

Sports Tourism and High-Performance Centres in the Portugal Central Region

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Tourism and sports are both the fastest and largest growing sectors, and sports tourism has a positive impact on the development of tourism. Considering the overall potential of sports tourism, this research aims to understand the importance of High-Performance Centres as a support for the development and growth of sports tourism in destinations. A qualitative methodology was developed, structured in the following stages: (i) a characterisation of the High-Performance Sports Centres, (ii) a SWOT analysis and a TOWS analysis of this type of infrastructure, followed by (iii) six interviews carried out with the managers of seven High-Performance Centres of the Central Region of Portugal. It is possible to see that tourism has a positive role in the Central Region in terms of employment and in improving the living conditions of the locals, contributing to increased employment in the region which, consequently, leads to an increase in per capita income and an improvement in the quality of life of the population. The main conclusions have shown that sports tourism can be a differentiating product that meets the new needs of the visitor that no longer wants only passive holidays, but demands active ones, seeking to be emerged in differentiated experiences during a trip. In this way, it is crucial that tourism stakeholders be aware of the new visitor's profile, adapting its services to meet the tourist needs.

Keywords: tourism, High-Performance-Centres, tourism destinations, Central Region of Portugal



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Introduction

Tourism and sport have been intertwined in history for many centuries (Redmond, 1991) since the Olympic Games of Ancient Greece or the games held in the Roman Empire. However, as it is understood today, sports tourism had its genesis in the mid-twentieth

century and currently holds very significant importance. Sports tourism emerged at the time when the points of contact between sports and tourism grew significantly.

Thus, tourism and sport ended up intersecting with common activities, contexts, and practices, and

from this connection sports tourism was then born (Redmond, 1991), a term which began to be used in sports-related travel (Carvalho & Lourenço, 2009; Gibson, 2008).

Sports tourism has a positive impact on the development of tourism (Soedjatmiko, 2015). Sport influences the life cycle of destinations and can be a form of rejuvenation of tourist destinations, and the same occurs in relation to tourism which influences the life cycle of sports (Hinch & Higham, 2001; 2011). Tourism and sports activities are important sources of income and employment for many countries. Sport generates tourism flows in the destination (Higham, 1999), generates income (Yu, 2010), creates employment opportunities (Nezakati et al., 2013) and generates dynamics at the territorial level, namely through the improvement of the destination tourism offer in terms of facilities or infrastructure (Nordin, 2008; Nezakati et al., 2013; Quintas et al. 2021). Sports tourism uses the existing facilities and infrastructures in the destinations, like High-Performance Centres (HPCs) that can themselves generate attraction, contribute to visitor loyalty and increase the competitiveness of destinations.

Therefore, to develop the sports and tourism sector, various studies should be performed within the scope of sports tourism. This research aims to understand the importance of High-Performance Centres as a support for the development and growth of sports tourism in destinations. To achieve the intended goal, a qualitative methodology was developed. Six interviews were carried out with the managers of the High-Performance Centres of the Central Region of Portugal, to understand the importance of these types of infrastructures in visitor attraction, seasonality reduction, income generation and increase in the competitiveness of tourism destinations.

This paper is organised in eight sections. After the introduction, the second and the third section review the literature addressing the main topics under analysis, namely, sports and tourism and high-performance sports. The fourth section presents the definition of High-Performance Centres and its importance to the development of destinations. The fifth section is dedicated to the methodology used in the collection and treatment of information. The sixth section analy-

ses the High-Performance Centres, their geographical distribution and SWOT analysis. The seventh section discusses the results obtained, and finally, the main conclusions are presented in the eighth section.

Sports and Tourism: Conceptual Framework and Dimensions

Until the 1990s, sport was only addressed as a general or even incidental context in tourism research, rather than as its central focus (Hinch & Higham, 2001). Tourism and sport have walked side by side in history for many centuries (Redmond, 1991), for example, the Olympic Games in Ancient Greece or the Roman Games. But the origin of this concept is associated with the mid-20th century. Pigeassou et al. (2003, p. 6) argue that sport is a complementary activity which differentiates the tourist supply, thus becoming beneficial for tourism.

However, the points of contact between sports and tourism have grown dramatically and it has become essential to create a concept that conceptualises their junction (Redmond, 1991). Thus, we have witnessed the emergence of Sports Tourism, which comes to fill the need for a more detailed description of the sport practiced in leisure travel (Gibson, 1998; Kurtzman & Zauhar, 2003; Pigeassou, 2004), whose demand has been increasing over the years (Hinch & Higham, 2011).

Gibson (1998) defines sports tourism as the travels that people make from the place of their permanent residence to monitor or participate in sports activities. The concept of sports tourism thus implies a dynamic flow of travel that has hitherto been largely ignored by those interested in the field of tourism and sports. But, in turn, it does not go unnoticed by the public, nor by the industry which must respond quickly to every demand (Hinch & Higham, 2001).

As noted, sports tourism is a broad concept, and there is still no consensual definition of sports tourism (Sofield, 2003). Table 1 systematises the concepts most used.

According to Carvalho and Lourenço (2009, p. 123), four factors can be listed that are essential to understand the importance in society of the synergies between sports and tourism: (i) the increase in the

Table 1 Definitions of Sports Tourism

Definition	Author
Travelling away from home to watch or participate in a sports activity	Hall (1992)
Where the tourist is a temporary visitor, who stays for at least twenty-four hours around a sports event, with the purpose of participating	Nogawa et al. (1996)
The tourist comes with the intention of practising sport for leisure or for training without the intention of competing, in a place where physical availability is characterised	Goidanich & Moletta (1998)
A set of activities where sport is the basis of the tourism project	Pigeassou et al. (2003)
All sports activities in which tourists take part, either as participants or spectators	Lourenço (2008)
A leisure-based trip that temporarily removes individuals from their local community to participate in physical activities, to attend physical activities or to venerate attractions associated with physical activities	Weed (2006; 2008)

duration of leisure time; (ii) the concentration of populations around urban centres; (iii) the evolution of means of transport; and (iv) the increase in purchasing power.

Sports Tourism as a Support for the Development and Growth of Tourism in Destinations

Over time, there have been more and more studies and research about sports tourism. This growing interest, in the opinion of Kurtzman and Zauhar (1993) and Gammon and Robinson (2003), is essentially due to five reasons: (1) increased popularity of major sports events; (2) greater awareness of the benefits, in terms of health, linked to active participation in sports activities; (3) the value given by government and tourism authorities to sport, for its positive impact on the economy and international relations; (4) a more varied sports calendar, with a tourist offer of events throughout the year, free for participants and spectators; and (5) ease of communication and travel of people, due to the advancement of new technologies and infrastructures.

Although sports literature does not focus on destinations, it has nevertheless explored sustainability issues, which at the local level can be categorised in a holistic three-pronged approach, incorporating environmental, socio-cultural, and economic impacts (Andersson & Lundberg, 2013). Focusing on the socio-cultural realm, namely the forms of sustainability that can be addressed by sport development programmes (Lindsey, 2008, p. 2), suggests that sustainability 'has become ubiquitous in the politics and practice of sport development,' such as in the role of participatory sport programmes in community promotion (Schulenkorf, 2012).

This ability of sport to be a way to counteract the seasonality patterns of tourist destinations is fundamental since it can create heterogeneous demand flows in tourist destinations (Garau-Vadell & Borja-Solé, 2008; Higham, 2005; Hinch & Higham, 2001; 2011). Through strategies it is possible to counteract these seasonal fluctuations in demand, and sport, for Higham (2005, p. 159), can be a way to change or improve seasonality patterns. Furthermore, sports tourism has the capacity to bring tourists to more inland areas of the country. For example, nature sports tourism attracts tourists to less populated areas, but with footpaths and other factors of interest to practitioners. This allows less developed areas, through sports tourism, to grow and become more attractive to domestic and foreign visitors.

Sports tourism may also constitute a means of using already existing facilities and infrastructures and may contribute towards visitor loyalty which is another positive impact to be highlighted and which leads to an increase at destination competitiveness level (Podovšovnik & Lesjak 2016). Much of the image and atmosphere of a destination results in part from the tangibility associated with the destination and that, in turn, stems from the presence of infrastructures that can themselves generate the attraction.

To be recommended, a destination must build a favourable image, offering infrastructures and services that, at first, facilitate access to it and, subsequently, enhance the experience of differentiated experiences (Carvalho & Lourenço, 2009; Waśkowski, 2016). This is in line with the opinion of Higham (1999, p. 83) when

he states that sports tourism can stimulate the image of a destination and promote the territory as a tourist destination, especially due to the media coverage that many of them manage to accomplish.

Thus, sport has come to play a leading role in terms of marketing and is used in advertising in which visitors can be seen watching or playing a sport at the destination as well as visiting tourist attractions (Hinch & Higham, 2001; 2004; Redmond, 1991). Sports tourism can also contribute to the identity of the destination. Several authors agree that sport is one of the elements that constitute the culture of a nation and helps to form its identity, reflecting and influencing the culture of a country and acting in certain cases as a symbol of that culture (Hinch & Higham, 2001; 2004; 2011; Torkildsen, 2005; Yu, 2010).

In relation to negative impacts, it is worth mentioning the costs that it brings or may bring to the destination. Some individuals also address the issue of managing and safeguarding the destination's resources, both natural and for local communities, preserving its authenticity and attractiveness, in line with that indicated by Hinch and Higham (2001, p. 55), who argue that the dependence of sports on the destination's physical resources must be taken into consideration, as well as the impact of sports tourism on the tourist landscape.

High-Performance Centres

A High-Performance Centre is 'an operational unit which combines a specific and diversified set of sports facilities and multidisciplinary support services, whose purpose is the improvement of sports performance, providing high performance athletes or those who are part of national teams with adequate conditions for sports preparation' (Marcolino & Baganha, 2011, p. 5). Its mission is primarily to meet the needs of sports federations and it aims to pursue objectives such as detecting and enhancing sports talent, enabling internships, evaluating, controlling and optimising training, scientific research and monitoring results (Fundação do Desporto, n.d.).

Böhlke and Robinson (2009, p. 81) argue that the results derived from the High-Performance Sports of a country are in line with the sports system of that

same country as well as appropriate to its specific reality. This is because a top sports model can only be defined with the presence of infrastructures and processes to identify, develop and train athletes for international sports success.

The European Charter for Sport (Conselho da Europa, 1992, p. 7), mentions that 'since the practice of sport depends in part on the number and diversity of facilities and on their accessibility, it is up to public authorities to make their overall implementation, taking into account national, regional and local requirements, as well as existing public, private and commercial facilities.' Infrastructure investment and critical consideration of civic investment in sports facilities will continue to be important (Scherer & Sam, 2008). To achieve the differentiation of the national tourist supply, investment has been made in the creation of specialised infrastructures with excellent conditions for the practice of sports for segments of High-Performance Sport.

The existence of High-Performance Sports Centres, with recognised quality, is associated with international travel and stays. The implementation of sports events in national territory attracts participants, but also tourists who are fans of the sport in question. This leads to a flow of people derived from sports tourism. Dwyer et al. (2000, p. 185) consider that the intangible economic impacts are the long-term promotional benefits, such as awareness of the destination and the creation of a positive image. The presence of High-Performance Sports Centres, associated with sports systems of recognised quality, motivates trips and stays of international segments, whether for the implementation of sports internships, aiming at the maintenance and/or improvement of their performances, or for the competition inherent to the participation in sports events. Sports events have been widely used as a strategic tool for the economic development of cities and regions (Jones, 2005; Ritchie et al., 2009; Ziakas & Costa, 2011).

Methodology

This research has as its main objective to understand the importance of sports tourism and High-Performance Centres for the growth and development of

tourism in destinations. To this end, a qualitative methodology was developed, structured in the following stages: (1) A literature review was carried out based on the importance of sports tourism in the development and growth of tourism in destinations and its future implications. The development of the empirical part was based on (2) a characterisation of the High-Performance Sports Centres in Portugal, and (3) a SWOT analysis and a TOWS analysis of this type of product and the existing infrastructures in the Central Region of Portugal. Furthermore (4) six interviews were carried out with the managers of the High-Performance Centres of the Central Region of Portugal.

Analysis of High-Performance Centres in Portugal Geographical Distribution

In Portugal, there are 14 High-Performance Centres, distributed from the North to the South of the country. There are already sixteen sports disciplines in High-Performance within the national High-Performance Centres: Athletics; Badminton; Canoeing; Cycling; Equestrian sports; Fencing; Gymnastics; Judo; Swimming; Modern Pentathlon Rowing; Surfing; Taekwondo; Tennis; Table tennis and Triathlon. Six of the 14 High-Performance Centres in Portugal are located in the Central Region, which shows that the region is committed to developing infrastructures that enable sports to be played at the highest level.

SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis was conducted and is presented in Table 2. The main strengths of the High-Performance Centres in Portugal are the infrastructures and equipment; the variety of the offer, as they cover different sports; and the country's capacity, in terms of hospitality and safety, which allows for attracting various markets. Regarding the weak points, we can highlight: the difficulty in internationalisation of the High-Performance Centres, which is described in several aspects, from communication to the lack of knowledge about them; and the outdated infrastructure. The opportunities are essentially related to the strong reputation of Portugal; the national achievements related to sport; and the growth of sports events and activities

held in Portugal, due to the country's strong capacity to host them. The threats are essentially related to competition from other High-Performance Centres at world level, with more modern infrastructures.

From the perspective of the High-Performance Centres, with the aim to understand the importance they consider to have in the development of the Central Region, several interviews were conducted with some of the directors/managers of High-Performance Centres of the Central Region of Portugal. The questions aimed at understanding the differences between the various High-Performance Centres in the region, but mainly to analyse their role in the development and growth of the territories.

In the Central Region, there seems to have been a positive evolution in terms of attractiveness given its growing prominence. However, there are still several markets where it is necessary to invest in the promotion of the destination. Thus, it is possible to conclude that this destination can still increase its attractiveness in several key-market segments, which will contribute in a positive way to the evolution of the Central Region's image and to the increase of its competitiveness. The capacity for innovation and differentiation of the supply of a tourist destination is crucial, since this differentiation is vital for the attractiveness of a given destination. A tourist destination must be able to innovate and differentiate its tourism products to attract other market segments to the destination and invest in an improvement of its tourism supply through differentiation. It is precisely through the importance of differentiation within the competitiveness of tourist destinations that the relevance of sport as a tourism product is highlighted since, as indicated by Ritchie and Crouch (2003), it can strengthen the tourism industry and increase the competitiveness of tourist destinations.

Discussion of Results

This section will analyse and discuss the questions the issues addressed in the interviews, based on the opinions of the managers of the High-Performance Centres regarding the importance of this type of equipment in attracting visitors, generating income, and increasing the competitiveness of the destinations.

Table 2 SWOT Analysis

<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>
• Infrastructures and equipment of the HPC Portugal Network; • Multidisciplinarity of the joint offer resulting from the herd of the different High-Performance Centres of the HPC Portugal Network; • Complementarity resulting from the modalities offered by the different HPC Network Centres; • Existence of a leading organisation responsible for the joint promotion of all the High-Performance Centres in the HPC Portugal Network; • Geographical location of the HPCs; • Use of maritime and river resources with high added value for water sports; • Safety; • Hospitality; • Accessibility; • Presence of internationally renowned athletes based at the HPC Portugal Network HPCs.	• Financial sustainability of the HPCs; • Low international awareness of the HPCs; • Reduced promotion and advertising of the HPC in external markets; • Lack of adequate marketing strategies to promote the national HPCs in foreign markets; • Little knowledge of foreign markets; • Heterogeneity of the supply of services directed towards High-Performance Sport; • Deteriorated or outdated equipment; • Scarce human resources with the necessary qualifications.
<i>Opportunities</i>	<i>Threats</i>
• Growing notoriety of the Portugal brand; • Portugal as a tourist destination of excellence; • Portugal's cultural links with various nations, namely the CPLP; • Socio-economic stability of the country; • Modern health systems; • Location – gateway to Europe and markets in South America and Africa; • Notoriety of national sport for having won the 2016 European Football Championship; • Possibility of integrating a large number of quality infrastructures and complementary equipment with potential for internationalisation; • Natural heritage of excellence; • Climatic conditions very propitious to the practice of sports; • High number of international sports events held in Portugal; • Availability of various support and/or complementary infrastructures to sports activities, of high quality, namely accommodation, restaurants and various services; • Growth of activities related to the sports economy; • Complementarity of sport with tourism activities.	• International competition from strong and well-positioned markets; • European and global socio-economic instability; • Procedural and bureaucratic barriers to access international markets; • Rapid technological evolution, making national HPC infrastructures and equipment obsolete and outdated; • Difficulty in providing national HPCs with state-of-the-art equipment; • Building of HPCs in other countries, namely in the Mediterranean basin; • Instability in the development of the economy caused by adverse socio-economic conditions.

Importance of the HPCs for the Growth of the Sports Tourism Sector

The sports tourism sector is growing both worldwide and nationally. It is an increasingly visible sector both by the increase in the number of sports practitioners, and by the potential associated with the various aspects of tourism. The HPCs are recognised as fundamental to this growth, 'by providing periods of stay that usually extend beyond one night, [and] by

the need for services associated with these stays in the territories,' argues HPC 1. Allied to the practice of sports, there is also the mass of fans who, most of the time, seek in the regions the necessary services to be able to follow the sports activity. For the regions, this is an opportunity to attract new markets. This vision is also shared by HPC 2, which summarises it 'as the primary focus of attracting athletes and sports fans in general, being able to promote the

territory as a “sports tourism” destination’ throughout the year. In short, and sharing the idea of HPC 3, the quality service offered by HPCS ‘will be a factor of attraction of national and international tourists to the destination.’

The Increase in Demand for the HPC Associated with the Growth in Tourism

Although the growth of tourism boosts the demand for sports and specifically for the HPCS, there are some particularities when analysing the answers of the interviews. The individual characteristics of each HPC allow us to say that there is a growing interest in the use of these infrastructures. This fact, combined with the quality and specificity of the HPCS, allows HPC 2 to state that as it is ‘a facility with characteristics essentially devoted to high performance and, therefore, in full conditions for the practice of high-performance sport, there is currently a great demand from athletes.’ Similarly, it is clear that the level of demand of athletes is increasing and the facilities have to meet their requirements, which, according to HPC 3, is also related to the ‘wannabes (people who pay to have a certain lifestyle)’ that play a major role in the demand for HPCS.

However, HPC 1 has a different and quite interesting perspective, pointing out that the growth in demand for the HPC leads to the growth of tourism, arguing that ‘the growth of internationalisation of the HPC, related to the impulse of the digital connectivity era where the sharing of experiences and access to information are instantaneous, has triggered the demand for tourism in the areas surrounding these Sports Centres.’

Strategies for the Promotion of Sports Tourism, and in Particular the HPC

The need for support from public and private entities for the promotion of the HPCS is at the base of all the strategies suggested by the interviewed HPCS, either by ‘contributing in an organized way to an improvement of the existing supply,’ according to HPC 1, or by ‘responding to several modalities, where the distances between them are reduced, allowing the efficient management of the required technical resources,’

emphasises HPC 2. This lack of diversity of services is pointed out for improvement due to the impact it may have both in economic and social terms. From another point of view, HPC 3 mentions the need to ‘create specific legislation, which allows the regulation of teaching and practice of some modalities.’

Economic Impact of the HPC on the National and Regional Economy

The HPCS have a positive impact on the national and regional economy and, as stated by HPC 1 ‘the fact that most of the HPCS have been implemented in areas other than the large metropolitan centres, has increased their impact on the regions where they are located.’ It is clear that the implementation of events and competitions in these infrastructures allow for increasing ‘the flow of consumers of all kinds of services [...] benefiting local trade, but also generating opportunities for various service providers, individual or collective, which operate or consequently appeared in the region.’ Likewise, and as indicated by HPC 3, these infrastructures are ‘centres of job creation, [and] qualification of employees.’ In short, and referring to HPC 2, ‘with the internationalisation [...] in the national high-performance centres, it is possible to capture national and international internships and international sports events and, ultimately, to capture sports tourism.’

HPC’s Perspective: SWOT Analysis

With the analysis of the interviews, where each HPC responded individually, it is possible to verify that each one can identify its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. However, it is possible to find a similar factor in all of them: the natural features existing in each region where the HPC is located, are for all of them, a strength.

At the same time, they all see the growth in tourism demand as an opportunity, but on the other hand, HPC 3 mentions ‘more supply and with quality [...] is a threat for the HPCS.’ The weakness mentioned by HPC 1, the ‘lack of coordinated interdisciplinarity in decision making regarding the operation and service supply of the HPCS’ is in line with the need for specific legislation, mentioned above.

HPCs' Differentiating Factors

Each High-Performance Centre can clearly identify the factors that differentiate them within the tourism supply, either by their quality infrastructures, by the diversity of disciplines or by the fundamental natural resources for the practice of sports. However, common to all of them is the importance of the international recognition that the HPC has for attracting athletes. With a completely different supply, all the HPCs can identify that the international market brings them great visibility and translates into a tool to promote new markets. At the same time, the diversity of the supply is mentioned by HPC 1, which 'responds to five sports, all with different competitive calendars,' and also by HPC 3, which has 'a clear focus on other water sports, which has allowed [us] to diversify the supply.'

HPCs' Strategies for Constant Demand

A factor influencing demand is seasonality, and from the point of view of the HPCs, it is essential to come up with strategies that allow the infrastructure to operate all year round. The main strategies include promoting international training camps, promoting activities with local clubs, and attracting markets that do not have conditions for sports practice in certain times of the year.

Prospects and Strategies for Growing the Role of the HPC in Tourism

Finally, for the HPCs it is essential to implement some strategies that allow their development for local and regional tourism. These strategies include, according to HPC 1, 'combining stays in the centres with tourist itineraries that allow visitors to get to know the region in cultural, historical, gastronomic, and scenic terms.' There is a greater demand for complementary services to the stay in the HPC, which should also be used by municipalities to promote their tourism products. This promotion should also consider 'the development of promotional material and presence in newspapers and magazines of national and international relevance,' argues HPC 2. As previously mentioned, it would also be essential to invest in legislation capable of making entities cohesive. In the same way, the vision is unanimous that the HPCs should be open

to the local community, monitoring the growth of future high-performance athletes, from school sports onwards, as well as having the support of local entities for a greater diversity of supply. In conclusion, and making reference to HPC 3, 'HPCs should be considered as a partner and a player for municipalities and all local and national agents in the development of strategies for the sector.'

Considering the results obtained from the analysis of the interviews, a TOWS analysis was developed (Table 3), supported by the SWOT analysis, allowing us to construct strategies for the development of sports tourism in destinations.

Tourism seems to reveal itself as one of the sectors that presents a high level of potential in the destination under analysis, being considered a strategic sector in the region and even in the country, which reveals that it is seen as a key industry in territories. It is possible to see that tourism has a positive role in the Central Region in terms of employment and in improving the living conditions of the locals, contributing to increased employment in the region which, consequently, leads to an increase in per capita income and an improvement in the quality of life of the population. It is perceptible that there is already an evolution in this direction with an increase in the level of arrivals and income; however, it can be perceived that the region can further increase its competitiveness at this level, especially regarding tourism expenditure, and should rethink its strategy. Ritchie and Crouch (2003), in their study, address the issue of destination image in key market segments.

In the Central Region, there seems to have been a positive evolution in terms of attractiveness given its growing prominence. However, there are still several markets where it is necessary to invest in the promotion of the destination. Thus, it is possible to conclude that this destination can still increase its attractiveness in several key market segments, which will contribute positively to the evolution of the regions' image and to the increase of its competitiveness.

The ability to innovate and differentiate the supply of a tourist destination is crucial, since this differentiation is vital to the attractiveness of a given destination. A tourist destination must be able to innovate and

Table 3 TOWS Analysis

	<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>
<i>Opportunities</i>	Maxi-maxi strategy • Take advantage of the infrastructure of the HPCS to host sports events of great national impact; • Combine excellent natural conditions with the ability to generate value in water sports, through attraction strategies in these areas; • Taking advantage of the growth in tourism in Portugal, to stimulate the growth of activities related to sports tourism.	Maxi-mini strategy • Associate the HPCS with the Portugal brand, for the international market; • Enhance tourism activities linked to the HPCS, to create better financial sustainability.
<i>Threats</i>	Mini-maxi strategy • Take advantage of the infrastructure capacity, hospitality, safety and accessibility of the HPCS to keep up with international competition; • Benefit from the existence of an organism responsible for the promotion of all the HPCS, to overcome the procedural and bureaucratic barriers to international markets.	Mini-mini strategy • Invest in the promotion and dissemination of the HPC in external markets, through the construction of these in countries in the Mediterranean Basin; • To study knowledge of foreign markets by analysing the international competition of the HPCS; • Promote the financial sustainability of the HPC in order to empower national HPCS with state-of-the-art equipment.

differentiate its tourism products to attract other market segments to the destination and invest in an improvement of its tourism supply through differentiation. It is precisely through the importance of differentiation within the competitiveness of tourist destinations that the relevance of sport as a tourism product is highlighted since, as indicated by Ritchie and Crouch (2003), it could strengthen the tourism industry and increase the competitiveness of tourist destinations.

Main Conclusions

One of the major conclusions of this research shows that sports tourism can be a differentiating product that meets the new needs of the tourist demand that no longer wants only passive holidays, but active ones, seeking to be immersed in differentiated experiences during a trip. It is crucial that the tourism supply has information about the new visitor's profile, adapting its services to meet the tourist needs, namely in the sports supply, something that is already possible to be verified by the tourism supply in the sports area. In this sense, the importance that sports tourism has for the

tourism sector and for the competitiveness of tourist destinations is visible.

Thus, the supply of sports tourism has, in fact, been growing in the Central Region, which already has a specific supply of sports activities, with sport being seen as an important element in the region's tourism supply. However, it is important to focus on the organisation, development, and promotion of sports tourism and to increase the number of sports experiences and activities in the region, since although there is a sport offer in the Central Region, the number of sports experiences or activities offered is reduced. It is also relevant that the destination seeks to offer experiences to audiences of any age group, adapting its sports tourism offer and diversifying the types of sports offered to meet the needs of any visitor who seeks sport at the destination, either as the main motivation for visiting, or as a secondary one.

The growth of tourism stimulates the demand for the HPCS, and the development and investment in HPCS can also be a key factor for the growth of tourist destinations. This evidence should also serve as an in-

centive to municipalities to develop a strategy side by side with the High-Performance Centres, which aims not only to collaborate with the financing of infrastructures, but also with their promotion in the national and international market. With different strategies for different audiences, the High-Performance Centres need legislation that stimulates them to comply with fundamental requirements that, later, will be useful for planning new actions.

In an increasingly competitive market, both nationally and internationally, the High-Performance Centres in Portugal must pursue the technological advances of other countries and, for that, it is fundamental that they have the financial capacity. In economic terms, it will be more profitable if all the local entities cooperate in planning strategies for the HPCs. At the same time, with economic growth, these infrastructures will be able to compete with international markets by investing in high quality materials and innovation. Considering the growth of the sports sector, it becomes preponderant that Portugal, and more specifically the Central Region, invests in the development of infrastructure and then in hosting events/competitions that promote sport because it is a sector that attracts many participants and spectators.

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