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## SEASONALITY IN TOURISM: TRENDS AND GOOD PRACTICES IN RIO DE JANEIRO, SHUMEN AND THE DOURO DEMARCATED REGION

Abstract: The world, this planet where we live, boosts a diversity of territories, landscapes and distinct dynamics, which we can see in urban centres, whether in large metropolises such as Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), or in small inland cities, like Shumen (Bulgaria), an urban centre surrounded by a fabulous heritage and history, as well as in rural spaces, such as the Douro Demarcated Region (NE Portugal). Regardless of the scale of analysis and the typology of scenarios scattered across the continents, there are a wealth of landscapes and economic, social, architectural, historical and cultural heritages that need to be bolstered, while preserving their specificities and their authenticity

#### **Author information:**

#### Helena Pina

University of Porto helenapina@netcabo.pt Portugal 🌎

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#### Milen Penerliev

University of Shumen Konstantin Preslavski penerliev@yahoo.com Bulgaria

### Leandro Dias de Oliveira

Universidade Federal Rural do Rio de Janeiro ☐ Idiasufrrj@gmail.com ( Brazil

#### Veselin Petkov

University of Shumen Konstantin Preslavski veselin\_9003@abv.bg Bulgaria

# ntroduction

On the other hand, these spaces are not static; they are undergoing continuous interference, both endogenous and external, increasingly more globalized and mostly deriving from economic demands. Nevertheless, these dynamics combine the action of multiple actors, public and private, local, regional and national, or even global [1,2]. In this context, we discover incisive, multifaceted development processes that enhance endogenous resources as well as tourism [3, 4, 5].

Although problematic, the "rural" is changing [6; 1] and in constant mutation, especially after the 1980s. These changes include demographic and socioeconomic restructuring / recovery [7], environmental improvements, as well as the recovery of some traces of their territorial identity, their intrinsic cultural values, and the adoption of new technologies [8; 9; 10; 11]. They reflect new strategies that have been implemented in rural areas aimed at promoting balanced development [7], which combine heritage conservation (material and immaterial) with innovation, environmental issues [12], and economic diversification, in a context in which all actors, all indigenous and external stakeholders are interconnected and can take action [13]. Indeed, although the agroforestry sector remains the economic mainstay of rural spaces [14], agriculture is no longer the main source of income in many rural regions. Multifunctional land use and economic diversification are on the rise [2; 15], covering multiple activities among which tourism and leisure stand out. At the same time, however, concerns are piling up, challenges that may undermine the preservation of local identities [3; 16; 17].

Rural spaces, especially the more isolated countryside, are facing multiple and diverse problems. A declining, mostly ageing population predominates in these areas [7], which reflects the weak local economic environment and the lack of tertiary functions, or the poor access routes that serve them. All things considered, it is a marginal, subsistence economy often associated with public social benefits [4; 14]. Nevertheless, even in these spaces there are a wide range of potential areas for development and dynamics for change. Rural areas can benefit for the revitalization of their heritage and from interconnecting all stakeholders, including the local population, the effective guardians of the indigenous material and intangible heritage [9;10], especially if supported by marketing and tourism, for example [3; 4; 5; 18; 19].

Although the changes resulting from the introduction of new activities are clearer and have a longer history in coastal urban spaces, they have also broadened inland, although more particularly in their urban centres. The examples presented here briefly illustrate these dynamics, diversified but in keeping with the local environmental, economic and sociocultural conditions, where the authentic and the distinctive are preserved and recovered. One of the foundations is, in fact, tourism, especially ecological and cultural tourism, but despite its potential, there are associated problems. One of them stems unquestionably from the seasonality of tourist activities [5; 20; 21; 22], but here too changes are taking place, with adaptations associated to different strategies [5;22]. Tourist seasonality is a widespread problem in the different territories, whether urban or rural, although more exacerbated in rural areas, including those that maintain a clear potential, such as the Douro Demarcated Region, the example discussed in this paper.

Slowly, though, pressured by external demands and the awakening of the residents' consciences, increasingly supported by policy makers, previously declining spaces are resurfacing, combining new strategies with traditional ones. Tourism has been assumed as the main driver for development, even though it is inseparable from a more or less marked seasonality. It is therefore necessary to address this problem at different scales in order to overcome this weakness. Key actors have to be identified and new strategies have to be applied in contexts where coexistence between tradition and innovation is a requirement, particularly in environments with declining populations suffering also from structural ageing.

In this article we attempt to address these problems, adopting a methodology that combines the analysis of bibliographic, statistical and cartographic documentation with the consultation of websites of the entities responsible for regional development and, in particular, for the tourist initiatives. This research, in turn, led to questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with various actors involved in the development of rural spaces, namely in the minimization of tourist seasonality, taking into account dynamics that can be developed in a responsible, harmonious, and sustainable manner.

# **Results and Discussion**

#### Rio de Janeiro

Historically, the state of Rio de Janeiro has tourism as an economic force [23; 24; 25]. In the capital, the natural beauty – which combines neighbouring beaches and mountains –, the architectural heritage, a specific culture combined with an extensive calendar of festivities makes the city of Rio de Janeiro always on the route of visitors from other regions of the state and from Brazil and other parts of the world. Nevertheless, tourism only reflects what happens on other scales: even with tourist attractions in other parts of the state, the capital has always concentrated industry, commerce, the hotel chains and all sorts of services in a much consolidated metropolization process.

In this paper, we will analyse three cases from the interior of Rio de Janeiro, namely: (1) the Região da Costa do Sol (or Região dos Lagos), which tourism is centred on the combination of sun and sea; (2) the Região da Costa Verde, nearby to the Metropolitan Region, like the first one, has a nautical tourism, but closer to a mountainous relief, with waterfalls and rivers; and (3) the Região Serrana, located at higher altitudes and characterized by milder temperatures and mountain tourism.

The Região da Costa do Sol is formed by the cities of Araruama, Armação dos Búzios, Arraial do Cabo, Cabo Frio, Iguaba Grande, São Pedro da Aldeia, Saquarema and Maricá. Due its larger population and more developed economy, Cabo Frio is the main city, attracting more tourists than the other ones. In this region, tourism is so important that urbanization itself favours this aspect: cities are designed for tourists, with squares, fountains and illuminations to adorn the landscape [26; 27; 28]. Concerning seasonality, tourism is deeply concentrated in summer unlike other seasons, when many businesses close their doors. Unfortunately, the cultural and architectural heritage that could attract tourists even in winter is not valued as it should be.

The Região da Costa Verde, which includes Itaguaí, Mangaratiba, Angra dos Reis and Paraty, is located to the west of the Rio de Janeiro Metropolitan Region. Like the Região dos Lagos, tourism is also concentrated in summer and it involves nautical rides, sea bathing, waterfalls and rivers [25]. In the region, there are sophisticated hotels, large and luxurious resorts [29], and very popular tourism, in simpler beaches that require less investment. Of course, although seasonally tourists are also declining in the winter season, local governments are finding alternative solutions: Paraty, with a year-round calendar of literary, drink, and music festivals that hold the interest of visitors; Angra dos Reis and Mangaratiba, through luxury condominiums and resorts, which are also occupied in winter, although a criticism this raises is the deep spatial segregation with the rest of the city.

Finally, the Mountain Region is, in our opinion, formed especially by the cities of Petrópolis, Teresópolis and Nova Friburgo. They are cities known for the urbanization of imperial times, with urban constructions of great attractiveness for tourists [30; 31], although the number of visitors is much more modest than the beach regions. Seasonality is reversed here: winter concentrates festivals, musical attractions and hotel promotions [32]; although in summer such cities are much sought after due the slightly colder temperatures than the highest recorded in the lower areas.

Important similarities between the studied regions can be indicated: (1) the expansion of the metropolitan phenomenon, as potentiation of productive linkages and economic exchanges with the interior; (2) the appreciation of nature as a form of economic expropriation and escapism from urban problems; and (3) the consolidation of inland tourism, with the appreciation of historical and intangible heritage and the construction of cultural circuits for visitors. Finally, we can preliminarily state that it is possible, based on these observations, to construct a more qualified state tourism-planning proposal, making seasonality an asset. This will not only prevent the stagnation of tourist activities during periods of low attraction, but also integrate and develop the interior of the state of Rio de Janeiro, which still needs much effort to reach its full potential.

#### Shumen

In their research, Penerliev and Petkov [33] analyse the behaviour of tourists in terms of most preferred time of the year for visiting the region of Shumen. The preferences for travel planning and realization of the actual trip to cultural tourism sites in the region are part of the socio-cultural profile of foreign tourists, given that the majority of them plan their vacation in advance. Bookings of summer vacations start as early as the autumn of the previous calendar year. This enables the projection of the expected tourist flow to the Black Sea resorts and the tourism sites in the region of Shumen. The results from the survey conducted by the above-mentioned authors confirm the projected number of tourists - nearly 49% of the respondents prefer visiting the studied region between September and October (autumn months), while another 36% prefer the period between May and August (summer months). The preferences of the rest of the respondents fluctuate from winter to the early spring months. It can be observed that the "high tourist season" is the six-month period between May and October. This is the period when holidays and trips are traditionally planned. The time range in the number of foreign tourists, however, is narrower – those tourists mostly prefer the months of August and September. This is because the vast majority of foreign tourists plan a seaside vacation along the Northern Black Sea coast of Bulgaria, which they combine with visits to the cultural tourism sites in the studied region.

In this context, an analysis of the attendance of cultural tourism sites in the region of Shumen follows. This is done for the purpose of comparative analysis of the number of tourists who visited the existing cultural tourism sites. The number of visitors by months - during a given period (year, decade, etc.) - can be used as evidence of the seasonal nature of cultural tourism in the region. In this case, the authors have used data on the attendance of the National Historical-Archaeological Reserve (NHAR) of Veliki Preslav in 2016 by months. As a tourist destination of national importance, this site is representative enough not just for the studied region but also nationwide. Nonetheless, the seasonality is clearly expressed in that case as well (Fig. 1).

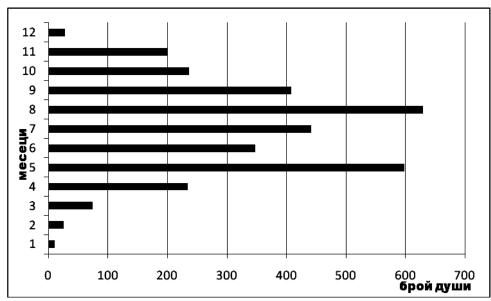


Fig. 1 Tourist attendance of the NHAR of Veliki Preslav in 2016. (by months and number of tour guide lectures delivered)

The analysis of the figure is indicative enough: the month of May yields a high number of visitors due to the so-called "Night of the Museums", when the entrance is free, which results in higher

interest, as the museum officials claim. Apart from that, the figure clearly shows interest in visiting the museum exhibitions during the summer months – starting from June and reaching its peak in August, being the high holiday season. From that point on, an expected decline follows, similar to the one observed in the case of the Regional Historical Museum (RHM) of Shumen. The conclusion is obvious: cultural tourism in the region of Shumen is clearly seasonal. This seasonality is expressed by exhibited interest in cultural-cognitive tourism sites mainly in the summer months of the year, which can be regarded as a distinct feature of the profile of tourists practicing this type of tourism. According to the RHM-Shumen data, in 2017 alone (the year for which data on the accommodation facilities is provided), more than 40 thousand tourists visited the NHAR of Madara, while 5500 tourists visited the main building of the RHM-Shumen [34; 35].

It is our belief that in order to overcome the negative trends, organizing of various (in terms of scope and topic) festivals is needed. Festival tourism can be an opportunity for extending the stay of tourists in the studied region for more than just a day. According to the European Festivals Association, festivals are "mostly festive events with a combined program of artistic performances, which goes beyond the qualities of day-to-day programming in order to achieve a level of exceptional festivity in a particular place. Therefore, festivals have a unique appeal that can only be maintained for a certain period of time ..."

On the other hand, as it became clear, May is also preferred as a month for visiting cultural tourism sites. Shifting the attendance to the last spring months or early autumn is an alternative option for the tourist sites in the region. The "Night of the Museums" initiative, celebrated nationwide, is also a good practice for overcoming seasonality.

### **Douro Demarcated Region (NE Portugal)**

We will now focus on a rural space located in NE Portugal, the Douro Demarcated Region (DDR). An emblematic area, partially classified by UNESCO in December 2001 as the "Living Evolutionary Landscape, World Heritage Site", it is a setting that combines an idyllic landscape with a superb culture and ancient history, as well as a diversity of world-renowned fine wines, most particularly Port. We are therefore dealing with a distinctive landscape and an exceptional heritage [5;12; 36).

Despite this appealing setting, the region, whose economic and social mainstay is viticulture, has always faced a range of problems, hindering its development, namely due to economic stagnation deriving from its deficient land use structure, but especially social and cultural problems among which severe demographic decline (Fig. 2). An elderly population without much technical training remains in the region, especially in the rural areas. However, they are the witnesses and guardians of an exceptional culture and of traditions, as well as a unique, exceptional landscape and architectural heritage, although subject to deficient maintenance given the region's poor accessibilities.

To mitigate these problems, several strategies have emerged in recent decades that have combined the restructuring of vineyards with tourism, especially Rural Tourism (TER) and, more recently, Local Accommodation (LA). However, as we have already mentioned previously, tourism remains a seasonal activity, mainly concentrated between the months of May and October, and particularly during the harvest season.

The case of Quinta dos Varais is enlightening [7], a wine farm located in the municipality of Lamego, on the left bank of the Douro River. It has a long history that dates back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century when the farm was property of the Cistercian Order in the Douro region, producing the first "Fragrant Lamego Wine", today known as Port wine [4]. Until 1773, the Quinta dos Varais belonged to the Convent of Salzedas, after which it was acquired by the current family.

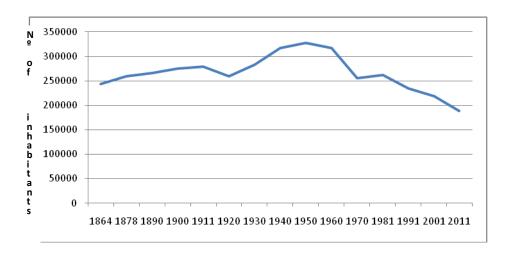


Fig 2 – Evolution of the resident population in the Douro Demarcated Region (1864 / 2011) Source: General Population Censuses, INE (Lisbon)

The wine farm has undergone several changes throughout its history, but it was mainly from the 1980s that the vineyards were restructured and mechanized, and later the granite winepresses were adapted, as well as the warehouses, making them more functional and modern. Those in charge at that time already had tourism in mind as a complement to winemaking. Thus, in 1984, the first "Home Tourism" unit in the region was established in this sunny 18<sup>th</sup>-century manor house, offering 3 rooms, to which they added one more in 2013 (a suite). In the meantime, in 1993, after renovating of the old caretaker's house, an "Agritourism" unit [36] emerged.

These two types of tourism attract mainly middle/upper class couples aged 50 and over, although more recently, young couples with 1 or 2 children, but also individual guests such as traders, winemakers or journalists interested in the region (36; 37). The number of guests increased after UNESCO listed the Douro region (2001), going from 16 visitors in 1984, when it began its activities, to 71 in 1995 (Fig. 3), and then falling to between 40 and 60 until 2001 (Source: House of Varais Archive).

This situation worsened during the economic crisis in Portugal (Pina, 2017a), but beyond this phase and following the use of international booking platforms (Booking.com, for example), there was an exponential rise in guests, both domestic and foreign, and the diversity of origins has grown. Thus, in 2015, 178 records were observed, a value that has continued to expand to the present day (Source: Casa dos Varais Archive).

On the other hand, seasonality has always been visible on the guest ledger, with the largest number concentrated between May and October (Fig. 2), especially in the harvest season. The owners take advantage of the low season to carry out maintenance of the residence and other tasks. However, , in addition to expanding the number of guests and the diversity of origins, the use of international booking platforms has also decreased seasonality, as is clear in 2015.

This strategy has been adopted by most of the dwellings enrolled in the Rural Tourism scheme in the region and, more recently, the Local Accommodation houses. The medium and large farms have also come to offer other initiatives to enhance regional and farm specificities. They have adapted old deactivated warehouses or created new structures to transform them into small rural hotels (less than 50 rooms), betting on the low season, promoting particularly social events (weddings, for example), or professional/business events (congresses, business meetings, etc.) and wellness tourism, when they invest in spas, for example [7;8].

In the smaller, family-run tourist units, the overwhelming majority focus on innovation and on offering difference. Some have specialized in hosting small cultural events (seminars, photography competitions, etc.), or in creating "My Wine", with a personalized label, as well as various recreational activities, such as regional gastronomy courses and wine tasting, themed family weekends, periodic events such as chestnut feasts, harvest wine tastings (November), olive picking (November to January), etc. It should be noted that olive and almond trees are important crops in the region that also need to be profitable in terms of tourism. And we must also remember the local and religious traditions [9;10].

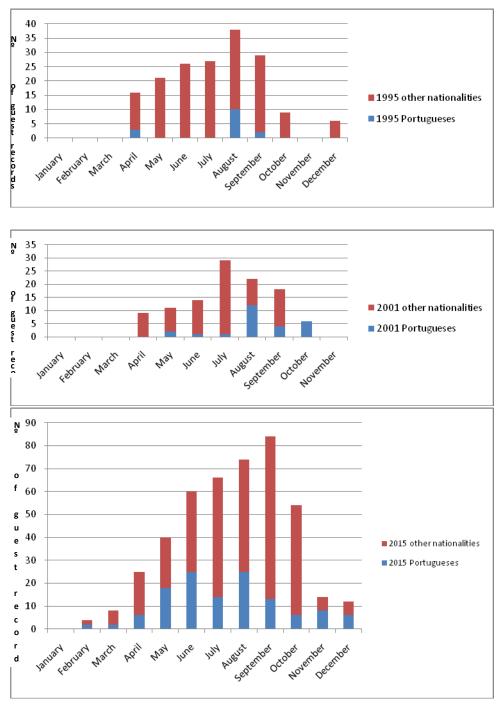


Fig. 3 – Evolution of the number of tourists at Casa dos Varais in 1995, 2001 and 2015. (Source: Casa dos Varais Archive)

Moreover, it is necessary to create and disseminate regional and local events such as sporting events (pedestrian races, cycling, non-polluting water sports and others), but also cultural and thematic fairs that are not restricted to the high season. Tourism posters should also be created for the low season, thereby enhancing regional development, including not only the wine-growing region but also the surrounding, distinct and complementary spaces, with specific landscapes, cultures and traditions, some of which would also be revitalized, jointly attracting different types of tourists. Obviously, the responsibility of the official and cultural entities in these strategies is unquestionable. In fact, society as whole, all actors, including the resident population and their traditions, must join forces and generate connectivity that will mitigate the tourist seasonality in the Douro region and the surrounding spaces. Only by joining efforts will the whole territory be bolstered, encompassing the DDR and its surrounding spaces.

#### **Conclusions**

Although the Douro Demarcated Region has superb heritage and multiple potentialities, the problems persist. In strategic terms, the vineyard and tourism, in their various aspects, are the key vectors for regional development, and the number of tourism units in the region have risen significantly, as well as the farms that have taken to wine tourism. This gives rise to a vast territory that goes beyond the limits of the DDR, preserving the landscape, culture, history, traditions and gastronomy. This can only be achieved by articulating all actors and institutional bodies, defining complementary local and regional strategies that cover the whole year, including the low season, supported by effective, innovative management and marketing that do not detract from the specificities, traditions and regional culture.

Indeed, regional development must be promoted in a harmonious, sustainable manner, focusing on the quality and conservation of the landscape and architecture, but also on the society, on endogenous activities, applying strategies that mitigate demographic decline and lessen tourist seasonality. This is how these UNESCO heritage landscapes can be bolstered, as evidenced by Quinta and Casa dos Varais, in a framework where innovation, tradition and complementarity are harmoniously combined.

As it can be seen from the above examples, dealing with seasonality in the tourism industry differs in the different studied areas. In Portugal, it is largely relied on finding an alternative for the local communities involved in the tourism industry. In Bulgaria and Brazil (based on the cities studied in the paper), the search for alternative forms of tourism is being sought so as to extend the tourist season (extending the "wings" of the seasonality). This is done through attractive cultural events (festivals, exhibitions, etc.), as well as congress tourism and other similar events.

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