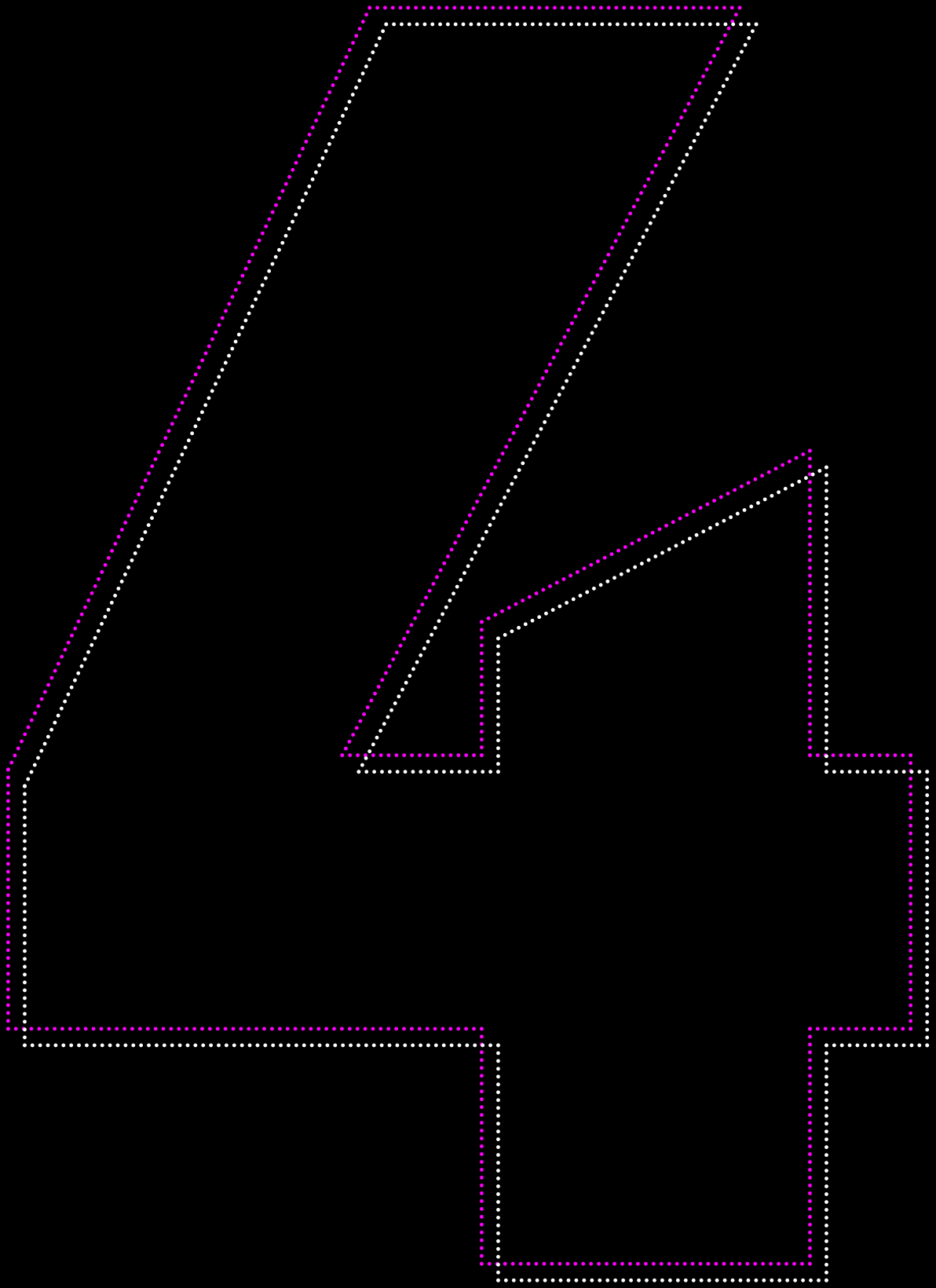
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1. INTRODUCTION

In the twentieth century, the movement of populations and the advances in transportation and communication technology have turned tourism into one of the largest industries on a global scale (*Choi & Sirakaya, 2006*). Touristic exports represent 30% of the total commercial services and 6% of the world's exports, in this category, tourism appears in the fourth position preceded only by fuels, chemicals and automotive products (*UNWTO, 2011*).

For many developing countries Tourism represents one of the main sectors of the economy, creating jobs and income sources (*UNWTO, 2010*). Therefore it is not surprising that in recent years many governments have focused in the advantages of a market with high growth rates and opportunities concerning social and economic benefits (*Jenkins, 2006*).

Like many other sectors, the tourism industry was greatly affected by the 2009 recession, the deepest since the Great Depression (*IMF, 2009; WTTC, 2009*). Global GDP declined 2.1%, being developed countries the ones who suffered the most (*IMF, 2009*). Within the tourism sector, many investments have been postponed or canceled, even in previously dynamic and in expansion touristic destinations (*WTTC, 2009*).

Research conducted by the World Travel & Tourism Council (*WTTC*) shows a recovery of the sector, with the contribution of tourism to the world GDP growing 3.3% in 2010. This growth is expected to increase to 4.5% during 2011, creating three million new jobs for a total of 258 million (*WTTC, 2011*).

Forecasts for 2020 indicate a growth increase of 4.4% per year, thus confirming the importance of this economic sector for employment (*WTTC, 2009*).

For a long time Tourism was considered, a non-polluting and clean business, the so-called "industry without

chimneys" (*Viegas, 2008*). However as the world's population increased and technological developments allowed for more frequent travel, tourism began to cause significant adverse social, environmental, cultural and economic impacts (*Choi & Sirakaya, 2006; Cooper, 2008; European Communities, 2006; Hardy & Beeton, 2011; Saarinen, 2006; Viegas, 2008*).

The unplanned growth of tourism has damaged the natural and socio-cultural environments of many touristic destinations, reducing its popularity in the eyes of the tourist (*Farsari & Prastacos, 2001; Rebollo & Baidal, 2003; WWF-UK, 2002*).

The tourism industry has the particularity of having as a commodity the concept of "touristic attraction". This product should be formed by a set of elements in which the perception of nature, the variety of environments, landscapes and biodiversity, play an essential role. For this reason, tourism and environment should never be antagonistic elements (*APA, 2007*).

Touristic destinations, especially the mature ones, are much in need of a change towards sustainability (*Rebollo, 2004*), not only because their socio-economic structure is very dependent on tourism (*UNWTO, 2011*) but also because a high intensity tourism leads to processes of environmental degradation that may reach inconceivable proportions for a society to which quality of life has become increasingly important.

In recent years, new ways to develop tourism began to show. "New" tourists seek as much as possible, new destinations with an intact environment and a greater integration of the local social and cultural characteristics. Additionally, there has been an increased focus on the experience, the importance of diversity and value for money (*PENT2.0, 2011*). For its part, these destinations seek alternative ways of development that reduce the negative effects of tourism on the environment and try to integrate in a harmonious manner the needs of tourists and local people (*SIET-MAC, 2005*).

Being an industry so dependent on external variables such as environment, culture, community and territory,

touristic destinations are influenced by tourism itself, sometimes to the point that the specific site turns out to be less attractive for tourists. This phenomenon is known as the Butler sequence (*Weaver & Lawton cited in European Communities, 2006*).

Therefore the tourism industry, being an activity of numerous interdependent sectors of the economy, has in sustainability the only option for future development (*Communities, 2006; Hall, 2008; T. Ko, 2005; Rebollo, 2004; SIET-MAC, 2005*).

The notion of sustainable tourism is a sequel of the concept of sustainable development introduced by the Brundtland Report in 1987 (*Hardy & Beeton, 2011; Saarinen, 2006*). Thus, the understanding of what is sustainable development is necessary to explain what sustainable tourism is.

With the economic, social and environmental dimensions as the pillars, this definition has been subject to many interpretations since its creation. Since the concept of sustainable tourism did not deserve an explicit mention on the report, the result was a huge variety of uses of this concept in the context of tourism (*Butler, 2007; J. Ko, 2001; T. Ko, 2005*), an ideology, a political slogan, a concept, a philosophy or even a product.

Tempting as it might seem and although statistics make it seem the other way, an *ad infinitum* growth is not possible. Destinations should be seen and treated as finite and non-renewable sources (*Butler cited in Cordeiro, 2008*).

In a broader context, sustainable tourism can be used to defend different views: by local traders to support the income from tourism, by different social classes to preserve the characteristics of their holiday or by the communities as a way to exclude non-locals (*Mowforth & unt, 2003*).

Conceptually, sustainable tourism can be defined as: Tourism which is developed (environmentally and socially) in such a way and in such a scale that ensures its viability for an indefinite period of time without degrading or changing the existent environment (human or physical) and without jeopardizing the development and well being of other activities and processes (*Butler, 2007*).

To Swarbrooke (*cited in Cordeiro, 2008*) it is a type of economically viable tourism, but that does not destroy the resources on which the activity in the future will depend, mainly the physical environment and social fabric of the local community.

Johnson (*cited in European Communities, 2006*), rather than presenting a definition, highlighted a number of guidelines which sustainable tourism must meet, where all three dimensions of sustainability are represented. The Mohonk Agreement (2000) poses as criteria for sustainable tourism the minimization of ecological and socio-cultural impacts including the promotion of economic benefits to local communities and host countries. Equally to the discussions on the concept of sustainable development, and even if it is evident the lack of consensus on the definition of "sustainable tourism", there is an overall understanding of the changes that must be carried out (*European Communities, 2006*).

In recent years a growing awareness on the part of many national governments and local authorities to sustainability issues appeared (*DCMS, 2005; España, 2007; MEI, 2007; Ministry of Tourism, 2007; Notarstefano, 2008*), however, the mere acceptance of the concept of sustainable development does not mean that the same has been transposed and implemented in practice (*Moniz quoted in Cordeiro, 2008*).

On the other hand, the key objective of sustainable tourism should not only consist in the creation of new touristic destinations considered sustainable. It is imperative to confront and propose solutions to the problems of existing touristic areas (*Butler, 1998*). The difficulty is to make mass tourism destinations more balanced rather than introducing new forms of small scale tourism (*Butler, 2007*).

Those cited above agree in general with two assumptions. Firstly, concern about the economic, social and environmental balance and secondly the preservation of the quality of life for future generations. However due to the existing ambiguity, almost all forms of tourism can be classified as sustainable. Hence the issue of how

the sustainability of a destination can (and should) be monitored and evaluated (*Butler, 2007*).

In conclusion, the term sustainable tourism is not a type of tourism (such as rural tourism or ecotourism) but a different way to promote tourism (*Cordeiro, 2008*).

The term "sustainable tourism" should be used to refer to a state of tourism, and not a type of tourism. This is the concept followed in this chapter and that somehow justifies the tool that is intended in terms of creating an index of sustainable tourism that can be used to assess trends in the sector, its actors and the contributions that they give to the overall development of the social, economic and environmental panorama.

2. TOURISM AND SUSTAINABILITY IN PORTUGAL

According to Beni (1997) the tourism sector will always be a national priority because of the ability it has, or will have, to contribute to the achievement of the objectives and goals of a national strategy. Given its important economic, social, environmental, political and cultural impacts, organized and planned tourism is an important tool to accelerate or complement the development of a country.

Portugal an evidence of that!

Apart from the government of Salazar (1932-1968), the tourism in Portugal has been seen as an activity of great importance for the country (*Cordeiro, 2008*).

All over the world, different national plans focused on tourism were created (*Australian Government, 2009; CHL, 2002; Ministry of Tourism of Turkey, 2007*) in the last years.

Obviously the goals of the different strategies vary greatly from one another since they are dependent upon various factors connected with the economy, social context, level of development, human resources and market conditions. If Brazil's strategy is very focused on integrating social and labour supply in an attempt to reduce poverty and crime (*Ministry of Tourism, 2007*), the Spanish one is focused on increasing domestic tourism and maintaining the country as a world's touristic power (*España, 2007*).

In the last decade, more precisely, from 1997 onwards, successive governments have set up several "strategies" for tourism in Portugal. Starting with the PAIET (*Intervention Action Plan for Tourism*) approved in 1997, but never executed, until the PENT (*National Strategic Plan for Tourism*) in 2007. These programs have set 24 goals for tourism (*Cunha, 2009*), all different from each other and none of them identical to those set by previous programs..

The PNDES (*National Plan for the Social and Economic Development*) identifies the cluster "Tourism/Leisure" as one of the most important activities of the country. Not only because of the existence of certain advantages, but also because of a certain multiplying and enhancing power to other related activities, that causes significant impacts at local and regional level (*Cordeiro, 2008*).

Today, tourism is considered a strategic sector for Portugal, not only because of its ability to create jobs and wealth, but because Portugal has clear competitive advantages as few other countries do (*MEI, 2007*).

There is political intent through the PENT to make Portugal one of the fastest growing destinations in Europe through a development based in competitiveness and qualification of the offer, which will transform the sector into a growth engine of the national economy.

Although the term sustainable tourism is not mentioned once in the PENT, the existence of a plan focused on the next lines of action in the sector is still commendable. As Swarbrooke (*cited in Cordeiro, 2008*) pointed, one of the characteristics of sustainable tourism, to the detri-

ment of non-sustainable tourism, is that the former is characterized by "planning before developing", and the second by "developing without planning".

As in most countries, Portugal has already recognized the benefits of tourism on the economy and on the international image of the country. It is essential to have a well defined strategy, brand or market position so that there can be an edge over the competition. And above all, a strategy that promotes sustainable tourism.

3. SUSTAINABILITY INDICATORS APPLIED TO TOURISM

Considering that sustainable tourism is a truly unrealistic objective (*T. Ko, 2005*), Ko proposes that an appropriate approach might be to measure improvements in performance in terms of tourism sustainability.

The fundamental objective that supports the monitoring of sustainability is to improve the quality of management decisions (*APA, 2007*), it also serves as a way to disseminate timely information about the sustainable actions of a particular geographic area and to raise awareness among the public (*Ferreira, 2008*). According to some authors, the need to monitor the efficiency and impacts of policies that are implemented will have an increasing demand over the years (*Gallopín, 1996; Meadows, 1998*). The use of indicators will fill this need.

Indicators are reflections of reality based on imperfect models (*Meadows, 1998*), but they still facilitate the

analysis and evaluation of the information collected (*Hanai, 2009*). Usually these indicators arise from values (we only measure what we value) and create values (we value what we measure) (*Meadows, 1998*). It should also be noted that an environmental indicator becomes an indicator of sustainability (or unsustainability) with the addition of the variable time, limit or goal to achieve. With a time unit, sustainability indicators enable an objective analysis of current conditions and desirable situations and should be able to show trends over time, enabling stakeholders to reduce the possibility of inadvertently adopt bad decisions (*Organizacion Mundial do Turismo, 2005*).

There is no perfect indicator, only the best indicator available. With this in mind, it is only possible to adopt attitudes and actions with appropriate and clear indicators that can actually display the paths and progress towards sustainable development (*Hanai, 2009*). The very process of developing sustainability indicators should contribute to a better understanding of what exactly is sustainable development (*Van-Bellen, 2005*).

The scientific community has the habit of distinguishing between "objective" and "subjective" indicators. Objective indicators measure the quantity, while subjective ones focus on quality. Meadows (*1998*) argues that all indicators are somewhat subjective, since the very choice of an indicator is based on a value, therefore, the choice of what is important is inherently subjective.

The concept of indicator is difficult to define, since they represent uncertain models and are unable to portray reality perfectly (*Gasparatos et al, 2008*). Their selection is always subjective and can lead to misunderstandings and they can be interpreted in different ways by different minds. However these difficulties do not mean that one should not use indicators. The world is too complex to deal with all the available information, although, it is essential to choose a small set of indicators that is at the same time significant enough to understand (*Meadows, 1998*).

4. INDICATORS OF SUSTAIN- ABLE TOURISM IN PORTUGAL?

Knowing that tourism can and should have indicators that show sustainability, does Portugal need a system of indicators for the country's leading industry? What is the most appropriate group of indicators to apply to the Portuguese reality, so that the environmental, social and economic dimensions are equally evaluated?

The diversity of cultures, values and traditions worldwide provides many different perspectives, each valid in its own particular context. It may be inappropriate the use of international indicators for judging values in local development. For this reason, the concept of international performance indicators for sustainable development is politically unacceptable (*Dahl, 1997*).

According to Valentin & Spangenberg (2000), each community is individual and must develop its individual set of indicators at the local level, which also represents an opportunity to increase the visibility of this individuality in the selection of indicators, and thus make them part of the local identity.

Literature discussing indicators related to tourism is scarce, which is understandable, given the extent of the problem of sustainable development in tourism (*Isabel & Correia, 2005*).

The National Sustainable Development Strategy (ENDS) (*Mota, 2005*) and the System of Indicators for Sustainable Development (SIDS) (*APA, 2007*) are two reference documents in Portugal. The first paper ad-

resses the sectorial instruments available and proposes a set of indicators (environmental, economic, social and institutional). It also sets targets for 2015, such as a reduction by 10% of the ecological deficit.

The SIDS consists of a set of indicators, the sources of information used and the methodology applied, demonstrating also the country's situation at the date of publication.

Currently, the PENT is the document where all the strategic plans for the touristic sector are complied. However the lack of an assessment or monitoring, what were the numbers achieved, what was the meaning of the evolution occurred or the lack of comparison between national and international examples are some of the critics made in relation to the national strategy for tourism, at the date of its approval.

The need for statistical information obtained from monitoring programs, as well as an independent comparison of several global realities are both key points when sustainability is the basis of a strategic planning. These points will not only allow remaking the targets and the goals already set but it also makes it possible to learn from the mistakes of others.

On the other hand, a *bottom-up* approach constituted of an active participation of different stakeholders, public and private, is considered essential in a modern tourism planning, unfortunately it is another issue not observed in this document.

Although the Ministry of Economy and Innovation through the Lei de Bases do Turismo (*Decreto-lei N.º 191/2009*) states that one of the general principles for sustainable tourism development is to ensure participation of all stakeholders in the definition of public policies, it is once again considered that there is a lack of participation in the PENT.

Regional Tourism entities can provide the know-how when the potential, diversity and specificity of touristic destinations are concerned. Universities, companies, associations and research centers linked to the tourism sub-sectors can also be added to this group. Their coun-

sel would certainly have been an important feedback during the preparation of the PENT.

As already mentioned the use of structured, comprehensive and neutral indicators based on the principles of sustainability is a methodology that when applied correctly results in important counterparts, ranging from the evaluation of the objectives of the National Plan to the analysis of future market trends.

Part of the constitution of the PENT and its revision (*PENT2.0, 2011*) is a series of indicators that seek to move beyond the rhetoric and show the evolution of some parameters. Virtually all the indicators are simple, meaning that they consist of an obvious correlation between the index and its metrics.

The PENT 2.0 (2011) considers as main indicators: i) the number of guests and ii) the number of overnight stays by type of market. An indicator that measures total revenues by region is also assumed to be of great importance. It is clear that the three indicators considered most important in the national plan are indicators that fall within the economic dimension of tourism.

The characterization of European tourists by age, the contribution to employment and an evaluation of Lisbon (in the form of inquiry) by foreign tourists are the only indicators that provide some information within the social dimension.

Even though indirectly, some indicators in PENT may be relevant to an assessment of the environmental dimension, for example through the pressure imposed on tourist destinations (evolution of overnight stays by region) or through the environmental impacts (air traffic growth), it can still be considered that there is no direct environmental indicator in the document.

It appears that almost all the indicators provided in the strategic plan and subsequent review are status indicators. They reflect the quality of tourism within a given range of space/time. This is suggestive of a very linear analysis, a linear relationship between income and expenditure, and a not very sustainable one.

The PENT believes that the tourism sector can be an engine of growth for the national economy and even for social development (*MEI, 2007*). This development must be based on qualification, competitiveness, environmental excellence, training resources and business modernization.

The objectives are not only the aforementioned contribution to the economy but also a sustainable development of regions and a reduction of seasonality. To this end 11 strategic development lines were created, and with its implementation it should also have been created a policy of continuous improvement (which is essential in an instrument directed towards sustainability), because only with a set of routine assessments it is possible to determine trends.

The PENT 2.0 was in a privileged position to present the evolution occurred in each of the development lines. However, once again, only indicators related to the economic aspect have been documented where tourism profitability, dependence on the tourism markets and air traffic are the main components (*PENT2.0, 2011*).

Once again the social and environmental dimensions are in the background when compared with the economic impacts and benefits. In a strategy that claims sustainability as the basis for development, this is clearly an error.

Being a proposal with insufficient detail to make a diagnosis of the current situation, it will also be unable to foresee the coming years.

The gaps presented above reveal the importance of creating a group of indicators to assess the sustainability of the Portuguese tourism industry. A group where the three pillars of sustainability are evaluated and the progresses made towards meeting the targets proposed in the PENT.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Tourism is an important economic activity in most countries of the world and Portugal is no exception. Despite the major revenue and employment it provides, in recent years the impacts (positive and negative) in the social, environmental and economic dimensions have climbed at high speed. We must therefore have some capacity to assess the impacts of these trends and variations in a perspective of sustainability.

Portugal has in recent years, focused on its great touristic potential. The investment in the tourism industry has been increasing, and in 2011, 10.5% of the total capital investment of the country went to tourism. This high percentage, which is above the world average (8.27%) or large tourism powers such as Spain (5.4%), France (3.03%) or the United Kingdom (3.88%), shows the effort that Portugal is doing to promote and develop the Tourism (WTTC, 2011).

According to the WTTC, Portugal has good positions in the world rankings (always above the world average) in respect of tourism contribution to national GDP or employability, but the expectations of future real growth place Portugal below the world average, which is symptomatic of a strategy or efficacy problem.

The importance that tourism plays in the Portuguese reality does not allow the stagnation in a state of lack of procedures to oversee the identification and management of economic, environmental and social development in the tourism sector. Hence the need for a set of indicators as a system for the evaluation of touristic sustainability in Portugal.

Even taking into account the vagueness of the concept of sustainable tourism and issues around the best methodology for its evaluation and monitoring, it is im-

portant to obtain some preliminary indicators that can be put into practice. This way, knowing that no group of indicators is perfect since it implies trade-offs between the relevance of the indicator, the scientific validity of available data, measurement capability, ease of understanding and accessibility to its cost and time, it is nevertheless important to start this creative process.

Tourism is an activity that aggregates several environmental, social and economic descriptors. For this reason it has every advantage in having its characteristic activities measured by a composite index. This index should have its main vectors constituted by sustainability indicators. Through its dissemination and discussion, this index together with the measurement of sectorial performances, could provide an incentive for more sustainable practices as a means of promotion and dissemination of the most abiding.

As Meadows (1998) says, the process of finding, implementing and improving sustainable development indicators will not be done right at first. Nevertheless, it is urgent to begin. It is important to get some preliminary indicators out there and into use. That way, with constant evaluations and corrections, indicators will become more perfect with time, which is the only way we can ever achieve sustainable development.

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