GLOBAL INSTO MEETING

THE AZORES SUSTAINABLE TOURISM OBSERVATORY (OTA)

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(President and CEO)

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Question 1. Before/during and after the establishment of the Observatory: which participatory processes took place that led to its establishment, definition of its objectives, decisions on priorities and work plan?

Answer to Question 1

OTA’s Background

On June 30, 2000, the Lisbon Tourism Sector Council, created the “Tourism Observatory”, which ended on August 31, 2003.

Its extinction gave rise to several “Tourist Observation Units” in different regions of Portugal, including the Autonomous Region of the Azores, where its “Azores Tourist Observation Unit” was headquartered at the University of the Azores.

A participatory process originated a data sharing and exchange of information process among the various “Tourist Observation Units”, in order to contribute to a better monitoring and analysis of tourist activity in their territories.

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Answer to Question 1 - OTA’s Background - (conclusion)

- Preparation of the Socialist Party's electoral program for the 2004 regional legislative elections for the IX Azores Regional Government;

- Proposal to create an “Azores Tourism Observatory”, inspired by the model of the extinct Lisbon-based “Tourism Observatory” (DR 149, I Series-B, of 30 June 2000). This proposal was discussed within the scope of a broad participatory process promoted by the tourism program coordinator, and including face-to-face meetings with representatives of the regional tourism sector and with the leaders of the socialist party.

- Victory of the socialist party in the 2004 elections, on October 26, 2004;

The “Azores Tourism Observatory” (OTA) was created, according to the Official Journal of December 29, 2006.
Question 1.2. Who were/are the stakeholders that were consulted? Who identified them? How they were identified?

Answer to Question 1.2 –
By suggestion of the Regional Secretary of the Economy an invitation to become OTA’s founding members was sent to three different local entities, namely: The University of the Azores (UAC), the Azores Tourism Promotion Agency (ATA), as well as the Azores Regional Statistics Service (SREA), the latter having declined the invitation.

These stakeholders were identified during meetings with the Secretary of the Economy of the Regional Government of the Azores, entity responsible for the tourism sector.

These founding members held regular meetings aimed at defining the activities to be covered by the Azores Tourism Observatory in broad terms, namely:

Evaluate the available statistical information;
Monitor the regional tourism activity;
Organize and maintain an information system for tourism;
Disseminate information about the tourism activities;
Provide statistical and other data;
Organize and participate in conferences, seminars, meetings and debate sessions.

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Answer Question 1.2

OTA’s Background

This was OTA’s contextual reality when there was no Regional Secretariat for Tourism and no regional DMO within the structure of the Regional Government of the Azores.
**Question 1.3** Are they forming a Local Working Group? How does this group work?

**Answer to Question 1.3** – The founding members keep having informal meetings with the Azores Tourism Observatory to define actions to be developed according to their particular interests.

**Question 1.4** How decisions were taken by the local stakeholders and how those were influencing decisions by the authorities?

**Answer to Question 1.4** - The Azores Tourism Observatory (OTA) has produced a wide range of technical and scientific work, useful to decision making by the government’s tourism entities, managers of the Azores tourism destination (DMO).

The Azores Tourism Observatory (OTA) actively participates in the following DMO's management initiatives:

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Answer Question 1

OTA’s Background

• “Monitoring Group on the Sustainability of the Azores Tourist Destination” (GASDTA);

• Forum of the “Azores Tourist Destination Sustainability Booklet” – Forum formed by voluntary public and private tourism organizations which signed the Booklet containing a commitment to the implementation in each organization of the sustainable development goals published by the United Nations and thus, provide a generalized adherence to the goals across the Region’s tourism players.
Answer Question 1
OTA’s Background

Question 2) Collecting data and subsequent analysis should help to take evidence-based decisions? Does this work in the case of the Observatory? Is there a link between establishing the observatory and this process of decision-making processes on the destination level?

Answer to Question 2 - The usefulness of OTA production for public tourism policies was recognized after the creation of a Regional Secretariat for Energy, Environment and Tourism by the Regional Government of the Azores, and a DMO within the Secretariat. In this context, OTA has promoted a growing participatory consultation process with several stakeholders, namely:
- The Azores Tourism Observatory (OTA) has actively participated in several tourism consultative councils.
Answer Question 1
OTA’s Background

- OTA collaborates with the DMO in the process of certifying the Azores destination as a “Sustainable Tourism Destination” by Earthcheck.

- OTA promoted year-round surveys, including the “Satisfaction of Tourists Visiting the Azores”. This survey, incorporating suggestions from multiple partners, including other tourism observatories, is a valuable source of information, available on our website, providing the basis for sound destination promotion strategies and for guiding the actions of the private tourism stakeholders operating in the region.

- In addition, OTA discloses the results of research projects, carried out in partnership either with our founding partner, the University of the Azores, or with foreign universities, as for example Indiana University.

- OTA organized face-to-face international conferences, with publications on scientific journals containing important tourism policy recommendations useful for public and private tourism stakeholders. An example is the “International Meeting of Tourism Observatories”, which took place on Terceira Island in 2012. This initiative will be promoted again once the current pandemic crisis has stabilized.
Question 2.1) Practical examples and Question 2.2) Other aspects.

Answer to Question 2.1 and Question 2.2 – At a regional/national level OTA participated in several Regional and Portuguese national partnerships, all producing important tourism policy recommendations and competitive tourism destination strategies, with the following tourism stakeholders:

• “Azores Smart Specialization Strategy” (RIS3) tourism working group;

• “Sustainable Tourism Observatory of Alentejo” (ASTO) a member of the INSTO network of “Sustainable Tourism Observatories”;

• Partnership with the “Azores Maritime Tourism Operators Association”;

• Partnership with the “Portuguese Association of Hotels, Restaurants and Similar” (AHRESP).

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• “National Group of Tourism Experts”, set up at the invitation of the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) to define the national tourism research agenda on the 20-30 Horizon.

• Partnership with a local consultancy company in a research project financed by the European Union aimed at presenting strategies for the “Smart Tourism Destination of the Municipality of Praia da Vitória”, in Terceira island.

At the international level, OTA established the following international partnerships:
• “European Islands Tourism Observatory” (OTIE);
• “Center of Social Studies of the University of Coimbra” (CES).
• UNWTO INSTO network of “Sustainable Tourism Observatories”;

• “International Association of Universities of Third Age” (AIUTA).

All these partnerships are part of our “Internationalization” strategic action vector, as defined in our Statutes.

Finally, OTA puts all its vast and varied production resulting from a broad participatory process of partnerships on its website, available for public knowledge, leaving it up to each of the regional tourism partners to decide whether to consult it or not, and even more, to use this information to help define sustainable tourism policies and adopt knowledge-based tourism competitive strategies.
Question 2.3) Challenges

Answer Question 2.3 – OTA faces the following main challenges:

• Lack of available and systematically collected data on the performance of the tourism sector, especially concerning energy consumption, water consumption and waste production by tourism firms and entities;

• Difficulties in reactivating the process of personal tourists’ surveys, which was completely suspended since April 2020, due to the COVID 19 pandemic, namely:
  - a) Unavailability of the usual interviewers who gave up the project, due to the risk of contact with many people of various backgrounds;
  - b) Extreme difficulty in hiring new interviewers in this new pandemic context;
Answer to Question 2.3

c) Very low willingness of tourists to be interviewed in person, due to increased fears resulting from the new Covid 19 variants;
d) Low numbers of incoming tourists highly dependent on health measures taken by each country and which are constantly changing;
e) More time spent in compliance with sanitary security bureaucracies and protocols, meaning less time to answer questionnaires.

OTA faces the following major constraints:
- The Azores Tourism Observatory (OTA) has produced extensive and credible independent technical and scientific work, which has sometimes not been properly recognized by government entities, including the public destination managers (DMOS).
- High costs of assembling services and implementing complex projects, such as in the field of "Monitoring the Mobility of Tourists in the Territory";
- Low annual budget.
- Low political recognition.
Question 2.4) **Way forward**

**Answer to Question 2.4 - Prospects for future actions**

Some of the future actions to be developed by the OTA include the following:

- A clear bet on digital tourism projects, integrated in the “Azores Digital Innovation Hub” project.

- Implementation of the project "Sentiment Analysis" - monitoring the tourist’s reviews on various platforms, TripAdvisor, Booking, etc.

- Implementation of a new online residents survey in partnership with the Azores DMO on the “Impact of climate change on the Azorean tourism products”.

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Concluding, OTA will not only continue the ongoing projects, but also embrace new projects in areas that are fundamental to the sustainability of the Azores tourist destination.

OTA wants to strengthen its partnerships with the various tourism stakeholders of the Azores destination by setting up an operational regional tourism consulting board, including the major local tourism players.

Finally OTA will strengthen its partnerships, mainly with other Sustainable Tourism Observatories of the INSTO’s network in Portugal and abroad, under a broad participatory process beneficial to all involved parties.
Thank you for your attention

Questions are welcome!

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