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***Theme 3***

***LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN  
RURAL AREAS:  
THE CASE OF HUNTING TOURISM***

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Historically, hunting is an activity with very relevant expression in many regions in the world, mainly in rural areas. Nowadays, according to the European Federation for Hunting and Conservation Association (European Federation of Associations for Hunting and Conservation – FACE, 2010), in Europe, there are about 7,4 million hunters, of which 6,7 million in the European Union countries (EU-28 ). On average, 1.3% of the EU population practices the hunting activity. Hunting is an activity with high expressivity also in some regions in Portugal. Accordingly to recent data, in 2013, it were issued 132,951 hunting licenses in Portugal. In some regions hunting is an important economic activity with expressive social, economic and environmental impact. The majority of these regions are rural areas where economic growth opportunities are very limited. However, hunting has been seen almost exclusively as a hobby. Recent changes in the national hunting activity have not been accompanied by an appropriate strategy, while aspects such as the sustainability or the respective economic impact have been neglected. In our view, the potential of this activity for economic development of rural areas should be framed within the context of Hunting Tourism, and strategies should be implemented in order to develop and potentiate this

tourism product in various regions of Portugal. Local authorities may have a word to say on this development. In this study we address this issue in specific.

Hunting tourism can be defined as leisure travel undertaken for the purpose of hunting game animals in a given region or country different from the usual territory of the hunter (Trauer, 2006; Nygard & Uthardt, 2011; Komppula & Suni, 2013). Several studies clearly demonstrate that practitioners of hunting tourism contribute greatly to the local economy taking in count the scale and diversity of consumption made in the exercise of this activity and due the multiplier effect associated with these consumptions (e.g., Garrido, 2012; PACEC, 2014; Sharp & Wollscheid, 2009). These effects are even more relevant because normally they occur in depressed rural areas. Effectively, hunting should be seen as an activity that, in conjunction with other endogenous factors of a region, can help to blur national asymmetries and contribute to regional development. Given this reality, it is critical to invest in a strategy that contributes to the development of hunting tourism based on principles of economic, social and environmental sustainability. Local authorities should take part in this strategy, since they play a very significant action with regard to the development of economic activities that contribute to the sustainable development of the territories. The activities, which can take various forms such as the promotion of initiatives involving the private and public sectors, must be undertaken within a holistic approach to the development of the respective geographical area (Kilipiris, 2002, Ritchie, 2002). The role of local authorities for the development of tourism is a theme widely addressed in the tourism literature. Notwithstanding, to our knowledge, it has not been explored in the context of hunting tourism.

This article contributes to overcome this gap in the literature. Doing so, it explores various dynamics between local authorities and hunting activity, aiming to identify possible forms of intervention by local authorities in the creation, development and promotion of this touristic product. The study develops upon the case of Alentejo and Ribatejo in particular, where the hunting activity is particularly relevant. Indeed, recent data for 2013 reveals a total of 4,701 zones for hunting (Zonas de Caça- ZC) in Portugal, and about 57% of them are located in Alentejo and Ribatejo. One must highlight that 1,240 of ZC are areas for touristic hunting (Zonas de Caça Turística- ZCT), and 84% of these are located in Alentejo and Ribatejo Region. It is estimated that about 90,000 hunters practice the hunting activity in Alentejo e Ribatejo. This territory offers very good conditions for the activity and presents good potential for its development in the future. In spite of the relevance of hunting, this activity has

not been seen as a crucial economic activity for the development of this region. There are very few academic studies addressing hunting tourism in Portugal from an economic, social or managerial point of view. Indeed, in Portugal in general, hunting is not an activity very well perceived by academics, neither by politicians nor by the population in general. Against this background, recently, a number of regional authorities and municipalities have been calling attention for the need to put in place strategies to integrate tourism hunting on local development strategies.

In this study we followed a qualitative approach, applied to a case study, allowing to explore and study the issue in detail (Yin, 1989). Data were collected through a questionnaire survey with open questions, developed by the research team for the purpose. The questionnaire was sent by email to 58 municipalities of Alentejo and Ribatejo Region. Through the questionnaire we obtained data of qualitative nature, more precisely, the perspective of local authorities about local supply and demand for hunting, the relevance of hunting tourism for local development, the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the development of this tourism product in the municipality, which actions have been taken and which actions can be implemented in the future by the municipality. Data were analysed using content analysis.

Our results reveal several intra-regional disparities with regard to the interest and role of local authorities in boosting hunting tourism in the Alentejo and Ribatejo. The results also show that the development of hunting tourism in the territory under study needs a greater coordination between private and public agents in order to maximize the social and economic benefits of this tourism product, mainly for depressed rural areas, and to minimize the negative impacts of this kind of consumption of rural areas. In the paper we open up many opportunities for intervention in a context that has been clearly overlooked.

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