EXAMINING TOURISM STAKEHOLDER NETWORKS AND RELATIONSHIP QUALITY: THE SPECIFIC CASE OF PENEDA GERÊS NATIONAL PARK (PNPG)

ANÁLISE DAS REDES DE *STAKEHOLDERS* E QUALIDADE DE RELACIONAMENTO EM TURISMO: O CASO DO PARQUE NACIONAL PENEDA GERÊS

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ABSTRACT/RESUMO

This paper draws insights from three key strategic management theories: the stakeholder theory, the network theory and the relationship quality theory. It examines how viable tourism policies could best be developed in PGNP, considering the stakeholder networks related to tourism, specifically by considering the relationship quality (trust, commitment and cooperation). Under this view it addresses the structure, nature and composition of ties among PNPG stakeholders using social network analysis (SNA) methodology, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques.

Additionally, the study categorizes stakeholders according to the "stakeholder salience" model, illustrates the relationship quality among the network and stakeholder's positioning in a complex structure of relationships informing about interactions, providing possible directions to minimize potential constraints in networks.

Keywords: Actors, Networks, Relationships, Stakeholders, Tourism

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Este artigo reúne contributos de três importantes teorias no âmbito da gestão estratégica, a saber: a teoria dos *stakeholders,* a teoria de redes e a teoria da qualidade do relacionamento. Pretende examinar como podem ser desenvolvidas políticas de turismo viáveis no PNPG considerando as redes de atores ligados ao turismo, analisando especificamente a qualidade do relacionamento (confiança, compromisso e cooperação). Tendo em conta esta perspetiva, este artigo analisa a estrutura, a natureza e a composição das interações entre os *stakeholders* do PNPG com recurso à metodologia de redes sociais, combinando técnicas qualitativas e quantitativas.

Acresce ainda que o estudo classifica os *stakeholders* de acordo com o modelo de "saliência dos *stakeholders*", ilustrando a qualidade do relacionamento entre *stakeholders*, o seu posicionamento numa estrutura complexa de relacionamentos, informando sobre as interações ocorridas e fornecendo possíveis orientações para minimizar eventuais restrições inerentes às redes sociais.

Palavras-chave: Atores, Redes, Relacionamentos, *Stakeholders*, Turismo

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1. INTRODUCTION

This article arose in the context of a research that explores the importance of interorganizational networks and the importance of cooperation among different stakeholders. One way to gain a thorough understanding of stakeholder theory is to link this theory with social network analysis and relationship quality (Rowley, 1997).

The last two decades have seen an increasing number of studies on networking, whose approach underlines the importance of social relationships and structural patterns of behavior rather than focusing upon the attributes and actions of single individuals and organisations (Scott *et al*., 2008). Specifically, networks enable individuals and organizations to search for, obtain, and share resources and engage in cooperative actions for mutual benefit (Saxena, 2005).

The study, therefore, draws insights from three key management theories: the stakeholder theory, the network theory and the relationship quality theory. Specifically, the research questions that the study aims to address are: 1) How are the tourism stakeholder networks related to tourism in the PNPG composed (quantitatively and qualitatively)? 2) What has been the association between the level of trust, commitment and cooperation among stakeholders, regarding PNPG tourism in the last five years and what will be in the next five years?

In order to achieve this aim, the patterns of relationships among the major PNPG tourism stakeholders are analyzed and classified according to their goals and their ability to influence each other when involved in tourism projects for the region, particularly concerning its power, urgency and legitimacy (Mitchell, *et al.,* 1997). In order to address the first research question, social network analysis was used, which is a well-developed set of techniques to study social interaction among different actors. This technique presents some indicators appropriate for analysing the patterns of interactions of the PNPG network. Second, the study analyzes the quality of interactions among different stakeholders in order to understand their impact on tourism activities, promoting the PNPG tourism policies more effectively.

This study also aims to demonstrate that SNA is a relevant tool for investigating network characteristics of a specific region, which is characterized by its natural beauty and demand for tourism. The foundation of the PNPG aimed at creating and planning a system that values human activities and nature conservation from a long-term perspective. It integrates the biogenetic reserves of the Council of Europe with the "Forest of Palheiros – Albergaria". However, it has not been easy to manage due to the degree of complexity of different interests among various stakeholders because two countries (Portugal and Spain) are involved in its social, cultural and economic development and promotion.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: we review the major theories of study, namely: the stakeholder theory, the network theory and the relationship quality and its integration. After this, we present the study methodology, focusing on the data collection procedure. Subsequently, the findings of this study are discussed. Finally, the conclusions, implications, limitations and future research directions are presented.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. STAKEHOLDER THEORY

The publication of Freeman's work, in 1984, is the cornerstone for the development of stakeholder theory which would be further used in management, marketing and, more recently, in tourism (Lewis, 2006). The concept of stakeholder varies over time and from author to author. To Freeman (1984), stakeholders, in an organizational and management context, are any groups or individuals who can affect or are affected by the achievement of organizational goals. The concept is underpinned by the idea of two types of stakeholders: strategic and moral. Zsolnai (2006) proposes a reinterpretation of the concept of stakeholder, stating that not all stakeholders are morally valid and only those who are should be considered. In the same line, Frooman (1999) refers to whom controls critical resources to the survival of organizations. Main literature points to the importance of examining the interests and capacity of influence on the organization. The definition of stakeholder can be presented as: (i) broad (Freeman, 1984; Caroll, 1993) or (ii) restricted (Clarkson, 1995 – stakeholders are risk carriers).

Over the past 30 years, stakeholder theory has been used in multiple contexts, namely: assessment of performance (Keeley, 1978), development of competitive advantages (Slatter, 1980) and development of the company mission (Pearce, 1982). In terms of planning and management in tourism, emphasis should be given to the role and the importance of a vast number of studies which used stakeholder theory as a management tool for business ethics with longitudinal analysis of stakeholders' attitudes (see for instance Sautter and Leisen, 1999; Yuksel *et al.*,1999; Robson and Robson, 1996; Timur, 2005; Sautter and Leisen, 1999; Ioannides, 2001) ethics in tourism marketing (Sautter and Leisen, 1999; Yuksel *et al*., 1999; Getz and Jamal, 1994; Robson and Robson, 1996), identification of stakeholders and perceptions related to sustainable tourism (Timur, 2005; Sheehan and Ritchie, 1997), analysis of the attitudes of stakeholders (Ioannides, 2001) and development of a tourism plan (Pforr, 2002).

Mitchell *et al.* (1997) conducted a review of stakeholder theory proposed first by Freeman (1984) and identified both power (also emphasized by Frooman, 1999) and legitimacy as the core attributes of a stakeholder's typology. Urgency was also added, and therefore the model of stakeholder salience was proposed.

This article seeks to integrate these contributions regarding the identification of relevant stakeholders under the criteria of power, legitimacy and urgency suggested by Mitchell *et al.* (1997) seeking to classify them according to its "stakeholder salience" model.

Over time, the stakeholder theory has evolved into a strategic vision and with the contributions to the development of stakeholder theory given by Freeman (1984), Clarkson (1995), Mitchell *et al.* (1997) and Rowley (1997) it became a new management model. The stakeholder theory becomes broad and permeable enough crossing other theoretical fields such as social network analysis and relationship marketing.

2.2. SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS

Social Network Analysis (SNA) has its origin in three research streams: (i) the sociometric perspective (that used and developed the graph theory), (ii) the Harvard perspective which pioneered the use of inter-relational models and cliques and which, after 1970, developed the algebric models and (iii) the anthropologist perspective of the Manchester School, which focused on the analysis of structural relations of power/conflict (Scott, 2000). A later work by Scott *et al.* (2008) categorised the evolution of networks in two schools: one based on mathematics and another based on the study of social sciences, both with relevance in the mid XX century.

From a marketing and strategy perspective, SNA has been increasingly applied in the analysis of distribution channels in marketing (Iacobucci and Hopkins, 1992), in understanding consumer behavior (Rowley, 1997, Wasserman and Faust, 1994), in word-of-mouth communication (Duhan *et al*., 1997) and in relationship marketing (Iacobucci and Ostrom, 1996).

In line with Morrison *et al.* (2004), some of the success factors associated with tourism networks relate to the establishment of a culture of trust, resource sharing and interconnection between the community network members.

The social network analysis interfaces with the analysis of destinations since they represent systems of relationships that influence the behavior and stakeholder's opportunities in a given destination. The stakeholder theory has been applied in tourism, for example, to understand the collaboration on the development of local tourism policies (Easterling, 2005).

2.3. RELATIONSHIP MARKETING

For some authors relationship marketing is understood as the set of marketing activities aimed at the establishment, development, maintenance and extinction of relational exchanges (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Eiriz and Wilson, 1999).

Other authors view relationship marketing as an area centered on the development of ongoing relationships with customers involving a family of complementary products and services (Shani and Chalasani, 1992). Basically, its main focus is based on the creation of links with each customer providing mutual benefits. Also, Shirshendu *et al.* (2009) defines the goal of relationship marketing as the achievement of long-term relationships with positive effects on businesses with an optimum use of resources through constant interaction, network connections and cooperation among all members (employees, customers, suppliers and business partners) associated with a high degree of commitment that can generate greater value for all stakeholders in a trusted environment.

Healy *et al.* (2001), for their part, showed that the theoretical development of relationship marketing must take into account both the context of the relationship and the number of participants in the exchange process. So, they analyze relationship marketing under three perspectives: First, the buyer-seller relationships, which ignore the role of other elements in the distribution channel and shareholders (Berry, 1983; Grönroos, 1994); Second, the Neo- relationship marketing perspective that includes all marketing activities directed at establishing, developing and maintaining successful relational exchanges. It also includes research in the area of consumer behaviour, marketing research methods and marketing communications (Christopher *et al.*, 1991, Morgan and Hunt, 1994); Third, the network view which embraces a more complex structure of networks with three or more actors.

A broad agreement exists about different schools of thought that have emerged within relationship marketing research. For instance, according to Grönroos and Strandvik (1997), it is not possible to understand this concept without taking into account the following schools of thought: 1) the Nordic school of service management which is mainly characterized by focusing attention on service management as the key aspect in building and maintaining relationships (Egan, 2003); 2) the network perspective that is mainly directed at industrial marketing and business-to-business marketing; 3) the Anglo-Australian perspective, which combines concepts such as quality, customer service and marketing; 4) The alliances and strategic partnership perspective, which considers the relevance of strategic alliances among business partners and, finally, 5) Research on the nature of relationship marketing itself.

Coote (1994) also identified three major approaches to relationship marketing, namely: 1) the Nordic perspective which covers the theory of interactive networks of industrial marketing and innovation in services marketing concepts, which are central to building and maintaining long-term relationships (Grönroos, 1994). This school advocates a change in the focus of the central areas in marketing and management of the process of interaction; 2) the North American perspective which is based primarily on transactional marketing, where marketing communication assumes a central role. This perspective emphasizes the relationship between buyer and seller in the context of the organizational environment (Berry, 1983; Levitt, 1983; Perrien *et al.*, 1993); 3) the Anglo-Australian perspective which is mainly based on the work of Christopher *et al.* (1991) and emphasizes the management of stakeholder relations. These authors associate quality and relationship marketing in the sense that quality contributes to the loyalty of customers. Marketing is concerned with the management of relationships between an organization and its

customers with quality and customer service as a key linking element to this relationship.

It is also relevant to notice that several authors use the notion of relationship quality within the framework of relationship marketing (Crosby *et al.*, 1990; Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2002; Athanasopoulou, 2008; Ashnai *et al.*, 2009). Specifically this construct, is a meta-construct that is composed of several components reflecting the nature of relationships between organizations and customers (Ashnai *et al.*, 2009). Among the most important relationship quality dimensions reported in the literature are: Trust (Crosby *et al*.,1990; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Leuthesser, 1997; Wilson and Vlosky, 1997; Doney and Cannon, 1997; Iacobucci and Hibbard, 1999; Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Naude and Buttle, 2000; Wong and Sohal, 2002; Woo and Cha, 2002; Ramayah and Leen, 2003; Búrca *et al*., 2004; Huang and Chiu, 2006; Athanasopoulou, 2009; Ashnai *et al*., 2009); Commitment (Crosby *et al*.,1990; Anderson and Weitz, 1992; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Wilson and Vlosky, 1997; Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Iacobucci and Hibbard, 1999; Wong and Sohal, 2002; Búrca *et al*., 2004; Athanasopoulou, 2009; Ashnai *et al*., 2009); and Cooperation (Naude and Buttle, 2000; Búrca *et al*., 2004; Woo and Ennew, 2004).

Gordon (1998) states that managing services involves building and maintaining relationships, and relationship marketing is based on aspects such as the construction of networks and the establishment of strategic alliances and partnerships. Lewin and Johnston (1997) conducted a case study on relationship marketing involving six major constructs: relational dependence, trust, commitment, communication, cooperation and fairness. The authors use these same variables to develop profiles of successful partnerships.

3. INTEGRATING STAKEHOLDER, NETWORKS AND RELATIONSHIP QUALITY IN TOURISM

In the tourism literature, the application of SNA brings clear benefits related to the analysis of tourism destinations and organizations because the tourism sector naturally operates in a network, where the organizations cooperate but also compete dynamically (Scott *et al*. 2008). Therefore, it is generally accepted that networks have strong applicability in the tourism sector because they are frequently related to a tourism product and endeavours regarding cooperation should focus on the promotion and sale of the destination (Valdez, 2009).

The literature has given rise to a strong debate between the paradigm of interorganizational networks (Borgatti and Foster, 2003; Podolny and Page, 1998) and research networks, which emphasize traditional qualitative methods. Webster and Morrison (2004) emphasised the importance of social network analysis as a tool to understand Word-of-Mouth communications, relationship marketing and the adoption of new products and services.

The first studies on tourist destination networks were mainly based on qualitative methodologies with strong emphasis on the description of networks and identification of groups. However, other studies have adopted other techniques (more quantitative) where the emphasis shifts from attribute data to the collection of relational data based on patterns of social relationships established between organizations (Timur, 2005). For Timur (2005) it is important to consider the need to integrate topics related to tourism and relational network analysis in order to understand the nature of flows between different stakeholders operating in this particular field.

In the context of tourism, networks enable mapping relations and interactions by analyzing their structure and pattern. At a broader level, tourism involves the development of formal and informal collaboration, partnerships and interorganizational networks (Scott *et al*., 2008), so it is relevant to assess the quality of these relationships. In most cases interorganizational networks are exemplified in destinations which can be viewed as loosely articulated groups of independent suppliers linked together to deliver the overall service or product (Scott et al., 2008).

Pavlovich (2003) refers to the importance of considering relational issues in tourism, particularly social network analysis which can be used to understand the interactions between stakeholders within tourism. Other authors like Blackshaw and Long (1998) argue for the application of social network analysis in the context of leisure and recreation. Cobb (1988), in turn, introduced network analysis into tourism applying this technique to identify patterns of communication between tourism organizations. Money (2000) applied the social network analysis to explain the role of the "mouth-to-mouth" on the buying behavior in business corporate travel, while Pavlovich (2001, 2003) focused on relational bonds in tourist destinations.

In the area of tourism it is worthwhile emphasising the work of Saxena (2005) who applied to the principles of relationship marketing and networks approach to determine the nature of exchange structure in three case study areas. He analyzed different attitudes of actors towards partnership building and their understanding of cross-sector networks.

4. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

From a methodological stance, a review of the relevant literature in tourism reveals that the most commonly used methodology in the context of network analysis of tourism (Timur, 2005; Timur and Getz, 2008; Leung *et al*., 2012; Flecha *et al*., 2012) is the case study. This can be partly explained by the fact that it generates relevant and rich information about social dynamics and operations developed over time (Coviello, 2005). However, despite its relevance, the number and diversity of relevant actors makes this methodological approach difficult to implement. Additionally, there is a need for further studies involving multiple cases and analysis of crossover networks. Relevant actors in this study mean those informants that are likely to be strongly involved in the strategic decisions of their organizations,

particularly related to rural tourism decisions. To ensure that the respondents were sufficiently knowledgeable to provide the required information accurately, we followed a snowballing sample. Networks are always embedded in specific locations, although the extent of their geographical reach and complexity may vary. Given the reality under analysis, this research adopts a three-stage research design.

Stage one: a list of major stakeholders involved in the PNPG tourism activities was identified and developed based not only on secondary data (blogs, websites, brochures, books, marketing data, etc.) but also on interviews to residents, tourism companies, public and private organizations. This is in line with Cooper *et al.* (2009), who observed that identification of the relevant class of stakeholders is important for destination managers to achieve their organizational objectives. Therefore, this preliminary analysis enabled us to produce an initial list of relevant stakeholders (based on Mitchell *et al*., 1997, "*Stakeholder Salience*" model) involved in Peneda-Gerês National Park rural tourism and local destination.

Stage two: Exploratory field work based on exploratory interviews (recorded, transcribed and analyzed) was undertaken in order to identify and confirm key players in the Peneda-Gerês National Park rural tourism. This option was justified by the need to define the network boundaries in order to facilitate the analysis of relationships within the network of stakeholders involved in implementing tourist activities. This qualitative technique is well known in the literature as it makes possible to define network boundaries, particularly when faced with a large number of actors. At this stage, a list of stakeholders was produced, assessed and the different stakeholders were ranked based on Mitchell *et al*. (1997) theory and further revised by Driscoll and Starik (2004). To a better understanding, Mitchell *et al.* (1997) proposed a model for identification of relevant stakeholders ("stakeholder salience"), which considers that stakeholders that have three main attributes (power, legitimacy and urgency) are more relevant than others. Based on these three main criteria Mitchell *et al.* (1997) categorise stakeholders in six categories, namely:

1. Dormant stakeholders – have power but, not having a legitimate relationship or an urgent complaint, their power becomes useless;
2. Discretionary stakeholders – have a legitimate relationship but no urgent complaints or power, so do not influence the organization;
3. Demanding stakeholders – have power and legitimacy, so their influence on the organization is assured;
4. Dangerous stakeholders – have urgency and power, so they tend to be coercive and even potentially violent;
5. Dependent stakeholders – have urgency and legitimacy but lack of power, so soon become dependent on others to carry out their intentions;
6. Final stakeholders – have power, legitimacy and urgency, so become priority and relevant stakeholders.

The results allowed us to validate the initial list of stakeholders considered for the purposes of the study. The major criteria used for selecting the major key players were: power, legitimacy, urgency and proximity (see Mitchell *et al.*, 1997). Additionally, a first in-depth interview was developed with ADERE-PG a key public entity actor that is responsible for managing Peneda-Gerês National Park marketing activities.

Stage three: This involved the personal application of the questionnaire administered to forty six relevant stakeholders in the Peneda-Gerês National Park. This stage enabled the collection of relevant information about the structure of relationships in the Peneda-Gerês National Park tourism network, the type and nature of relationships among actors, and the major responsible for implementing rural tourism projects. The questionnaire was pre-tested with three academics and with one of the main representatives of the ADERE-PG. Based on these initial interviews forty six key stakeholders were identified and each organization was interviewed in person with the interviews taking around forty minutes.

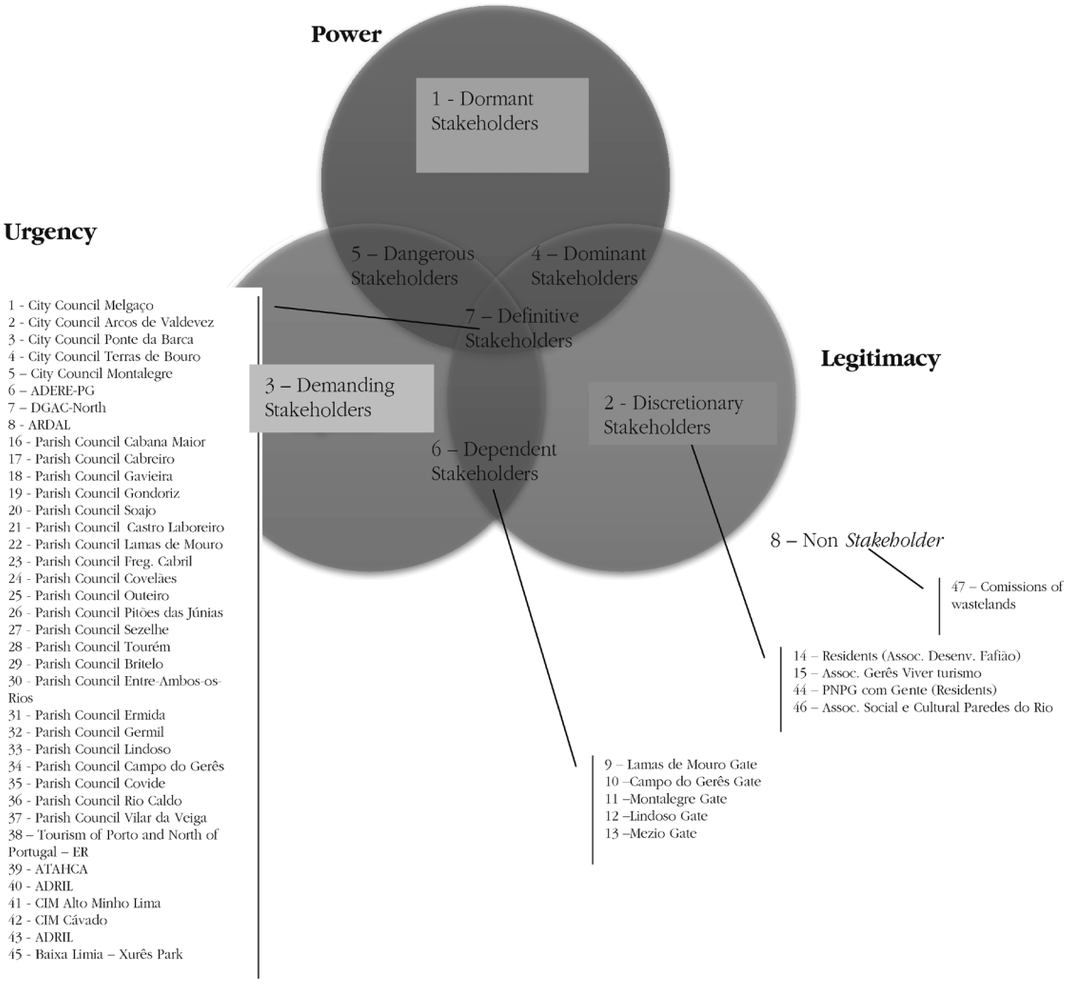
Concerning the data collection procedure, to perform a SNA it usually requires collection of data from all members of a population, or the use of representative samples of the population. For the present study, although a convenience sample was adopted, the sampling frame includes forty six (n = 46) key stakeholders operating in the specific region known as Peneda-Gerês National Park. While the study may be seen to use a small sample, the respondents were perceived as the key stakeholders in the region. The unit of analysis was considered the interactions between these key stakeholders. It should be noted that this study adopted the methodologies inherent to SNA, and measures of network analysis such as network size, symmetry, density, intensity and centrality (see for instance Timur, 2005; Timur and Getz, 2008; Leung *et al.*, 2012).

While the qualitative stage of this study allowed the identification of relevant stakeholders (involved in the decisions of PNPG tourism), the quantitative stage allowed both the identification of different relationships (interactions) among different stakeholders and the quality of their relationships, particularly considering Trust, Commitment and Cooperation. To analyze the data collected (between August 2011 and March 2012) PASW 18.0 and UCINET 6.0 were used.

5. STUDY FINDINGS AND RESULTS

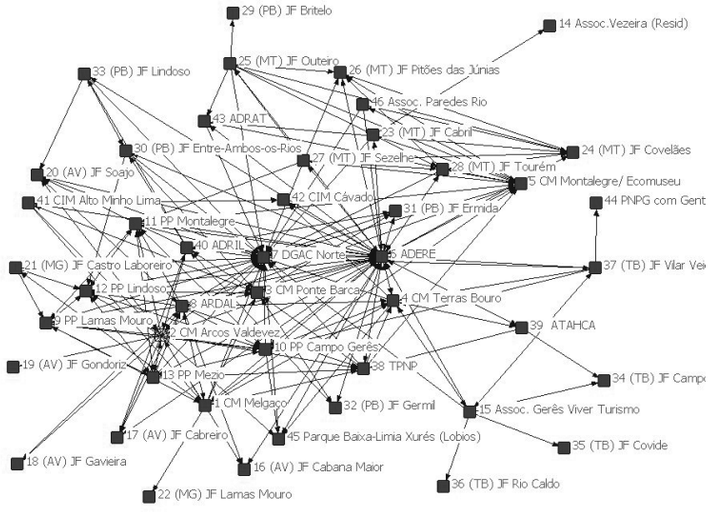
Concerning the first objective established, this study follows Frooman's (1999) proposals, which made it possible to identify and classify different stakeholders under the model of "Stakeholder Salience" proposed by Mitchell *et al*. (1997). Therefore, for the purpose of this study three categories were identified (Figure 1): Discretionary stakeholders (have legitimacy but have no power, and there is no urgency in meeting their aims); Dependent stakeholders (have legitimacy and urgency but depend on others to support them); and Final stakeholders (represent a group that has power, legitimacy and urgency and were named as priority stakeholders).

FIGURE 1. RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED IN THE PNPG TOURISM PROJECTS



Source: Author (2012).

FIGURE 2. GLOBAL RELATIONSHIP MATRIX



Source: Author (2012).

As can be seen in Figure 1, 37 definitive stakeholders were identified. It is important to refer that among these, DGAC-North was the one that showed most power, legitimacy and urgency, followed by the five city councils and lastly by ADERE-PG. From this data, it was possible to confirm what Pesqueux and Damak-Ayadi (2005) argued that, within the stakeholder framework, the organization has relationships with various groups that affect, or are affected by their decisions. The most relevant stakeholders control those resources which are critical to the organizations (Frooman, 1999). Considering the network structure identified, Figure 2 presents a graph illustrating of the global relationships among major stakeholders (in the past 12 months) involved in tourism projects in the PNPG.

The main network indicators are presented in Table 1:

TABLE 1. NETWORK INDICATORS

Number of *Stakeholders*	46	*Degree*	5,1
Potential Links	2.070	Reciprocity	51,2%
Existing Links	263	Average distance	2,17
Density	12,7%	Transitivity	37,36%
Centralization (*outdegree*)	61,1%	Clique	15
Centralization (*indegree*)	58,7%	Clusters	5
Clustering	0,483		

Source: Author (2012).

The global network shows the centrality of ADERE-PG and DGAC-North. As central actors, these stakeholders have central access to information and a relevant positioning in the network, such as easy access to other actors, more power and legitimacy. Surprisingly, residents in the PNPG have a marginal positioning within the network.

Consistent with Rowley (1997), who considered both network density and centrality of the actors, this study found that there are two stakeholders identified as "commander" organisations, which are ADERE-PG and DGAC-North. All other stakeholders are assumed as "solitarian" organisations, which are isolated and are under less pressure from other central actors. Regarding tourism projects in PNPG, 19.57% identify ADERE-PG as the main stakeholder and 17.39% identify DGAC-North. The network presents a reciprocity of 51.2%, i.e. from all the links in the network, only 51.2% are bidirectional. Regarding the subgroups 15 cliques were detected and ADERE-PG was present in 14 of these. It is possible to conclude that ADERE-PG is the actor that reveals the highest intermediation (51.9%), followed by the Council of Melgaço (5.1%) and Council of Arcos de Valdevez (4.8%). This helps to explain the first research question proposed in the present study.

With regard to the quality relationship dimensions (Trust, Commitment and Cooperation) and to ensure the homegeneity and internal consistency of sub-scales (Nunnally, 1978) those items which account for each dimension were correlated with their item-to-item total correlation. Those items below a sudden drop-off in the total item correlation (i.e., 0.30) have been eliminated because such items are assumed to lack internal consistency, that is, they do not co-vary or are not consistent with the total score or with other items.

After examining the item to item correlation used to capture each sub-dimension, factor scores representing the sub-dimension of each quality relationship were computed in order to be used in the subsequent analysis.

Given the fact that we are dealing with an ordinal variable we decide to compute Spearman's rho correlation which enables us to find potential associations between different quality relationship sub-dimensions. First, descriptive analyses show that there is a moderate Trust (M = 2.65; SD = 1.6), moderate Commitment (M = 2.71; SD = 1.7) and moderate Cooperation (M = 2.55; SD = 1.55) in relation to major stakeholder (the following scale was used: 0 = Not applicable; 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Agree; 4 = Strongly agree). Second, a Spearman's rho correlation was conducted to examine the correlation between different sub-dimensions. Results show that there is a high correlation between the three sub-dimensions of Quality Relationship, namely between Trust and Commitment ($r = 0.95$; $n = 46$; $p < 0.01$), between Trust and Cooperation ($r = 0.71$; $n = 46$; $p < 0.01$) and between Commitment and Cooperation ($r = 0.71$; $n = 46$; $p < 0.01$).

These results are in line with the study by Morgan and Hunt (1994) who found that Trust has a positive impact on both Commitment and Cooperation. That is, when Trust and Commitment are higher, the Cooperation tends to be more intensive. So, the present study highlights the advantages of creating a solid relationship quality among stakeholders based on Trust, Commitment and Cooperation. Additionally, it is important to mention that while the major elements determining the Trust in the relationship relate to honesty, loyalty, sincerity and high level of integrity, the major elements of commitment are the endurance of the relationship and the effort and time put into the relationship. In turn, the major elements of Cooperation among actors relates to joint tourism projects and joint advertising. From qualitative interviews it was found that Cooperation is most influenced by the following main

stakeholder attributes: technical knowledge, recognition by tourists, quality of service, financial resources and human resources development. The active involvement of residents was shown to be an important factor to reinforce Trust among stakeholders.

To conclude, it should be emphasized that the network concepts are closely related to relationship marketing, as the network structure and position is built upon social interactions and relationships provide trust (Saxena, 2005). In the present study it was found that the players with the highest degree of centrality in the network are also those who have higher index of Trust, Commitment and Cooperation.

ASSOCIATION BETWEEN COOPERATION AND TOURISM ACTIVITIES (IN THE LAST/NEXT FIVE YEARS)

This section attempts to analyze whether Cooperation with the major stakeholders is reflected in a positive or negative association with the evolution of a number of tourism indicators, such as tourism investments, tourism revenue, number of tourists, relationship with locals and preservation of natural environment. This analysis was undertaken in relation to the past five years and also with regard to the next five years.

Concerning the past five years, a positive correlation was found between Cooperation and tourism investments ($r = 0.39$; $n = 46$; $p < 0.01$), Cooperation and tourism revenue ($r = 0.49$; $n = 46$; $p < 0.01$) and Cooperation and the number of tourists ($r = 0.32$; $n = 46$; $p < 0.01$).

These results give an idea of the importance of Cooperation between the different stakeholders involved in the PNPG tourism projects as it is an essential concern for the development and management of the PNPG tourism sector. It is also an important way for local people in positions of responsibility to reach out and work closely with the several actors involved, particularly regarding the development of a common communication strategy and joint marketing projects. In order to boost tourism investments, tourism revenue and the number of tourists, tourism should be viewed as the result of collaborative actions among key stakeholders.

With regard to the next five years, results showed a positive correlation between Cooperation and Tourism investments ($r = 0.35$; $n = 46$; $p < 0.01$) and Cooperation and tourism revenue ($r = 0.37$; $n = 46$; $p < 0.01$). Similarly, for a future scenario of tourism in the PNPG, Cooperation is seen as an important factor and is positively associated with tourism investments and tourism revenue. An increase in Cooperation between the stakeholders involved, sharing tourism benefits, costs and risks, as well as shared tourism projects will bring economical and financial benefits for the PNPG.

In this context it is important to recognise that Cooperation needs to involve all the stakeholders and tourism organizations ensuring relationship quality, as the foundation of future tourism in the PNPG, and respect for cultural values while bridging this with the interests of residents' groups and the preservation of the natural heritage.

The aforementioned analysis helps to clarify research question two which attempts to analyse the association between the level of Trust, Commitment and Cooperation among stakeholders, regarding PNPG tourism in last/next five years. A possible explanation for these results is the fact that different stakeholders value continued cooperation in order to obtain higher outcomes in tourism investments and revenue. In other words, cooperation is a necessary condition for generating potential benefits not only in the past but also in the future.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study has attempted to integrate some of the concepts of social networks, stakeholders and relationship marketing to gain an understanding of how different actors interact with each other in order to promote the development of the Peneda-Gerês National Park tourism activities.

In terms of conclusions, this study found that the small size of organizations involved in Peneda-Gerês National Park tourism activities and the need to build a common strategy specific to that region is possible if we understand who the major stakeholders operating in the region are. Here, we include public and private organizations, the local community, non-profit organizations and residents. Second, it is important to identify how they interact with each other. This was possible by applying SNA analysis which provides indicators related to measuring node links and illustrates the structural patterns among different stakeholders. Ultimately, as it deals with developments that have been taking place recently in the field of tourism, SNA is a tool which cannot be ignored by those who, either from a theoretical or a practical point of view, wish to keep up-to-date in the context of tourism marketing. Third, the understanding of the association between Trust, Commitment and Cooperation among stakeholders regarding the PNG tourism policies in the last five years, and in the coming five years is also an important topic under analysis.

This research applied to the PNPG tourism network made it possible to map the network of organizational actors that are responsible for tourism projects in the region. The identification of differences in terms of centrality in the stakeholder network helps organizations to find the balance between relationships with their partners, paying attention to the principles of dialogue and transparency, seeking mutual benefits. The research also revealed interesting results that are in line with the existing literature, including the advantages of collaboration between stakeholders (for example regarding the exchange of resources). The challenge of operating in a network requires organizations to expand their relationships, increasing the importance of management stakeholders (according to their categorization).

The network of stakeholders involved in tourism projects in PNPG reveals 263 links and has a density of 12.7%. Furthermore, the centrality of ADERE-PG in this network is highlighted, and this is important as it integrates different

municipalities and interests and creates articulation with DGAC-North (managers of the national park).

This study contributes to the advancement of knowledge in the field of tourism by integrating the stakeholder theory with the social network theory and by examining the quality of those relationships.

Furthermore, the study tested the Mitchel *et al*. (1997) work, and presents an integrated perspective considering the type of stakeholders involved, their interests and goals and their relationship quality. Finally, the differences among stakeholders can be traced by identifying opportunities and constraints resulting from the actors' structural positioning in the network.

This study went a step further by examining the quality relationship between different actors and the key stakeholders as well as analysing the association of different quality relationship dimensions with several tourism indicators or outcomes. With regard to the past five years, a positive correlation was found between Cooperation and Tourism investments, Cooperation and tourism revenue and number of tourists. Concerning the next five years, results showed a positive correlation between Cooperation and Tourism investments and Cooperation and tourism revenue.

7. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The study has some limitations regarding cost and time constraints. Taking into account that this study is linked to the provision of tourism services, the characteristics that make services unique and different may also constitute an impediment in analysing different relationships. Another limitation relates to the subjective nature of data. For instance, the different flows between stakeholders were measured based on perceptions of respondents.

Another limitation relates to the use of a convenience sample. Interpretation of these findings and their generalization is not possible. However, this study demonstrates the utility of SNA in understanding the major stakeholder interactions and the quality of their relationships. Specifically, in line with other studies, the visualization of the interactions and the structural patterns of behaviour make this technique particularly useful.

Finally, future research could be developed by examining the collaborative outcomes and mainly how these evolve from a longitudinal perspective. It is generally recognized that networks are dynamic with interactions among stakeholders changing as they draw together and interact with the external environment.

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