

Research paper

Destination Branding through Tourism Entrepreneurship and Territorial Identity: The Center of Portugal as a Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study explores how entrepreneurs perceive the territorial brand of the Center Region of Portugal and identifies key attributes that influence investment decisions. A strong territorial brand enhances destination value, fostering a sense of belonging and attracting tourists, residents, and businesses.

Design/methodology/approach: A transversal and exploratory study was conducted using a self-administered questionnaire survey with entrepreneurs in the Center Region. A total of 138 responses (N=138) were analyzed through word clouds and descriptive analysis.

Findings: The results show that the "Center of Portugal" brand is strongly associated with "Nature" and "Diversity." Entrepreneurs seek investment opportunities aligned with the region's unique characteristics. The most valued attributes include Natural Heritage, Gastronomy and Wines, Thematic Routes, Safety, and Sports and Outdoor Activities.

Research limitations/implications: The study is limited by its sample size and regional scope, which may affect the generalizability of findings. Future research could expand the sample and compare different regions.

Practical implications: Understanding the attributes valued by entrepreneurs can help policymakers and regional development organizations enhance territorial branding strategies to attract investment.

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Originality/value: This study provides insights into the perception of a territorial brand from an entrepreneurial perspective, highlighting the factors that influence investment decisions. By identifying key territorial attributes, it contributes to the development of place-branding strategies that enhance the region's attractiveness for business investment.

Keywords: *Tourism entrepreneurship; Territorial identity; Territorial marketing; Place branding*

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1. Introduction

The growing competitiveness and dynamics of tourist destinations has been fostering the debate around territorial identity, as a new paradigm of tourism management and development. The territories face several challenges and opportunities to assert themselves in relation to other competitors, who appear with more appealing conditions. Enhancing their differentiation and the factors that make them unique, and singular has become crucial to optimise the quality and competitiveness of the tourism offer. Therefore, territorial marketing becomes a fundamental strategic tool, capable of asserting distinctive features and highlighting competitive advantages. Specifically, the creation of a territorial brand, which should be implicit functional and symbolic components that mirror the identity values of the territories, populations, and stakeholders. This, when correctly applied, can transform, and revitalize it, providing better adjustments to its reality. It also enables the creation of new concepts, and the desirable sustainable and integrated development of the tourism offer. This tool is therefore not limited to promoting or communicating a favourable image of the tourist destination. The territorial brand will be an important means to stimulate the settlement of new investments and residents, increase tourism flows and consequently, actively contribute to the development of destinations (Cozmiuc, 2011; Danylyshyn et al., 2020).

In this context, entrepreneurship stands out as an important process that contributes to the competitiveness and innovation of tourism regions, since it manifests itself as an important instrument of creativity, empowerment, and innovation (Basbeth, Ghani & Sedyowidodo, 2018; Dias et al., 2021; Long, 2017; Mashiah, 2024). As agents of change, entrepreneurs, add value to the tourism offer, driving local development through job

creation, new tourism products and services, better procedures, and efficiency in the use of resources (Araújo & Junior, 2018). It is therefore essential to better understand the perspectives of tourism entrepreneurs. Moreover, entrepreneurs in the tourism sector have, in fact, different behavioural patterns from other entrepreneurs, with objectives more directed towards lifestyle and identification with the territory where they will develop their business/project (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Wang, Hung & Huang, 2019).

However, research on the group of tourism entrepreneurs is still limited, presenting itself as a knowledge gap in the literature. In this sense, the objectives of this study are to understand the perception of tourism entrepreneurs in relation to territorial brands and identify the attributes that they value in the territories and that drive them to invest (or not) in tourist destinations regarding the specific case of the Central Region of Portugal.

To answer the defined objectives, an empirical study supported by a multi-method research methodology was carried out. Through the application of a self-administered questionnaire survey, with open response questions (treated through content analysis) and closed response questions (treated through multivariate analysis), addressed to tourism entrepreneurs in the Central Region of Portugal, a qualitative and quantitative study was developed, of cross-sectional and exploratory nature. Data were collected between January and May 2021, obtaining 138 valid responses (N=138).

Finally, the main contributions of this research are: (1) to broaden the knowledge scientifically gathered about the specific group of tourism entrepreneurs; (2) to better understand the perspectives of tourism entrepreneurs regarding the importance of territorial brands; and (3) to identify attributes of the territories that constitute themselves as attractors of potential tourism investments and businesses.

This paper is structured in four parts. The first corresponds to the literature review, the second to the description of the methodology used, the fourth to the presentation and discussion of the results of the empirical study, and the fourth and final part refers to the conclusion and theoretical and practical implications.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Entrepreneurship and territorial identity in tourism

Entrepreneurs are promoters and drivers of the attractiveness and competitiveness of tourist destinations (Dias et al., 2021). And, therefore, no need to obtain rewards and personal satisfaction with these processes, which may be of different order, namely, economic, and personal independence (Comparin, 2017) or attachment to the place or the business (Araújo & Junior, 2018; Ageevaa & Foroudia, 2019), among others. In the more specific case of tourism entrepreneurs still stands out the identification with the territorial identity and how this influences self-efficacy (Hallak, Assaker & Lee, 2015). In other words, as these entrepreneurs identify with the beliefs, values, specificities and potentialities of the region, they enhance the ability to achieve their goals and entrepreneurial skills, as well as a closer relationship with the community.

The attractiveness of destinations, tourism resources, the regional economy and the characteristics of the local community are important elements in the decision to set up your business in each territory. The territory also appears to be an important element. These aspects can be called 'place attachment'. This refers to the emotional connection or relationship that exists between people and certain places (Ageevaa & Foroudia, 2019). Based on various studies, Kamani Fard and Paidar (2024) argue that individuals who feel a strong sense of identification with their territory or local community are more motivated to engage in entrepreneurial activities. These emotional connections to the territory arouse in entrepreneurs a greater attention in the search to develop projects that bring more benefits to themselves, as well as to the region, because they both identify with the territory and fit with the values with which these entrepreneurs identify (Pereira et al., 2013). This identification with the territory may translate into taking advantage of business opportunities, especially in the case of tourism entrepreneurs who distance themselves somewhat from the patterns of other entrepreneurs (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Kline, Duffy & Clark, 2020; Tajeddini, Martin & Ali, 2020; Wang, Hung & Huang, 2019). According to Hjalager, Kwiatkowski and Larsen (2018) tourism entrepreneurs are attracted more by opportunities than by needs. This may be a consequence of a 'democratisation' of access to the tourism sector (Bosworth & Farrell, 2011). In other words, many entrepreneurs are seduced into the tourism area because it does not require a very high initial investment, nor specialisation to start their project (Dias et al., 2021). This often translates into entrepreneurs with no specialised qualifications and little experience in the tourism field, as well as small companies with modest resources (Dias et al., 2022).

Nevertheless, despite some limitations that this entails, entrepreneurship is a fundamental process, to boost the development of the territory, promote competitiveness and innovation of tourism regions. The companies that work directly or indirectly with the tourism sector play a fundamental role in the provision of services, in the diversity of supply, as well as in the image of the tourist destination (Hallak, Assaker & Lee, 2015; Avraham, 2020). Thus, territorial identity is an important element in the choice of a territory, whether from the perspective of tourists, residents, entrepreneurs, or investors (Ageeva & Foroudi, 2019; Hanna & Rowley, 2011). Reciprocally, territories evidencing a favourable and positive image of regions can attract improvements to tourism, business, and investment, thus promoting the development of an environment conducive to entrepreneurship (Ageeva & Foroudi, 2019; Avraham, 2020).

The dynamics of marketing are recognized as essential to the growth and competitiveness of a business. Defining a brand positioning, a value proposition and building a relationship with a customer determine the exploitation of possible market opportunities (Basbeth, Ghani & Sedyowidodo, 2018). From this perspective, Hansen et al. (2020) refer to entrepreneurial marketing, a combination of marketing and entrepreneurship. The authors cite Morris et al. (2002), describing *the* concept as a ‘proactive identification and exploitation of opportunities to acquire and retain profitable customers through innovative approaches to risk management, resource leveraging and value creation’ with ‘a spirit, an orientation, as well as a process of passionately pursuing opportunities and launching and growing ventures that create customer-perceived value through relationships, employing innovation, creativity, salesmanship, market immersion, networking and flexibility’ citing Hills, Hultman, Kraus, & Schulte (2010, p.6). The clear relationship between these different concepts highlights the complementarity between entrepreneurship and marketing. The value proposition that marketing develops is based on a brand, a sum of perceptions and feelings that consumers create, and which can lead to the creation of a relationship (Keller, 2001; Danylyshyn et al., 2020).

Applied to tourism, the territorial brand is therefore fundamental for creating and promoting engagement with entrepreneurs or potential investors/entrepreneurs, for allowing the territory to be recognised as a tourist destination, stimulating a sense of belonging and dictating the way they share experiences with tourists and the way they promote and develop the tourist offer (Wang, Hung & Huang, 2019). In this sense, it is

essential to understand the concept and values of the brand and its link to the territory's identity.

2.2. The “Center of Portugal” brand

The territorial area covered by the "Center of Portugal" brand corresponds to the *NUT II* Center territorial unit, comprising a group of 100 municipalities and 8 intermunicipal communities, as shown in Figure 1. The territory is bounded to the north by the region of Oporto and Northern Portugal, to the east by Spain, to the south by the region of Alentejo, to the south-east by the region of Lisbon and to the west by the Atlantic Ocean. This territory corresponds to 31.3% of the territory of Portugal, with a total area of 28,405 km² (CPTB, 2021) and a population of approximately 2,227,912 (INE, 2021).

Figure 1: Center Region of Portugal



Source: CPTB, 2019

The Center Region of Portugal is one of the largest tourism regions in the country. It has a wide variety of resources or tourist attributes and composes and sustains a diversified tourist offer, highlighting:

- 189 national monuments;

- 8 sites distinguished by UNESCO;
- 12 Historical Villages;
- 27 Schist Villages;
- 17 Parks and natural reserves and protected landscapes;
- 700 km of pedestrian circuits;
- 5 wine regions;
- 279 km of Atlantic coastline;
- 81 beaches with blue flag;
- 24 m (world's longest surfed wave)

According to the Center's Regional Tourism Development Plan 2020-2030, these attributes are organised and summarised into five major strategic development pillars (CPTB, 2019):

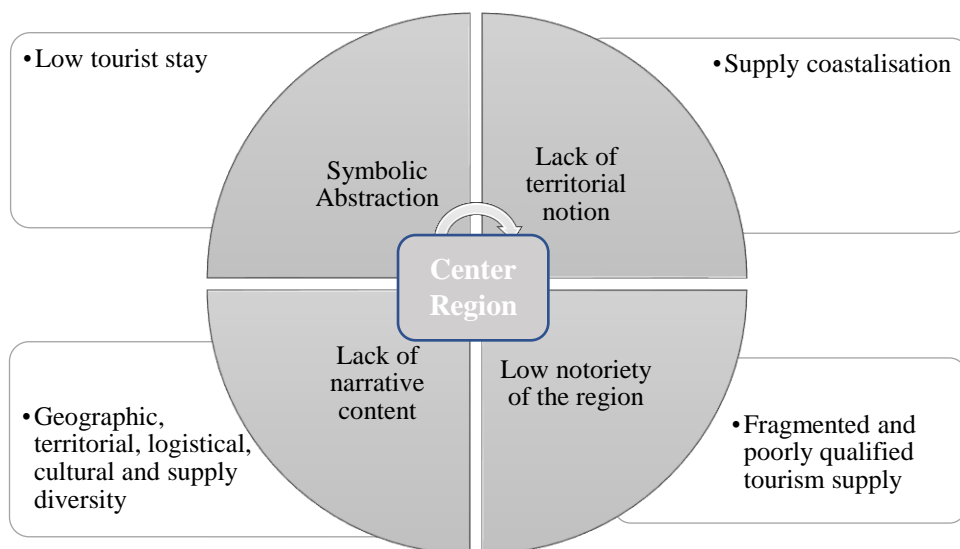
- 1) Culture, History, Heritage and Gastronomy and Wine (gastronomy, wine tourism, events and popular festivals, areas of archaeological, geological and paleontological interest, endogenous products and PDO, crafts and tradition, material and immaterial heritage of humanity and other, cultural heritage and thematic routes);
- 2) Nature, Wellness, Active and Sport Tourism and Sea (mountain ranges, hiking and trekking, cycling and walking, sport infrastructures, canoeing, wakeboarding, sea and river boating, sea and river beaches, surfing, thermal stations, caves, dams, astronomical observation);
- 3) Spiritual and Religious Tourism (Fátima, Camino de Santiago, Jewish heritage - Jewish quarters routes, and other places of worship and places that provide inner and spiritual peace)
- 4) Corporate and Business Tourism (Meeting Industry, sectorial fairs, international events, business tourism - company networks, exporting business fabric)
- 5) Lifestyle, Inspirational and new trends (Luxury tourism in terms of personal enrichment, wellbeing, surroundings, conducive to attracting people who seek a new lifestyle - digital nomads, among others.

These five strategic pillars underpin the positioning of the "Center of Portugal" territorial brand, which is based on three fundamental values: Authenticity, Nature, and Spirituality (CPTB, 2019). The territorial brand appears as a crucial tool in the enhancement and

projection of the territory's image (Avraham, 2020; Basbeth, Ghani & Sedyowidodo, 2018). Its construction should be structured based on identity elements (attributes and values) of the territory, creating a collective identity (Aragonez & Alves, 2013; Cozmiuc, 2011; Gineste & San Eugenio, 2020). However, it is not always an easy task to synthesise such diverse and disparate characteristics of a territory, such as the Centre Region, which includes "Aveiro technology, Coimbra tradition, snowboarding, schist villages, the world's largest wave, the Knights Templar, Viriato or conventual confectionery, Dão wine, Fátima and Serra da Estrela" (CPTB, 2014, p.5).

In 2014, unlike other regions in Portugal, to which one or more tourism products related to the specificities and identity of the territory could be associated almost immediately, this was not the case in the Center Region (Figure 2). In this sense, the CPTB (Center of Portugal, Regional Tourism Board), as a DMO - Destination Management Organization of regional scope, assuming its role in the context of territorial brand management, faced this difficulty and the need to build a brand that defined the territory in a clear and cohesive way. Seeking a visual and territorial concept that would allow the territory to be unequivocally recognised, it went ahead with a rebranding process.

Figure 2: Overview of the Centre Region before Rebranding



Source: Adapted from CPTB, 2014

In September 2014 the invitation was sent to the company Ivity Brand Corp, to develop a proposal for the “Center of Portugal” brand. The proposal was presented to the executive

committee and the marketing board and in December the new CPTB image was approved by the executive committee.

In order to reverse the 2014 scenario, through a new visual concept and a narrative that would highlight the richness and diversity of the region, as a distinctive factor, the CPTB approved a new brand “Center of Portugal” (Figure 3).

Figure 3: The “Center of Portugal” brand



Source: CPTB, 2014

The conception of the brand was organised in a logic of trilogies, alluding to the diversity and heterogeneity of the territory, full of options, giving dynamism to the presentation of the offer, which can be constantly renewed, depending on what is intended to be communicated. The trilogies may represent general concepts (diversity, entertainment, and contemplation), places, themes, activities and experiences or tourism niches. The constructive elements of the brand, namely the symbol was made from the municipal coat of arms and based on the structure of the coat of arms of Portugal. The colours also symbolise the Portuguese nationality. In turn the slogan "a country within the country" aims to "generate an immediate association to the concepts of size, diversity and abundance of supply (...) association to the historical importance of the region in the formation of the country and the weight of heritage in the composition of the offer" (CPTB, 2014, p.24).

3. Methodological Approach and Related Outcomes

In order to meet the objectives of understanding the perception of tourism entrepreneurs about the Center of Portugal Tourism brand and identifying the attributes of the territory that lead them to undertake business in the Center of Portugal Region (CR), a study was developed according to a multi-method methodological approach. In a first phase, an

exploratory study of qualitative nature was carried out, through the construction of word clouds elucidating the perception of tourism entrepreneurs regarding the CR Tourism brand. In the second phase, a quantitative study was developed, having collected data on the attributes of the territory that drives entrepreneurs to invest (or not) in each territory, through the same self-administered questionnaire built for this purpose, addressed to tourism entrepreneurs of the Central Portugal Tourism Region.

3.1. Sample profile

In the period 2015-2020, 201 participants in the CRTB entrepreneurship contest and 1395 individuals who had contacts with the CPTB's Tourist Investment Support Centre were identified. The sample was collected from the universe of 1596 subjects, consisting of 138 valid responses (N=138). The entrepreneurs that make up the sample were chosen, supporting this choice in previously defined criteria being requested their voluntary collaboration in the research (Aires, 2011). The sampling technique used in this research is therefore non-probability convenience and intentional sampling, which seeks to ensure its heterogeneity (Coutinho, 2015; Lopes, 2005). In this type of technique, the researcher has influence on the choice of the target population, but not on its representativeness, either in terms of the number of participants or the representativeness of the geographical area, among others, which make up the sample (Table 1).

Table I: Sample characterization by entrepreneur's characteristics (N = 138)

		N	%
Gender	Male	85	61.6
	Female	53	38.4
	Total	138	100.0
Age (years)	< 25 < 34	9	6.5
	< 35 < 44	32	23.2
	< 45 < 54	48	34.8
	< 55 < 64	39	28.3
	< 65	10	7.2
	Total	138	100.0
Nationality	Portuguese	132	95.7
	Other	6	4.3
	Total	138	100.0
Location (NUT II)	North	4	2.9
	Centre	108	78.3
	Lisbon Metropolitan Area	24	17.4
	Alentejo	1	0.7
	Other	1	0.7
	Total	138	100.0
Academic qualifications	Basic education (4th year)	1	0.7
	Basis education (6th year)	3	2.2
	Basic education (9th year)	1	0.7
	Secondary Education (12th year)	17	12.3

	Professional higher technical course	11	8.0
	Bachelor	8	5.8
	Degree	62	44.9
	Master	27	19.6
	PhD	8	5.8
	Total	138	100.0
Tourism experience	Yes	44	31.9
	No	94	68.1
	Total	138	100.0
Activity type	Tourism Resorts	47	34.1
	Local accommodation	44	31.9
	Travel and tourism agencies / Tour operators	5	3.6
	Food and beverage establishments	4	2.9
	Tourism entertainment	23	16.7
	Technology and tourism-based projects	11	8.0
	Other	4	2.9
	Total	138	100.0
Number of project promoters	Individual	87	63.0
	Two	41	29.7
	Three	5	3.6
	Four or more	5	3.6
	Total	138	100.0

Source: Own elaboration based on the output of IBM_SPSS_v.25.0 software

Most respondents are male (61.6%) and between 45 and 54 years old (34.8%). There are other nationalities besides Portuguese (95.7%), which were grouped in the category 'Others' (4.3%), as they represent approximately one individual per country, namely: Brazilian, Italian, French, Angolan, Belgian and Swiss. In terms of academic qualifications, the majority of respondents have higher education qualifications, at Bachelor's level (5.8%), Degree (44.9%), Master's (19.6%) and Doctorate (5.8%). The predominant degrees were in economics, business management and administration (18.1%), hotel management, tourism, and catering (17.4%) and engineering (11.6%). Regarding experience in the tourism field, before the beginning of the project, 94 of the respondents had no experience (68.1%) and 44 (31.9%) had already worked in this field. There were individual projects (63.0%) or projects carried out by two entrepreneurs (29.7%). The investments are mainly in tourism (34.1%), local accommodation (31.9%) and tourist entertainment (16.7%), as shown in Table 3.

Crossing the variables "experience in tourism" and "category of activity", we conclude that the lack of initial experience in the area was not an obstacle to develop projects and invest in areas such as tourism developments (32 respondents), local accommodation (33 respondents) or tourist entertainment (15 respondents). The same was verified in the crossing of the variable "experience in tourism" with the variable "current project situation", that the fact of not having experience in tourism was not observed as an

obstacle to continue the project or start its development/construction. This confirms what we found in the literature review, that many entrepreneurs are attracted to the tourism sector by the existence of few barriers, such as low investments or low specialisation needs to start the business (Dias et al., 2021). It is also important to highlight, that both men and women focus their preference on undertaking in tourism enterprises (34 male and 13 female respondents), as well as in local accommodation (25 male and 19 female respondents). For female respondents also the activity of tourist entertainment stands out, with 13 respondents.

Finally, with regard to the current status of the project, we found in this study that of the 138 respondents, 56 respondents (40.6%) have their project under development/construction; 38 respondents (27.5%) continued with their project by opening their company and are currently in operation; 20 respondents (14.5%) opened their company, but had to adapt their project to the current pandemic reality; 17 respondents (12.3%) did not continue with the project and the main justification was the lack of financial support (11 respondents), followed by the need for a very high investment (2 respondents). The need for partnerships and the COVID19 pandemic were also pointed out, but with less expression. It should be noted that 2.9% of the respondents continued the project, complementing the activity of an already existing company and 2.2% of the respondents continued their company, but later had to close.

3.2. Instruments

A self-administered questionnaire was designed to understand the perspectives of tourism entrepreneurs in the Central Region, since research in this area is scarce and no valid instruments were found for this purpose (Dias et al., 2022; Gem, 2020; Long, 2017). This instrument was divided into six parts, namely: (i) introduction; (ii) socio-demographic variables; (iii) project characterisation; (iv) current project situation; (v) “Center of Portugal brand”; and (vi) territory attributes for investment in the Central Region of Portugal. About the sociodemographic variables, project characterisation and current project situation, we chose to place them at the beginning of the questionnaire and developed mostly closed and multiple-choice questions, with several response options. In these questions, an option called "other" was introduced, giving the respondent the possibility to add more information which was not yet mentioned in the options. Considering the “Center of Portugal brand”, two dichotomous questions, two open-ended

and four open questions were also developed, allowing the study participants the necessary freedom to share their perspectives voluntarily and spontaneously on the main topic under analysis: “What is the first idea/image that comes to mind when you think of the CR (Central Region)?” (Quivy & Campenhoudt's, 1992). Regarding the territory attributes for investment in the Central Region of Portugal, this study focuses on the analysis of the results of the scale 'Attributes of the territory of the CR', composed of 17 items. It was assessed by a five-point Likert scale, ranging from Not at all important (1) to Extremely important or decisive (5) (Cunha, 2007; Dalmoro & Vieira, 2013; Thayer-Hart et al. 2010). Gorsuch's (1983) assumptions regarding sample size were respected, with a ratio of 7.6 (i.e., 121 participants/ 16 items). The items reflect the attributes or factors that facilitate the identification with the territory for the tourism entrepreneur (Kline, Duffy & Clark, 2020; Pereira et al, 2013; Tajeddini, Martin & Ali, 2020; Wang et al., 2019).

3.3. Procedures

The survey was completed online, using the Google Forms platform, and an invitation to complete them was sent, with the respective access link, through the email of the CPTB's Tourist Investment Support Centre. The invitation explained the context of the research, subject, and objectives of the study (Brewerton & Millward, 2001).

A total of 1596 questionnaires were sent between January and May 2021, with resending's in February and May. A total of 138 valid responses were collected (N = 138).

The process of collecting data through an online survey was an advantageous procedure, as it allowed for efficient data gathering from a broad audience, minimized costs associated with paper-based surveys, and enabled real-time data analysis. Additionally, it offered respondents the flexibility to complete the survey at their convenience, which likely contributed to higher response rates and more accurate data collection.

3.4. Data analysis

Within the scope of the qualitative study, the information collected was subject to a content analysis, which allowed for the creation of word clouds about the entrepreneurs' perceptions of the "Center of Portugal" brand and its differentiating elements, focused on the first idea/image they perceive about the Center Region of Portugal.

For the quantitative study, data were processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0 for Windows operating system. Frequencies were examined in order to eliminate items with no variation and outliers were analysed according to the Mahalanobis square distance (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). The normality of the variables was assessed by the coefficients of skewness (Sk) and kurtosis (Ku), and no variable presented scores that violate the normal distribution ($|Sk| < 2$; $|Ku| < 3$). Measures of central tendency indicate that mean scores are close to the median and mode in all items. The measures of dispersion reveal that the tendency to respond to the items is distributed across almost all options of the scale.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Qualitative exploratory study (Word Clouds)

When questioned about what is the first idea/image that comes to mind when thinking about the CR (Central Region), most respondents answered: Nature (24 respondents); Diversity (14); Culture (7); Serra da Estrela (7); Heritage (5); Sea (5), among others. These are in agreement with the representations that the Regional Entity of Tourism of the Centre intends to transmit with its territorial brand, regarding the diversity and heterogeneity of the territory, as well as the multiplicity of offer options. As well as some of the strategic pillars defined for the development of tourism in the region, namely "Spiritual and Religious Tourism", "Culture, History, Heritage and Gastronomy and Wines", "Nature, Wellness, Active and Sport Tourism and Sea".

We can see them synthesized in the word cloud, represented in Figure 4. The words that appear with larger dimensions are the most frequent ones. Some entrepreneurs associate the image of the region with specific attributes of a particular territory, namely "Serra da Estrela", "Fátima", "Coimbra", "Aveiro", "Óbidos" or "Lousã", which represent symbols that identify their region.

Figure 4: Representation of the Center Region for Entrepreneurs



Source: Own elaboration based on Word Art Software

The diversity and multiplicity of the territory is also represented through the slogan "a country within a country" and of the 121 respondents, 93.4% (113 respondents) agree that it is representative of this reality. And in this sense, 89.3% (108 respondents) consider that the brand has achieved its purpose: to promote the territory and publicise the region's assets. Through their campaigns and promotion of the brand they mainly boost the attraction of tourists (95 respondents); make known the regional attractions (91 respondents); develop the territory (86 respondents) and attract entrepreneurs (73 respondents). On the other hand, some respondents, although with little representation, find the campaigns very generalist (4); little revealing of the authenticity of the community and the territory (3); they give little value to the attractions of the region, claiming that they are always directed to the same regions (5) and confusing, in the sense that they consider that there are many institutions promoting the region, namely the Centre Regional Tourism Authority, Intermunicipal Communities, municipalities, among others.

Regarding the values that best define the Center Region, the respondents mainly refer to the characteristics of the territory, not focusing so much on the values, given their subjective nature. The most mentioned were diversity (21 respondents), authenticity (14 respondents), genuineness (7 respondents), knowing how to welcome (4 respondents), "Portugalness" (2 respondents), and uniqueness (only 1 respondent). These are in line, as we have seen, with some of the values by which the "Center of Portugal" brand is governed, such as authentic, epic, and cooperative (profound values), diverse, dynamic,

and challenging (positional values) and enthusiastic, surprising and sociable (relational values).

4.2. Descriptive analysis

Descriptive statistics were applied to the scale 'Attributes of the CR Territory', such as mean, median, mode, standard deviation, minimum and maximum value per response option and outliers. The measures of dispersion indicate that the responses are distributed across the different options of the scale (between 1 and 5, where 1 represents 'not at all important' and five represents 'extremely important') and less dispersion of the response by the extreme values (outliers) (Table 2). In Table 2 the items are arranged in descending order of average score and those with the most significant average values are: A5 Natural Heritage, A7 Gastronomy and Wines, A8 Thematic Routes, A15. Safety and A6 Sports and Outdoor Activities.

Table II: Descriptive Analysis of the Attributes Scale [N=121]

Which attributes did you consider most relevant in your decision making? Please rank their importance*:	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation	Min	Max
A5 Natural Heritage	4.21	4	5	.939	1	5
A7 Gastronomy and wine	4.05	4	5	1.015	1	5
A8 Thematic Routes	4.08	4	5	.945	1	5
A15 Safety	3.93	4	5	1.101	1	5
A6 Sporting and outdoor activities	3.93	4	5	1.146	1	5
A9 Health and Wellness	3.79	4	5	1.185	1	5
A13 Accessibilities	3.64	4	4	1.049	1	5
A17 Infrastructures	3.43	3	3	1.063	1	5
A4 Art Culture	3.42	3	3	1.086	1	5
A16 Tourism Recreation	3.42	3	3	1.216	1	5
A2 Monuments Heritage Buildings	3.39	3	3	1.128	1	5
A14. Crafts	3.15	3	3	1.078	1	5
A12 Accommodation	3.09	3	3	1.103	1	5
A1 UNESCO Classified Heritage	3.07	3	3	1.17	1	5
A3 Museums	2.99	3	3	1.076	1	5
A11 Religious Tourism	2.76	3	3	1.258	1	5
A10 Surfing	2.21	2	1	1.372	1	5

Source: Own elaboration based on the output of IBM_SPSS_v.25.0 software

Note*: Scale: (1) Not at all important; (2) Not very important; (3) Important; (4) Very important; (5) Extremely important

The results obtained confirm the identity values that define this region, highlighting its uniqueness in relation to others and pointing the way to the development of an integrated and differentiated tourism offer (Ageeva & Foroudi, 2019; Hanna & Rowley, 2011). In this context, the effective management of a territorial brand can be fundamental, making

it possible to communicate in a clear and impactful way what makes the region unique (Avraham, 2020; Basbeth, Ghani & Sedyowidodo, 2018). This not only attracts tourists and investors, but also helps to strengthen local cohesion and community pride (Cozmiuc, 2011; Danylyshyn et al., 2020).

Regarding the open and optional question "Other. Which?" eleven answers were obtained from the 121 respondents. The answers were analysed and presented in Table 3.

Table III: Respondents' answers to the question " Other. Which?" and corresponding frequencies (N= 11; 8.8%)

Responses	N	%
"A large space with its own property"	1	0.8%
"The streets with umbrellas attracting tourists to visit the city"	1	0.8%
"Desertification of inland areas"	1	0.8%
"Only the place of residence"	1	0.8%
"I dream of boosting the region through tourism"	1	0.8%
"The possibility of fulfilling a dream: collaborating in the implementation of a culture of well-being through tourism".	1	0.8%
"Creativity"	1	0.8%
"Attractiveness for being able to recover and execute a unique, differentiating and innovative tourism project"	1	0.8%
"Unique architectural heritage in stunning countryside"	1	0.8%
"Getting a unique and differentiating tourism project back on track"	1	0.8%
"Good roads"	1	0.8%
Total	11	8.8%

Source: Own elaboration based on the output of IBM_SPSS_v.25.0 software

After the presentation of the respondents' answers, we can see that some of the answers are close to the item's infrastructures, art and culture, built heritage and accessibility. Other answers, such as "desertification of the interior central zone"; "place of residence"; "dream of dynamizing the region through tourism"; "possibility of fulfilling a dream, collaborating towards the implementation of a culture of well-being through tourism" and "manage to recover a unique and differentiating tourism project" are suggestions that are more related to the question alluding to the entrepreneurs' motivations.

The emotional relationship between people and places, as highlighted by Ageevaa and Foroudia (2019) and Kamani Fard and Paidar (2024), is a powerful motivation for entrepreneurs. This bond can be understood as a factor of deep connection between the individual and their territory or community, which directly influences business decisions.

According to Pereira et al. (2013), individuals who develop a strong sense of identification with the place where they live or work tend to be more motivated to create or expand business activities. This motivation is not only based on economic reasons, but also on an emotional and social commitment to the community or territory, reflecting a

broader vision of local development and collective well-being (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Kline, Duffy & Clark, 2020; Tajeddini, Martin & Ali, 2020; Wang, Hung & Huang, 2019). This emotional attachment can be seen as a factor that strengthens entrepreneurs' commitment to their region, as they seek not only financial success but also the progress of the community.

4.3. SWOT analysis

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the opportunities and challenges faced by tourism entrepreneurship in the Center Region of Portugal, this section presents a SWOT analysis. This strategic tool evaluates the region's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats within the context of its tourism development and branding efforts. By examining both internal and external factors, the SWOT analysis provides valuable insights for territorial managers and entrepreneurs. It highlights key areas where targeted interventions can enhance growth, innovation, and competitiveness, ultimately strengthening the region's tourism sector and brand positioning.

Table IV: Center Region territorial brand SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Centre Region of Portugal stands out as one of the largest and most diverse tourist regions in Portugal. It has a wide variety of tourist resources or attributes and makes up and sustains a diversified tourist offer. - The tourism brand is strongly based on 5 strategic pillars of development: Culture, History, Heritage and Gastronomy and Wines; - Nature, Wellness, Active and Sports Tourism and the Sea; - Spiritual and Religious Tourism; - Corporate and Business Tourism; - Lifestyle, Inspirational and new trends. - Defined tourist brand positioning: Authenticity, Nature and Spirituality. - In a single visit, tourists can discover a varied combination of the elements of the 5 strategic pillars. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Difficulty in synthesizing the diverse and disparate characteristics of a territory's offer. - These characteristics prevent the construction of a brand that defines the territory in a clear, cohesive and comprehensive way, not only in terms of the brand's graphic identity but also its psychological identity.
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gradual and dynamic competition between tourist destinations can lead to innovation in the offer. - Differentiation and the factors that make them unique and singular are elements of competitive advantage for regions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Growing competition between different tourist brands. - Difficulty in defining elements that allow regions to differentiate themselves and obtain competitive advantages.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A territorial marketing approach is a fundamental strategic tool that reflects the identity values of territories, populations and stakeholders. - Creating territorial brands is an important means of stimulating new investments and residents, increasing tourist flows and, consequently, actively contributing to the development of destinations. - Innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship are essential for tourism development. 	
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Source: Own elaboration

The strong points of the region include its vast diversity and appeal, positioning it as one of the largest and most varied tourist regions in Portugal. The Center Region boasts an extensive range of tourist resources, forming a diverse and rich tourism offer. The region's tourism brand is firmly anchored in five strategic pillars: Culture, History, Heritage, Gastronomy, and Wines; Nature, Wellness, Active and Sports Tourism, and the Sea; Spiritual and Religious Tourism; Corporate and Business Tourism; and Lifestyle, Inspirational, and New Trends. This wide array of attributes allows for a rich and varied tourist experience, with a clear brand positioning based on authenticity, nature, and spirituality. Tourists visiting the region can enjoy a harmonious blend of these elements in a single trip, creating a unique and compelling destination.

However, there are notable weaknesses that hinder the region's ability to present a cohesive brand identity. One of the main challenges is the difficulty in synthesizing the diverse and sometimes disparate characteristics of the region's tourism offer. This complexity makes it challenging to construct a clear, unified brand that not only conveys the region's visual identity but also creates a strong psychological connection with potential visitors. The lack of clarity in defining and communicating the region's identity can limit its effectiveness in appealing to target audiences.

In terms of threats, the growing competition between different tourist brands in both domestic and international markets poses a significant challenge. As other regions and countries develop their own unique tourism identities, the Center Region must find ways to differentiate itself and create competitive advantages. The difficulty in defining distinct elements that allow the region to stand out among its competitors is a pressing concern for stakeholders seeking to strengthen the region's position in the global tourism market.

Despite these challenges, several promising opportunities exist for the region to enhance its tourism brand and foster entrepreneurship. The dynamic competition between tourist destinations can act as a driver for innovation in the tourism offer. By leveraging its

unique characteristics and focusing on the factors that make it distinct, the region can create a strong competitive advantage. Additionally, adopting a territorial marketing approach that reflects the identity and values of the region's stakeholders is essential. A well-executed territorial branding strategy can stimulate new investments, attract residents, and increase tourist flows, contributing to the sustainable development of the region. Finally, the emphasis on innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship remains crucial to the ongoing growth and competitiveness of the region's tourism sector.

This SWOT analysis, therefore, provides a comprehensive view of the Center Region's current position and offers valuable insights into how territorial managers and entrepreneurs can capitalize on its strengths, address its weaknesses, seize opportunities, and navigate potential threats in order to foster sustainable and innovative tourism development.

5. Conclusions and Implications

We can conclude that the perception of tourism entrepreneurs regarding the "Center of Portugal" brand is associated with the attribute's nature, diversity, culture, history, and sea. These agree with the representations that the Regional Tourism Authority of the Centre intends to transmit with its territorial brand and with the specificities of the territory, as well as with the strategies defined for the development of the region.

As for the differentiating aspects of the center region, diversity (of the heritage, cultural and landscape offer), gastronomy and wines, location and nature stand out, showing that the respondents' perceptions of the region and the representative brand of the central region do not differ much from the strategy defined by the territorial managers. Most entrepreneurs consider that the brand is representative of the central region, either through its slogan "a country within a country", reflecting its diversity, or through the campaigns and promotion of the brand, in the promotion of the territory and dissemination of the region's assets, in making known the regional attractions. As for the values, due to their subjective character, the entrepreneurs associate them more to the characteristics of the territory.

It is therefore important to stress that national, regional, and local tourism managers, and especially Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) define strategies and support that promote a favourable climate for tourism entrepreneurship, so that these

entrepreneurs fix their businesses and make their investments in territories with which they identify (Araújo & Junior 2018). Their sense of belonging to the territory encourages them to seek mutual benefits in the region, both for themselves and for the territories.

Regarding the attributes that are most valued in the central region, the natural heritage, gastronomy and wines, thematic routes, safety and sports and outdoor activities stand out.

These results show an almost symbiotic combination between the existing resources and the identity elements of the region (Ageeva & Foroudi, 2019; Hanna & Rowley, 2011; Wang, Hung & Huang, 2019). Aspects linked to 'singularities' are also valued, as differentiating aspects capable of highlighting the specificities of the region (Aragonez & Alves, 2013; Cozmiuc, 2011). Entrepreneurs in the Aveiro region value the attributes based on the gastronomy and wines, the existence of thematic routes, the natural heritage, sports and outdoor activities, health and wellness, tourist entertainment and safety. On the other hand, entrepreneurs in the Oeste Region value attributes linked to religious tourism, surfing, and the sea, as well as handicrafts and endogenous products.

5.1. Theoretical implications

In the context of tourism entrepreneurship, the development of strategies based on the unique attractions and competitiveness of a region is critical. The findings suggest that territorial managers should prioritize strategies that focus on the inherent qualities of the tourist destination. This aligns with existing literature emphasizing the importance of regional identity and authenticity in fostering emotional connections with visitors (Dias et al., 2021; Hallak, Assaker & Lee, 2015). By focusing on these elements, tourism destinations can enhance their appeal and competitiveness in a saturated global market.

Furthermore, this study contributes to the understanding of the role of territorial managers in cultivating entrepreneurial conditions. The literature underscores the significance of these managers in developing strategies that create an environment conducive to entrepreneurial activities (Basbeth, Ghani & Sedyowidodo, 2018; Danylyshyn et al., 2020). This research reinforces the theoretical understanding that the image and identity of a region are central to entrepreneurial success, influencing both the attraction of potential investors and the broader tourism ecosystem.

The study also highlights the theoretical significance of territorial branding in tourism. Effective branding involves not just promoting the region's aesthetic and cultural identity, but also conveying its economic potential. The incorporation of unique territorial attributes in branding strategies, such as the region's identity, values, and resources, is crucial in shaping positive perceptions among investors and potential entrepreneurs. This aspect is essential in the decision-making process for tourism entrepreneurship, as it strengthens the alignment of entrepreneurs with the territory's broader cultural and economic goals.

5.2. Practical implications

From a practical standpoint, this research underscores the importance of aligning policies with territorial marketing strategies, particularly in terms of strengthening the territorial brand. Implementing policies that emphasize the region's competitive advantages and opportunities for tourism entrepreneurship can significantly enhance its attractiveness. Practical measures include marketing campaigns that focus on the region's unique offerings and fostering an ecosystem conducive to innovation and competitiveness.

The results further highlight the need for targeted financial incentives and support mechanisms to lay the groundwork for the development of tourism entrepreneurship. These initiatives should not only provide financial backing but also create educational and training opportunities for human capital development. By understanding the motivations and needs of entrepreneurs, policymakers can design more effective strategies that meet the demands of the entrepreneurial community while simultaneously promoting the region's development.

Additionally, the study calls for the creation of ecosystems that support innovative and competitive businesses. These ecosystems should encourage collaboration among public and private stakeholders, attract human capital, and foster the growth of institutions and companies that contribute to the region's tourism sector. By focusing on attracting new products and services, as well as investments that bolster the region's economic and cultural offerings, territorial managers can create sustainable growth opportunities for tourism entrepreneurship.

In conclusion, the practical implications of this research are clear: by implementing these strategies, territorial managers can drive the development of a vibrant, innovative tourism

sector that adds significant value to the region's overall tourism offering. These actions will also strengthen the region's competitiveness, making it a more attractive destination for both entrepreneurs and tourists alike.

5.3. Limitations and future research

Some limitations were encountered during this research, namely the difficulties of clarifying doubts about the questionnaires in a way other than online, due to the constraints caused by the pandemic, which in turn, may have influenced the number of responses achieved to the survey, although some reinforcements were made to obtain more responses, this study does not allow us to generalize to all tourism entrepreneurs, since the sample represents those who participated in CPTB initiatives, however, the conclusions are interesting to define or readjust strategies.

Nevertheless, building on the findings of this study, several avenues for further research could enhance our understanding of tourism entrepreneurship and territorial branding. One potential direction is the use of longitudinal studies to explore the long-term impacts of territorial branding strategies on tourism entrepreneurship. Such studies could assess how shifts in a region's identity and branding influence entrepreneurial activity and the broader tourism development over time, providing insights into the sustainability and evolution of these strategies. Another valuable area of research would involve comparative studies across different regions or countries. This approach would help to understand how various geographical, cultural, and economic contexts shape the effectiveness of territorial branding and entrepreneurship policies. A comparative perspective could shed light on the role of regional identity and authenticity in different cultural environments, and how these factors impact entrepreneurial decisions and tourism development.

Further exploration of the relationship between entrepreneurial ecosystems and innovation in tourism would also be insightful. Research could focus on identifying the key components that foster or hinder the growth of innovative businesses within these ecosystems, such as networking opportunities, public-private collaborations, and access to funding. Understanding how these elements contribute to the development of competitive tourism businesses could inform future policy and strategy design.

Finally, exploring the relationship between tourism branding and consumer perception presents another fruitful research avenue. Investigating how branding influences tourists' destination choices based on the perceived identity and authenticity of a region would be particularly valuable. By understanding how consumer perceptions align with entrepreneurial activities, researchers could provide recommendations for strengthening the region's competitive edge through more targeted marketing and branding efforts.

By pursuing these lines of inquiry, future studies can further enrich the field of tourism entrepreneurship, offering practical guidance for territorial managers, policymakers, and entrepreneurs.

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