Abstract

With frontiers becoming ever lesser deterrents, with the growth of population inter-relationships and with growing globalization, the existence of an airport in a region is a must. The airport enables the conversion of a territory into a tourist destination, and, thus has a significant local and regional importance, being able to give international visibility to the location.

The Oporto city airport, in Portugal, is a pragmatic example of how a structure of this kind contributed decisively to convert the city and northern Portugal region into one of the best European tourist destinations.

Co-authors: Catarina Moreira, Isabel Reynal, Rui Correia (students, Instituto Politécnico do Porto)

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Introduction

It is intended to know whether an airport is the main infrastructure that enables the local and regional tourism development. So, we are studying the history and characteristics of Oporto airport in order to understand if this example answers our initial research question.

Oporto airport is an important player for the tourism management of the area, operating as a bridge between the origin and host countries. It is essential for the success of tourism in the northern Portugal region, was awarded the prize of best European airport from 2008 till 2011 and in 2016, reached the peak of its capacity with more than 9 million passengers.

Methodology

We analyzed several scientific articles published between 2010 and 2016, about the role of airports in the local and regional tourism development of a region, in order to answer our initial question. For the study, we selected articles related to the study topic: The Oporto airport.

The Oporto Airport

The Oporto airport is known by the name Francisco Sá Carneiro airport, by reference and in homage to the tragic air accident of the former Portuguese prime-minister, Mr. Francisco Sá Carneiro, who died in a trip towards Pedras Rubras area of Oporto district in 1980. The old name of the Oporto airport was Pedras Rubras airport. It is located about 11 km from the center of the Oporto city, in the confluence zone between the Vila do Conde, Maia and Matosinhos councils of Oporto district and was inaugurated on the 3rd of December of 1945 with an initial flight from Lisbon, Portugal.
During its entire history and as a strong space contender, there were a few investments made in it. In 1999, the airport had only capacity for 14 aerial movements per hour and for traffic of about 3 million passengers per annum. Based on this limitation, there was an urgent need to restructure and expand the airport, through the 2000 plan (ANA, 2000). Between 2000 and 2006, the planned investments for the airport were accomplished and its expansion plan was set up at about 247.7 million euro. The main aim of this project was to initially increase the traffic of passengers and also to improve the airport conditions, assuring international connections (Salvador & Fernandes, 2015). The expansion of the runways, machinery, hangars, other related areas and posts ensured a more efficient functioning of the airport (Hanaoka & Saraswati, 2011).

Airports try to differentiate from each other in order to attract airline companies. In our case, we outline Oporto airport as an identity that is both relational and historical, as it is truly a referential space. This effort for such identity creation is due to the direction of ANA (Aeroportos de Portugal, S.A.) that aimed at offering a modern and high quality service. Regional airports are an important factor for the social and economic development of the region and place where they are located. Such infrastructures are important attraction poles for investment and employment generators. Regional airports in Europe employed around 500,000 people, directly and nearly the double of that, indirectly, in 2012. Airports are also an important factor for access to the entire world, represent a connecting link between communities and a very efficient transportation means ally to cover a large distance in a short period of time (Carballo-Cruz & Costa, 2014).

Oporto airport is classified as a success case between European airports due to its capacity development as well as due to its infrastructure restructuring. An evidence of this recognition is demonstrated through the increase in routes offered and in the growing levels of demand (Carballo-Cruz & Costa, 2014). In 2006, it was considered the third best airport in Europe by ACI – Airports Council International, and the third best in the world in the capacity of 2 to 5 million passengers category. This rank is based on the passengers’ opinions as well as on indicators of the services on offer, waiting time, attendance and friendliness of staff, cleanliness and comfort (ACI, 2012). In the following years, it was considered the best airport in Europe (from 2008 to 2011).

Based on a study of 2012, “in the last ten years, the traffic volume increased more than 3.4 million passengers, passing from the accounted 2.6 million in 2002 to more than 6 million in 2012.” (ANA, 2012). This constant evolution of numbers reached its peak last year, surpassing 9 million passengers, thus, a remarkable increase from the 6 million recorded in 2012.

Oporto airport was the second airport with more passenger traffic in Portugal, behind Lisbon airport (6,050,094 vs. 15,301,176) in 2012. On the brighter side, Oporto airport is about 95 km from the border with Spain, being thus an attraction pole for the Galiza region of Spain. Even though Galiza has three airports, none of them have the capacity to offer the same international routes that Oporto offers. Galician passengers who want to make an international connection, have to make a scale in Madrid. It is more advantageous financially to make the said scale at Oporto airport. As per ANA, in 2012, more than 700,000 Galician passengers opted for Oporto airport (12% of the total traffic of the airport) (Carballo-Cruz & Costa, 2014).

The changes in the offer and demand for air trips originates a large scale competition. Taking this into consideration, it is a must to created one’s own and differentiating identity from the competition. For example, there are the slogans used by the management of Oporto airport: “An airport at the level of image of each passenger” and “We give life to airports”, inspired on the platform that initially one accesses on land and later on, discovers through the sky. “As chocolate is for Óbidos,

\(^1\) Óbidos is a town in the central region of Portugal known for its annual chocolate festival.
"the wave is for Nazaré"**, the Sá Carneiro airport is for Oporto (Martins, Fernandes & Mendes, 2014) and so, this infrastructure constitutes an important and attractive entry gate for the city of Oporto, being crucial for the beginning and end of the journey experience. A large number of people, while selecting their vacations destination, take into consideration the airport as a decisive factor, and thus, Oporto airport always has scores some points in its favor, being a model and internationally recognized airport, for its quality. In the last few years, there has been a large increase in the number of passengers and flights, as well as an increased number of destinations and direct flights, influencing considerably the tourism to Oporto city that keeps receiving more and more visitors from every corner of the world, including China, U.S.A., and from almost every European country.

Now-a-days, the security issue is crucial for the economic agents and for those that are responsible for administration. Faced with such an issue, Oporto airport has been gradually reinforcing its security measures in order to provide an ever growing level of comfort and security feeling for anyone who visits Portugal and travels via this airport (Santos & Dias).

In 2010, Oporto airport had the following services available (Loureiro, 2011):

- **Airlines with attendance desk at the airport**: TAP Portugal, Sata Internacional, Iberia, Aigle Azur, Air Transat, Swiss International Airlines and Lufthansa.
- **Low-cost airlines with attendance desk at the airport**: Brussels Airlines, Air Berlin, Ryanair, Luxair, Transavia and Easyjet.
- **Services and equipments**: Information counter, information post, passenger helpdesk, green way (priority boarding lounge), CTT post office, tourism counter, police counter, pharmacy shop, baggage storage, rest chairs, internet access, bank and foreign exchange counter, rent-a-car, baggage trolleys, baggage protection, lost & found services, live music, directories with service/facility location, kiosks for service quality evaluation, mobile phone recharge stations, Aerolândia – space for kids, foreigners and border service counter, customs, diaper change rooms, passengers lounge (Galiza), CIP services, equipment for incapacitated passengers, My Way services, shops, duty-free shops, restaurants and cafés, ATM machines and restrooms.

It was the investment in the main infrastructure of Oporto airport that enabled the promotion of Destination Oporto and the formation in several areas concentrated in the analyzed structure.

**Conclusion**

The local and regional tourism development has the airport as its main infrastructure. Through the example of Oporto airport, we can conclude that the infrastructure enabled the settlement of low-cost airlines that resulted in the exponential growth of local tourism to the Oporto city and the northern Portugal region.

The example of Oporto city proves that its airport is the main infrastructure that contributed decisively to make that city one of the best European tourist destinations.

Any city that wishes to attain similar notoriety should follow the strategy of Oporto city and start by investing in its local airport.

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2 Nazaré is a town in the central region of Portugal known for its beaches.
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