

QUALITY OF LIFE AND PLACE SUSTAINABILITY: A RESIDENTS' VIEW

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ABSTRACT

A vision of sustainability is nowadays crucial to the success of places, a condition in which the adoption of a Place Marketing Policy to create value and to emphasize identities is definitively interiorized by the literature. The success is achieved when the actors (citizens, visitants, business sector and all the actors that live the territory) meet their expectations and obtain satisfaction from the territory performance. A territory environmentally qualified, economically valuable, socially coherent and consistent in its heterogeneity, where the local agents are active participants and not spectators of the territory changes represents the objectives and the crucial condition for the development of a strategic marketing policy destination.

A theoretical framework based on the contributions of Breakwell (1992, 1993), Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001), Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996) was developed and applied to Portimão, a city located on south-western Algarve, Portugal. The study aims to describe and understand the causal relations between independent variables (individual characteristics, residential time and quality of life attributes) and dependent measures (place attachment and place-related identity) in order to identify the actual conditions for the development of a successful strategic marketing policy destination in Portimão.

KEYWORDS

Sustainability, Place Marketing, Place Attachment, Place-Related Identity, Policy.

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of sustainability applied to the territories implies an integrated perspective considering the economic, the social, the environmental and the institutional dimensions. In the last 10 years Portimão's municipality (Portugal) observed a strong population growth, achieving a total of 50.454

inhabitants, with a demographic and economic framework driven by tourism which comprises more than 1.6 million of overnight stays in 2009. The sustainability of the economic, social and environmental standards achieved along this growth, emphasizes the importance of the knowledge about the perception of quality of life and place attachment by the residents, an area where place marketing and its framework of audit studies plays an important role. As a result the main objectives of the study are:

- Understand the factors that explain the perception of place quality of life by the residents;
- Which aspects of the residents profile explain place quality of life perception and place attachment.

2. METHODOLOGY

To fulfill the objectives a survey applied to 641 residents of Portimão was conducted in order to assess a diagnostic study of quality of life attributes and place attachment measures (William and Vaske, 2003), supported by a framework of audit studies and recommendations promoted by European Union.

In order to analyze these casual relations the questionnaire was built according with two sections: A) City's quality of life attributes was asked to evaluate the city using 32 items measured by a 100 points millimeter ruler scale (latter transformed in a scale from 0 – very bad to 10 – very good). The residents also evaluated the overall quality of life using the same scale. B) Place-attachment measures were calculated using eight items/statements. For example, respondents were showed the following phrase: "I like to live in Portimão" on the same likert scale used at Section A, ranging from 0 (strongly agree) to 10 (strongly disagree). These sections and items emerges from their intensive use in the scientific research of place marketing, attachment, place-identity and audit systems applied to residents, namely by Félonneau M.L (2004), Dixon and Durrheim (2000), Knez (2005), Hernández et al. (2007) and Freire (2007).

3. MAIN FINDINGS

A factor analysis of city's quality of life attributes enables us to conclude that six dimensions explain 52.6% of variance which could help to a better understanding of the several factors that contribute to distinctiveness structure or place identity positioning. Also the significant correlations achieved reinforce the need of special concern regarding residents needs according to stage of life, gender and life experiences.

The findings enables to accomplish a factor analysis of city's quality of life attributes produced the extraction of six factors which explained 52.6% of variance: 1- Basic needs; 2-Walkability; 3- Tourism attractions; 4- Infrastructures; 5- Commerce; 6- Leisure. Also there are significant Spearman correlation coefficients between respondent's age, gender and residential time and the attributes of quality of life considered, which reinforces the need of a segmented policy according to the different needs. There is also influence of resident's gender over place attachment measures. Male respondents are more economically dependents and less identified with Portimão but more politically engaged with city. On the contrary, female respondents showed higher levels of happiness, probably, because they like the city of Portimão better. The time of residence is also significantly correlated with place attachment measures. The respondents who live in Portimão for longer time are happier and like the city better. There are significant differences between natives/residents who ever lived in Portimão and

residents who experienced to live in other places before. The first ones evaluated more favourably the gastronomy and the urban planning, whereas those who have a comparative reference are more satisfied with the overall security level and the easiness to find house. In addition, those who ever lived in Portimão consider that the city treats visitants better than residents, which could be a reflex of a stronger sense of ownership.

4. CONCLUSIONS

These findings could contribute to a better understanding of the factors that most influence resident's evaluation of quality of life in order to improve successful public policies and strategies in place marketing.

Nowadays it is recognized by public policy makers the role of a city's brand as a strategic developmental tool that can help to clarify a city's identity, to enhance a city's image and position and to increase residents' perceived sense of belonging and self-esteem. When people are attached to a place with a strong commitment and feeling, they may engage active citizenship behaviours in order to contribute to a better overall quality of life.

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