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The Tourism Observatory of Alentejo: a support instrument for foresight and strategic planning in the Tourist Sector in the region.

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Abstract:

It is the aim of this work to make a brief reference to the current situation of "observatories" in Portugal as well as the change of their status, before developed through closed research circuits which included the Administration and Universities; nowadays characterized by the proliferation of more flexible and interactive structures very often as a result of private initiatives or public-private partnerships. We are also going to make a mention of two regional tourism observatories in Portugal - Lisbon and Azores - already established. Finally, it offers an overview of the new Tourism Observatory of Alentejo (presented in July 14th, 2010) as a result of a submission to an Incentive Scheme for Class Actions Program (SIAC) – InAlentejo, which the main promoter is Alentejo Tourism, ERT, in partnership with the Polytechnics Institutes of Beja and Portalegre, the University of Évora and the regional business associations.

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1. Brief allusion to the current situation of "observatories" in Portugal, as well as the change of their status

The men always felt, the need to observe what is around them, so understanding this information will enable them to implement a better and higher quality of life. The term "observatory" appeared linked to "site used for observations and studies of terrestrial and celestial events, used by various sciences (...), and possibly for military purposes"¹. So the astronomical observatory that uses the telescope to observe the sky became widespread. As a result of a little online research it can be seen that, in Portugal and as an example, the Astronomical Observatory of the University of Coimbra dates back to 1799²; Lisbon Astronomical Observatory was founded in 1861³ and it is, since 1995, within the sphere of Faculty of Sciences of the University of Lisbon. In the late 80's the concept extends to other areas of knowledge: in 1989, rises the Permanent Observatory on Youth linked to the Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Lisbon aimed at "enhancing the production, exchange and dissemination of scientific knowledge about the diversity of youth realities in Portugal and abroad"⁴. In the 90's different observatories appear, among which we stand out: the Centre for Employment and Vocational Training (1993), a "proactive entity that has a central structure called Central Coordination Unit (UCC), of a tripartite composition and it is chaired by a representative of the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity "⁵, the Observatory of Cultural Activities (1996), "a nonprofit association, whose founding members are the Ministry of Culture, the Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Lisbon and National Institute of Statistics"⁶, the Permanent Observatory of Portuguese Justice (1996) linked to the Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra⁷ as well as Tourism Observatory of Lisbon (1999)⁸, an internal department of the Lisbon Tourism Association. From the year 2000 a variety of observatories in many different areas is referred, among which tourism. Effectively, the paradigm has changed: before, observatories were strictly linked to the structures of the government and/or universities, feeding themselves of information from more closed circuits; currently observatories get the information supplied to them by the staff under study, ie open networks. Great part of this is owed to the popularization of Internet access, but also the understanding about the forms of governance: today, and according to Benhabib (2005, cited by Sangreman and Santos, 2009), new functions to the traditional functions of the state must be added, which implies a greater citizen participation. Thus, observatories must be understood as forms of "integration of the various stakeholders in policy discussions and practical cooperation, monitoring and evaluation" which means "the challenge of building

systems for coordination, monitoring and analysis and dissemination of information"⁹. Based on ideas proposed by Jalali (2009)¹⁰, Marks and Hooghe (2001)¹¹ and Peters and Pierre (1998)¹², Sangreman and Santos (2009) they consider that observatories should be a tool enabling the model of multilevel governance in which the "civil society actors involve themselves in public life by relating directly to the national Government and international entities of the Union, challenging the system of the state, by a greater capacity of direct intervention, interest and participation". As a result of a study which aim was the identification of types and models of observatories in Portugal, Sangreman and Santos (2009) concluded:

- "1. Observatories associated with departments of the Universities that carry out research and investigation in specialized areas. Sometimes, they are also associated with European international networks of research in the same areas. The essential purpose is the production of scientific knowledge. Aggregates are composed by researchers working at universities and investigation departments and have a secretarial support.
2. Observatories associated with ministries and other governmental entities, such as municipalities and/or public institutions. They develop monitoring labor and collect information on a given topic. This work is associated with the monitoring of a given sector and the formulation and implementation of policies and programs for the same. Sometimes, they are also framed in European research networks on a given topic. They consist of a secretariat of support, permanent researchers and hired investigators".

The Observatories of Tourism in Portugal fall into this second type.

2. Two Observatories of Tourism already in place: Lisbon and the Azores

2.1. Tourism Observatory of Lisbon¹³

Lisbon Tourism Association - Visitors & Convention Bureau (ATL) was established in 1997 and its objectives are: i) sustainable development in its area of intervention; ii) the promotion of Lisbon as a touristic destination in the various leisure products, iii) the promotion of Lisbon as venue for conferences, trade shows and as a destination for incentive travel, iv) information and assistance to tourists who visit Lisbon. It is, since 2004, the regional tourism agency to promote the region of Lisbon. It is a private non-profit organization, declared of public interest, which social organs comprise government agencies,

business associations and individual members, being its president assured by the City Hall of Lisbon. The Tourism Observatory of Lisbon is an internal department of the ATL and it was established in 1999. It is the specialized agency for education and it is intended to monitor outcomes of tourism operations in order to support all activities within the association, as well as his associates, whether public or private entities with links to tourism or to other areas and still to meet the needs of the general public.

Several studies are available, monthly, and published in the *Turismo de Lisboa Magazine*¹⁴, examples of which are the InfoGest¹⁵, the InfoGolf and indexes for areas in the Lisbon region; it also carries out regular surveys (survey motivation, satisfaction survey of foreign tourists, survey of tourist information and activities of foreign tourists to the golfer investigation, inquiry to the congressman, international passenger survey and investigation of cruise passengers to *low-coast* airlines). It also conducts other activities such as: collaboration with international organizations, participation in the preparation of marketing plans, preparation of project applications from ATL under the National Strategic Reference Framework 2007-2013 (QREN) and other national programs, development of Opinions, data collection of associative congress for the inclusion in the ranking of the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), the increasement of the hotels in Lisbon and its region and intention to open new units; systematization of information of visitors of the various cultural facilities, in Lisbon region (InfoCultura), systematization of information from other sources (National Institute of Statistics, Tourism of Portugal ...), holding presentations on tourism in Lisbon and ATL groups of stakeholders, including students and affiliated organizations and, finally, to be able to respond to the requests about statistical and qualitative information addressed to the Tourism Observatory of Lisbon sent by associates, tourism industry agents, students, journalists or others. The Observatory makes use of market research companies to collect interviews for the inquiry that performs to the visitors, although the organization and data processing as acquisition and the analysis of the results and drafting of reports, is a responsibility of the fixed team. The funding of all activities is fully covered by internal means of the ATL and the outside communication work is carried out, largely through the website of the Association, in the *Turismo de Lisboa Magazine* and by the received requests of information, internal or external the ATL.

2.2. Tourism Observatory of Azores¹⁶

The Tourism Observatory of Azores is a private, nonprofit association, whose founding partners are the Autonomous Region of the Azores, the Azores Tourism Association

and the University of Azores, created on the 26th October 2006. Its aim is to promote the analysis, dissemination and monitoring the development of tourism, in an independent and responsible way, ensuring the suitability of its scientific-technical production, thus contributing to the development of sustainable tourism in Azores. It is integrated in the overall strategies of regional development. The Directorate is composed by two researchers from the University of Azores; the team consists of a Secretary of the Board and two Administrative Techniques. Its operation is funded through annual program contracts, signed with the Regional Economy of Azores Regional Government and co-financed by the Community Pro-convergence. The Observatory makes available, on a regular basis, statistics related to overnight stays and income verified, as well as other issues relating to tourism markets, carries out studies related to various supply and demand for tourism in Azores and also a variety of surveys for the profile and levels of motivation and satisfaction. Holds conferences and meetings and publishes, twice a year, a free distribution magazine *Turismo em Observação*. The work is distributed primarily through its website, newsletter, biannual magazine and sponsorship of events, conferences, seminars and workshops, and speciality journals.

3. Presentation of the Regional Tourism Observatory of Alentejo¹⁷

3.1. The idea

The idea that led to the establishment of the Regional Tourism Observatory of Alentejo (ORTA) held with the intention of creating an instrument to support the planning and foresight of the Touristic Sector in Alentejo, capable of producing reliable information and adapted to regional needs and targeted for promotion, classification, differentiation, innovation and sustainability of its business. The project sponsor - Turismo do Alentejo, ERT - involved a set of partners based in the Alentejo region establishing a public-private partnership, also formed by higher education institutions of the region - Polytechnic Institute of Beja (IPBeja), Polytechnic Institute of Portalegre (IPP) and University of Évora (UE) - and the core business - Core Business in the Region of Beja / BaixoAlentejo Business Association and Coast (NERBE/ AEBAL), Region Business Center of Évora (NERE) and Core Business Region Portland (NERPOR).

It should be noted that the establishment of the Observatory is inserted within the strategy and policy development in the tourism sector in Portugal, particularly in relation to the purposes defined in the National Strategic Plan for Tourism (PENT) and the purposes of

the Regional Plan Spatial Planning (PROT). This project is funded in accordance with the objectives of INALENTEJO (QREN), particularly with the System of Support to the Class Actions (SIAC), and having been publicly displayed at the College of the Holy Spirit University of Évora on 14th June 2010.

3.2. Objectives

Specifically, ORTA wants:

- To define the baseline, or draw a picture of the tourism sector in the Alentejo;
- To build methodologies, tools and routines to collect and produce information that will permit an effective and appropriate analysis of the region;
- To create an information system (storage and distribution) appropriated to the needs of the entities producing knowledge but, simultaneously, targeted for the use by tour operators in the region;
- To observe and monitor the sector and draw its portrait in suitable time periods, adequated to timings suitable to the decision-making of tour operators;
- To produce prospective studies in research areas not yet explored and unquestionable relevance to the promotion of Alentejo, recognized as a touristic destination;
- To inform and disseminate information generated among stakeholders providing to the operators support instruments for the qualification, innovation and differentiation of the business, promoting creativity and the promotion of competitive intelligence systems;
- To boost regional tourism by promoting the emergence of business networks and knowledge around the theme of tourism, their interconnection networks and their participation in national and international counterparts;
- To develop proposals to promote tourism to the public and private stakeholders, identifying trends, opportunities and constraints to regional tourism;
- To contribute to the reputation of the Alentejo tourism industry, creating a Center for Production of Knowledge, inductor of creativity and strengthening as well as the expansion of regional critical mass.

3.3. Governance model

The governance model includes three ORTA organs of operation: i) strategic advice that sets out the strategies and infrastructure development, ii) the management committee "Information System and Network Operations" and the management committee "Economic

Promotion” responsible for collecting and providing information related to its area of operation, iii) the advisory board, consisting of a network of observers, being the monitoring organ of ORTA, that ensures the participation of economic and social partners of local and regional institutions.

3.4. Strategy

The strategy of implementation and development of ORTA meets the above objectives and should be understood within a time horizon that goes beyond the funding period (2010-2012). Thus, in this period of the beginning of the project, it was defined a set of activities which potential for leverage and continuity, in the near future, was considered high and it will be enumerate below:

1. Information System of the Tourism Observatory of the Alentejo, to which is already possible to access;
2. GIS - Geographic Information System of Tourist Offer Area Regional Tourism in Alentejo, which field work is taking place;
3. Tourism Barometer of Alentejo, already with available data online, for the first quarter of 2011;
4. Regional Tourism Satellite Account in Alentejo, in development phase;
5. International Conference, to be held in 2012, which objective is to disseminate the ORTA and the work done in the same period of startup, bringing to this meeting, members of the academic community and business sector.

3.5. Impacts and sustainability

There are still no concrete data that can be measured and quantified to evidence the impacts and externalities caused by ORTA either in the region or even in the country itself. However, it is believed that this will contribute to the creation and consolidation of a better image of the Alentejo, based on collaboration among various stakeholders in the region to evaluate products, people and heritage. Thus, the sustainability of ORTA weighs up its own intervention in this region, as a generator of socio-economics dynamic, that raise a priority sector, such as tourism, in Alentejo region.

4. Conclusion

The observatories go on playing a very important role in Portugal: Besides to gather and to deal with the information that they make available to the interested parties, promote the participation and involvement of citizens in collecting this same information. Regarding the specific case of the tourism sector, the experiences already mentioned and consolidated, confirm their importance in the management of supply and respective touristic destinations. ORTA is still in a very preliminary stage but it intends to position itself as a decisive authority in providing information that benefits the entire value chain value of tourism and, thus, help to consolidate the destination Alentejo.

¹ <http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Observat%C3%B3rio>, accessed 10th May 2011.

² <http://www.astro.mat.uc.pt/novo/observatorio/site/index.html>, accessed 10th May 2011.

³ <http://www.oal.ul.pt/index.php>, accessed 10th May 2011.

⁴ <http://www.ics.ul.pt/instituto/?ln=p&mm=3&ctmid=1&mnid=3&doc=31818411070&linha=1&idpro=16>, accessed 10th May 2011.

⁵ <http://oefp.iefp.pt/Content.aspx?ContentId=8>, accessed 10th May 2011.

⁶ <http://www.oac.pt/menuobservatorio.htm>, accessed 10th May 2011.

⁷ http://opi.ces.uc.pt/pdf/Rel_OPJBrasil_produto1.pdf, accessed 10th May 2011.

⁸ <http://www.visitlisboa.com/Observatorio.aspx>, accessed 10th May 2011.

⁹ SANFREMAN, Carlos and SANTOS, Tânia (2009). “Uma Proposta de Observatório da Cooperação Portuguesa”, Lisboa: **Colecção Documentos de Trabalho**, 78. CEAD – ISEG/UTL.

¹⁰ JALALI, C. (2009), "A UE e os cidadãos: a percepção pública da União Europeia", **communication to the Seminário de Verão 'Debater a Europa'**, organised by the Centro de Informação Europeia Jacques Delors e Europe Direct from Aveiro.

¹¹ MARKS, G. e HOOGLE, L. (2001). **Multi-Level Governance and European Integration**, New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, EUA.

¹² PETERS, G. and PIERRE, J. (1998). “Governance Without Government? Rethinking Public Administration”, **Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory**, Vol. 8, 2: 223-243, EUA.

¹³ Information kindly provided by Dr. André Barata Moura from Lisbon Tourism Association, 11th May 2011.

¹⁴ http://www.visitlisboa.com/Publications_UK.aspx,

¹⁵ <http://www.visitlisboa.com/getdoc/b9159951-25c2-4912-bed9-288b73f78329/RTL88-OBS.aspx>, IngoGest, Lisbon, data March 2011, accessed 11th May 2011.

¹⁶ <http://www.observatorioturismoacores.com/observatorio.php>, accessed 11th May 2011. The research was based on information available on the website and in collaboration with the President of the Tourism Observatory of Azores, PhD Professor Carlos Santos.

¹⁷ TURISMO DO ALENTEJO, ERT (2009). **Observatório do Turismo do Alentejo**. Photocopied. Excerpted and adapted.