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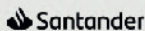


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The Character and Uniqueness of Madeira's Natural and Cultural Heritage as Determining Factors for Sports Tourist Products

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Abstract

The association between the area of sport and physical activities in nature, in conjunction with the Madeiran language and sociocultural heritage, is important because tourists who are looking for sporting and physical activities in Madeira are also interested in the unique landscape aspects of the island, in particular the historical and sociocultural knowledge of the *levadas*.

This research is based on the theoretical framework that the unique nature of Madeira Island is associated with the sociocultural environment (Fredman, Wall-Reinius, & Grundén, 2012). Cultural landscapes result from the interaction of human processes with nature, with positive effects on sustainable development and people's well-being (Vallés-Planells, Galiana & Van Eetvelde, 2014). Nature and cultural heritage are increasingly valued as truly significant to tourists' interests, by way of physical and sporting activities. Therefore, tourism and sporting activities in nature, both recreational (hiking in the *levadas*) and adventure (BTT *Enduro* and Canyoning), occur in the natural and cultural, as well as the traditional and rural landscapes of the island of Madeira.

The character and uniqueness of Madeira's natural and cultural landscapes evoke a holistic view, including the material and immaterial dimensions of the landscape, i.e. it implies that the landscape is not only the geographical entity, but also the perceived environment. Almost a hundred year ago, Sauer (1925,) argue that a cultural landscape is created by a cultural group from a natural landscape. The culture is the agent, the natural area is the way and the landscape is the result. So, the cultural landscape is the register of the human action on the natural territory. It means that there is a living relationship between natural and cultural heritage and respect for cultural significance and context is important for the appreciation of cultural heritage and it is a valuable resource for sustainable local communities development, with ecological, educational, scientific and cultural values, corresponding to the visitor's desire for authenticity in their vacation experience. Therefore, the sense of the place or the landscape's sociocultural reality integrates local experience in nature, as memorable and positive experiences of tourists in the natural environment.

In this paper we intend to show the experiences of sports products in active tourism which are associated with the unique features of natural and cultural environments of Madeira Island.

In what concerns to the methodology, the study was carried out in 2015, using a methodology of quantitative analysis, based on responses to an anonymous questionnaire for 290 tourists: 160 tourists from *levadas* and 130 canyoning tourists – 159 women and 131 men – with the following nationalities: German (136), English, (29) Spanish (22), French (17), Swedish (12), Portuguese (8), Dutch (6), Danish (3), Finnish (3), Russian (1) and others (53). The survey was based on a questionnaire translated in 4 languages (German, French, Portuguese and English) and organized in two parts: the first part included demographics and profiles of tourist: gender, age, academic qualification, professional situation, nationality and the main purpose of travel. The second part was based on the Kim's model of memorable experiences (Kim, Ritchie, & McCormick, 2012), adapted for mountain activities (*Levada* Walking and Canyoning): *Hedonism* – which includes 4 items – it was a very exciting activity, it was a challenge, I enjoyed the contact/proximity to water in the context of the mountain, the water falls was a compelling

element of the experience; *Novelty* – which includes 4 items – it was a once in a lifetime experience, it was a unique experience, it was quite different from my previous tourism experiences, it was a significant experience while visiting Madeira; *Refreshment* – which includes 4 items – it was liberating, I enjoyed a sense of freedom, I enjoyed a feeling of freshness, I was revitalized through this tourism experience; *Recollection* – which includes 4 items – I will repeat *Levada Walks/Canyoning*, I would recommend *Levada Walks/Canyoning* to a friend, I will remember this *Levada Walks/Canyoning* experience, there are parts of the route that I will never forget; *Knowledge* – which includes – I gained knowledge about *Levada Walks/Canyoning*, I learned new technical skills, I felt that *Levada Walks/Canyoning* can damage nature; *Local culture* – which includes – local people made a good impression on me, I had an intimate experience with the local culture, local people are cozy and friendly, I was concern about participating in this activity with the history and origin of water courses in the mountains, I felt that *Levada Walks/Canyoning* can be useful for the preservation of nature.

Another dimension was included in order to cover risk perception and degree of difficulty from the tourist point of view (Bouchet, Lebrun & Auvergne, 2004), comprising 4 items: it was a risky activity; it was an adequate experience based upon my abilities, regarding the degree of difficulty of the route; it was a very demanding physical experience; I felt safe in the activity. In order to increase the response rate, we requested support from three experts and mountain guides to validate and administer the anonymous questionnaire.

In terms of statistical procedures and data analysis, we applied an exploratory analysis of the dimensions based on the standard test of internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha). The results point to acceptable values in terms of reliability: *refreshment* (0.902), *local culture* (0.882), *recollection* (0.828), *novelty* (0.791), *hedonism* (0.711). *Knowledge* (0.437) and *risk perception* (0.364) had very low scores, so we decided to eliminate these dimensions. Moreover, in line with standard procedures, each variable was accessed in terms of normality (via the Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistical test of normality). In order to get a global idea of the data, we did multivariate statistics (relative frequency distributions, percentages, mean and standard deviation). To analyze the degree of interdependence among qualitative variables, we applied the Chi-squared test for independent measures of qualitative data and the exact and Monte Carlo option. We also used the t-student in order to compute the differences among groups (*Canyoning* and *Levadas*), for a continuum scale from 1 point (completely disagree) to 7 points (completely agree), and we employed the Mann-Whitney and t-test for a 5% level of significance. The data was stored and analyzed using SPSS, version 25.0.

The results of *levada* walking and canyoning, in terms of profile, point to significant differences between *levada* walking and canyoning practitioners (see Table 1).

Table 1 - Profile of tourists involved in *levada* walking and canyoning

		Total	<i>Levada Walking</i>		<i>Canyoning</i>		X ²	P	
Gender	Male	131	45.2	61	38.1	70	58.8	6.537	0.011
	Female	159	54.8	99	61.9	60	46.2		
Age	<20	8	2.7	2	0.7	6	2.0	147.44	<0.01
	20-29	67	22.6	7	2.4	60	20.3		
	30-39	55	18.6	4	5.4	17	13.2		
	40-49	35	11.8	23	7.8	12	4.1		
	50-59	66	22.3	56	18.9	10	3.4		
	60-70	42	14.2	41	13.9	1	0.3		
	>70	23	7.8	23	7.8	0	0		
Academic background	1 ^o /2 ^o /3 ^o c school	37	12.5	20	6.8	17	5.8	22.849	0.002
	Secondary/professional	99	33.0	60	20.0	39	13.0		
	Bachelor/Undergraduates	92	31.0	49	16.0	43	14.0		

	Master/Ph.D.	56	19.0	35	11.9	21	7.10		
	Self-employed	43	14.5	27	9.1	16	5.4		
	Employed	177	59.0	86	29.0	91	30.00		
Professional status	Student	20	6.8	4	1.4	16	5.4	24.683	<0.01
	Retired	49	16.6	48	16.2	1	0.3		
	Other	6	2.0	3	1.0	3	1.0		
The canyoning/ <i>levada</i> walks was decisive to visit the Madeira Island?	Yes	113	38.4	93	31.6	20	6.8	14.961	0.001
	No	181	61.6	74	25.2	107	36.4		

Regarding their professional background, most of the respondents in the canyoning group were employees. On the contrary, *levadas* walkers were retirees (16.2%), employed (29.0%) or self-employed workers (9.1%). According to the variable age, the differences are significant: canyoning tourists are younger than *levada* walking tourists and these were more committed to their decision than the tourists of canyoning ($p < 0.01$).

In terms of purpose for travel, the data suggests that most respondents opt for holiday leisure and recreation (92%) as a key reason to travel to the Island. Around 3% mentioned other reasons. No significant differences were found in terms of travel motives between canyoning and *levada* walking ($p > 0.05$), as we can see in the Table 2.

Table 2 - Main purpose to travel

	Activity type	Frequency	Percentage
Canyoning	Leisure or vacation	119	91.5
	Work	1	0.8
	Education	6	4.6
	To visit family	2	1.5
	Other	1	0.8
	Total	130	100,0
<i>Levadas</i>	Leisure or vacation	154	91.1
	Work	3	1.8
	Education	2	1.2
	To visit family	1	0.6
	Other	9	5.3
	Total	169	100.0

Respondents indicate motives related to nature (66%) as the key reason to choose Madeira as a destination. Other reasons include: 38% the climate; 35% the landscapes and the mountains, and 17% and 7%, respectively, refer to sun, sea and beaches. One of the most important reasons put forth by the respondents (42% of them) was the opportunity to pursue and practice one of the sports and / or activities available, which confirmed early expectations, being that such activities can be traced to active and sport oriented tourists.

Regarding to the memorable experience perception of both groups, the components of the study were: *hedonism*, *refreshment*, *recollection* and *local culture*. The results show a significant difference between the two groups, except for *local culture*, as shown in the Table 3. Both groups evaluated the activity as an experience to remember, to repeat and to recommend to a friend.

Table 3 - Average and standard deviation of the two activities

	Activity type	Nº	Average	Deviation	Test-t	Sig.
Hedonism	Canyoning	130	6,06	,841	10,492	<0.001
	Levadas	169	4,86	1,075		
Novelty	Canyoning	129	5,67	1,063	4,557	<0.001
	Levadas	169	4,98	1,428		
Refreshment	Canyoning	130	5,68	,910	7,831	<0.001
	Levadas	169	4,51	1,495		
Local Culture	Canyoning	125	5,20	1,059	-1,102	0.271
	Levadas	164	5,32	,871		
Recollection	Canyoning	130	6,31	,772	5,657	<0.001
	Levadas	169	5,73	,947		

The *recollection* dimension achieved high scores. This data suggests that most tourists rank the experience of *levada* walking or canyoning as a most memorable and unforgettable one, with a high probability of returning to the destination. Significant differences between canyoning and *levada* fans are discernible, because the canyoning group assigns more meaning to the *recollection* dimension compared to the *levada* group (6.31±0.772 vs. 5.73±0.947; p<0.001). For the other dimensions, *refreshment*, *hedonism* and *novelty*, the same pattern of attitude and behavior is verified, because canyoning fans systematically report higher values in every area, and major differences emerge (p<0.001). The socio-demographic characteristics, for example the age, the professional status and the reasons to experience the activity, were found to be different between the two groups. It is important to observe that canyoning fans seem more thrilled (*hedonism*) and delighted by their experience versus the *levadas*' tourists. A possible explanation relates to the exhilaration and challenge of canyoning as a sportive activity, i.e. canyoning offered an exciting and unique activity as well as a physical challenge for several visitors. Age is another variable that can explain the differences between the two groups. The *levadas* walkers were older than canyoning tourists. Therefore, the differences between tourist's profile of canyoning and of *levada* walking are significant.

Regarding *levadas* walking, tourists highlighted the natural landscapes as being challenging but pleasant, with thick vegetation exuding feelings of pleasure and relaxation in natural surroundings. The fact that the natural landscapes are inseparable of the sociocultural and historical heritage of Madeiran *levadas*, harmoniously integrated in nature, arouses interest from visitors to understand their origin and functions. Besides being a physical activity, this is a multisensory experience resulting from direct immersion with the fauna and flora, but also with the cultural landscape of *levadas*.

Tourism-sports activities in nature can affirm the authenticity of the cultural landscape associated with the local communities, contributing to sustainable rural tourism. It is important to note that most tourists declared that their current experience was memorable and amazing, which leads to high levels of interest in returning to the destination and likelihood that they will recommend it to family members and friends.

Keywords: Mountain trails; Sport Tourism; Active Tourism; Genuine Experience; Natural Environment; Cultural Heritage.

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