

## THE ALQUEVA RESERVOIR IN PORTUGAL: TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW LAKE DESTINATION

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**Key words:** Alqueva Lake, Lake tourism, lake destination, tourism development, natural environment.

### Abstract

A number of well-known tourism destinations around the world are based on lakes as the main attraction. Although it is still difficult to determine the economic significance of lakes, lake tourism has been recognized as a relevant subfield of tourism studies. Based on a PhD investigation related to lake tourism, this paper seeks to reveal and discuss the potential of the Alqueva reservoir as an emerging destination in the Alentejo region in the south of Portugal. This new resource has offered a naturally defined unit for tourism development since the reservoir started to fill up in 2002. Further research concerning destination image applied to the Alqueva Lake as a study area will provide valuable information for positioning and promoting it as a lake-destination in the future. Meanwhile, some of the challenges and contradictions in aligning the Alqueva as a resource with tourism development are highlighted in this paper.

### ZBIORNIK ALQUEVA W PORTUGALII: ROZWIJANIE NOWEGO PRZEZNACZENIA W WYKORZYSTYWANIU JEZIORA

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**Słowa kluczowe:** jezioro Alqueva, turystyka jeziorowa, rozwój turystyki, środowisko naturalne.

## Abstrakt

Wiele znanych ośrodków turystycznych na świecie funkcjonuje w oparciu o jeziora, które stanowią ich główną atrakcję. Choć nadal trudno jest ustalić znaczenie ekonomiczne jezior, turystyka jeziorowa stała się już uznaną dziedziną badań. W oparciu o badania prowadzone w ramach pracy doktorskiej autorzy zaprezentowali i omówili potencjał zbiornika Alqueva jako tworzącego się ośrodka turystycznego na południu Portugalii. Począwszy od 2002 r., czyli od czasu, gdy zaczęto go napełniać wodą, zbiornik Alqueva jest w sposób naturalny określoną jednostką przeznaczoną do rozwoju turystycznego. Dalsze badania dotyczące wizerunku jeziora Alqueva jako miejsca docelowego dla turystów dostarczą cennych informacji pozwalających na ustalanie pozycji i promowanie jeziora w przyszłości. W prezentowanym artykule autorzy podkreślają niektóre z wyzwań i okoliczności utrudniających uznanie jeziora Alqueva za zasób odpowiedni do rozwoju turystyki.

## Introduction

Lakes offer a naturally defined core resource for tourism development. There are several examples of lake-based destinations around the world, where regional or local attractions are mainly based on a lake resource. In fact, the potential of Europe in terms of lake destinations is well-recognized, which clearly justifies the adoption of a “lake tourism” concept under the wider concept of “water based tourism” (RYHANEN 2001). Nowadays, lake tourism is considered not only as an important type of tourism of economic value for certain destinations, but also academically as a subfield of tourism studies (HALL and HÄRKÖNEN 2006). Two different types of lakes should be distinguished: natural and artificial. The case of Alqueva Lake, a new artificial reservoir in Portugal since 2002, will be examined. This reservoir fulfils several functions as storage, water supply, hydroelectric and irrigation, considering the fact that this dam is located in Alentejo, the driest and hottest region of Portugal. The construction of the dam was crucial, since severe climate and the lack of infrastructures have blocked this region’s development for decades, isolating it from national and European economies. Presently, the Alqueva Lake is a large reservoir in Europe (surface area 250 km<sup>2</sup>; maximum depth 99 m; shoreline 1200 km; length 82 km). It is important to highlight that, like natural lakes, the importance of reservoirs for social and economic development has been already demonstrated (DUDA-GROMADA et al. 2010).

According to HALL and HÄRKÖNEN (2006), the idea of lake tourism is underpinned by a certain geographical entity which has arisen because of its particular environmental characteristics. In the case of Alqueva, the establishment of a new reservoir in 2002 has resulted in a lake resource considering the fact that it comprises several recent attractions contained in the nature, culture and community of the lake, generating new possibilities for tourism development. One of the basic elements of a tourism destination is well-defined spatial boundaries. Presently, a territorial delimitation has been conducted,

giving rise to a geographical area of seven municipal areas around the lake, which includes sixteen villages on the lakeshore (named “lakeside villages”) spread over seven municipal areas<sup>1</sup> (*PE~AQUA...* 2003).

The tourist and recreational potential of Alqueva is rooted in the Alentejo region where it is located. Broadly, the Alentejo is considered to be an exceptional part of an unspoilt Portugal, full of character, barely touched by tourism and steeped in history. The Alentejo region is marked by nature and heritage, a vast landscape that varies considerably, from the open rolling plains of the south to the granite hills that border Spain in the north-east. With the construction of the Alqueva dam a completely new landscape has appeared since 2002. Where there used to be plains, roads and even villages there is now a considerable body of water known as the “Great Lake”, which crosses two countries, Portugal and Spain<sup>2</sup>. New beauty came into being, mostly non-urbanized, characterized by a genuine landscape.

However, to be competitive, destinations must be managed from a strategic point a view. Since destination image is considered to be one of the most important marketing tools for a successful destination, an image study assumes a crucial step, even more so in the case of emerging destinations, such as the Alqueva Lake which is at the very beginning of tourism development. Therefore, framed by a Ph.D research with the purpose of identifying the main image variables of Alqueva as an emergent lake destination in order to develop in the future a reliable and valid scale of image management for this type of destinations, two key themes underpins this paper. First, knowledge of the process through which the Alqueva reservoir has emerged, highlighting some natural, cultural and tourism aspects; this will contribute to the Ph.D research since it provides a richer understanding of how the tourists perceived the Alqueva Lake as an emerging destination. Second, it is believed that the value of examining these elements provides important insights to engage in a discussion of the challenges, contradictions, and directions towards a tourism development as a lake-destination area.

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<sup>1</sup> The municipal areas located in the Portuguese part of the lake are the following: Alandroal, Moura, Mourão, Portel, Reguengos de Monsaraz, Serpa and Vidigueira. The lakeside villages are: Capelins, Juromenha, Póvoa de S. Miguel, Estrela, Luz, Granja, Alqueva, Amieira, Monte do Trigo, S. Marcos do Campo, Campinho, Monsaraz, Telheiro, Mina da Orada, Marmelar and Pedrógão, according to Gestalqueva (*PE~AQUA...* 2012). However, the legislation of the Destination Management Organization of Alqueva (TGLA) in 2008 determined only six municipal areas, excluding Vidigueira and Serpa, and including Barrancos. For more information about the legislation visit <http://www.turismoalqueva.pt/media/attachments/24/2/Estatutos-do-Polo-Alqueva.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> The Alqueva Reservoir resulted from damming the Guadiana River located on the Portuguese-Spanish border separating Extremadura and Andalucia (Spain) from the Alentejo and the Algarve (Portugal). The Guadiana’s course covers a distance of 829 km, and it is the fourth-longest in the Iberian Peninsula, with a hydrological basin extending into an area of approximately 68,000 km<sup>2</sup> (see MAIA 2000). The Alqueva Reservoir covers the two countries. This paper focus on the Portuguese part of the Lake.

## The Dam Construction: Background

The Alqueva dam is located in the Alentejo, a south-central region of Portugal separated from the rest of the country by the Tagus River. The Alentejo is rural and is the most depopulated region in the country. The Alqueva project has a long and well-established history: the Portuguese government decided to invest in water storage facilities to expand irrigation and supply water to the Alentejo region as a result of severe problems of physical and human desertification. This region has one of the lowest rates of rainfall over the whole Portuguese territory, generally varying between 500 and 600 litres per square meter *per annum*. At the same time, the inter-annual distribution of rainfall in the region is extremely irregular, varying between 250 litres/m<sup>2</sup> in dry years and 900 litres/m<sup>2</sup> in rainy years (EDIA 2000). As a result of an extremely irregular water flow, the only way to guarantee the supply of water from surface resources was by building large dams. The first reference to creating a water reserve in the Guadiana River dates back to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, the Multipurpose Alqueva Project (MAP) was only implemented in 1957, as a part of the Alentejo Irrigation Plan. At that time the main goal was economic development based on the agricultural sector. The Project was only approved in 1975, with the Portuguese-Spanish Agreement in 1968 on international rivers. After advances and retreats during the 1970s and the 1980s, a *Global Assessment Study* of the project promoted by the European Commission Regional Development Office emerged as the central issue in this process. Portugal joined the European Union in 1986 together with Spain and since then, the financial support of the project by the European Commission (EC) was a key issue for the Portuguese government. As a result of this *Global Assessment Study*, the European Commission agreed to finance MAP only if became evident that it would play a key role for regional development. Finally, in 1995 the Portuguese government decided to proceed with the MAP with or without financial support from the European Union, as a means of setting up a strategic water reserve in this region. Alqueva was considered as a key project of the Guadiana River Basin Plan approved in 2001 (SANCHES and PEDRO 2006). This watershed is regulated on a national basis under a bi-state agreement between Portugal and Spain. On February 8<sup>th</sup> in 2002 the dam gates were closed and the Alqueva reservoir started to fill up.

In order to manage the whole MAP, a public limited company named EDIA (Alqueva Development and Infrastructures Company) was founded in 1995 by the Portuguese Government with the objective of conceptualizing, building and exploiting the MAP. Also aware of the importance of this project for the social and economic development of the region, EDIA included a business

perspective in its strategy, aiming to promote the development of 20 Alentejo municipalities, which are directly influenced by the MAP (EDIA). Among the various components of this project and as a result of the lake's size, sustainable tourism growth soon became a significant goal.

## Natural Environment

The territory adjacent to the Alqueva Lake and its nearest surroundings (mainly located in the southeast) has a Protected Site classified by the European Union, which is part of the Natura 2000 network<sup>3</sup>. This Site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) named Moura/Mourão/Barrancos, which has 84,909 ha characterized by a heterogeneous landscape that varies between open treeless plains for cereal cultivation and *montados*. A *montado* is the agro-silvo-pastoral system specific to the Alentejo region, comprising an open formation of cork and holm oaks in varying densities, combined with a rotation of crops/fallow/pastures (PINTO-CORREIA and MASCARENHAS 1999). Despite the fact that it has been declining in recent decades, the *Montado* is one of the best examples of Mediterranean forest. The type of landscape generated by this agro-silvo-pastoral system is particularly attractive for relaxation and recreation (SUROVÁ and PINTO-CORREIA 2008: 313). Therefore, the typical landscape of the Alqueva Lake should be considered in the future as one of the most important resources for tourism development. Considering biodiversity, the Mourão/Moura/Barrancos SPA is also very important for the conservation of steppe birds as well as for many species of birds of prey (Black Vulture, Golden Eagle, Spanish Imperial Eagle, Bonelli's Eagle). This is the most important overwintering area of the Crane (*Grus grus*) in Portugal. It is also one of the priority areas for the conservation of the Iberian lynx (*Linx pardinus*). As for steppe birds, this SPA is an important overwintering area for the Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*) (LPN 2012).

In addition to this SPA, there are two more Sites classified by the Natura 2000 Network as Sites of Community Importance (SCI) in the terrains adjacent to the lake: a) Moura/Barrancos (43,309 ha) with an appreciable

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<sup>3</sup> The Natura 2000 Network is a European ecological network which aims to preserve biodiversity by conserving natural habitats, wild flora and fauna in the European Union territory. The Natura 2000 Network is composed of sites classified as Special Protected Areas (SPA), by the Council Directive 79/409/EEC of 2 April 1979 on the conservation of wild birds, including the migratory species and the habitats where they occur. Sites of Community Importance (SCI) classified according to the Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and wild fauna and flora which are considered threatened in the EU. For more information visit the website <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/index-en.htm> and also <http://www.icnf.pt/ICNPportal/vEN2007/O+ICNB/Rede+Natura+2000/>

physiographic and geological diversity, allowing the occurrence of various plant communities; it also includes one of the country's most important havens for bats; b) Guadiana/Juromenha (2,501 ha), very important for endemic flora; the location of the only two populations of *narcissus humilis* in Portugal (ICNF 2012).

Additionally, it should be highlighted that as a consequence of a large-scale transformation in this area, the management for multiple uses of the Alqueva reservoir has determined certain obligations for EDIA, who have recognized since the beginning of this process the environmental responsibility implicit in its action. In order to compensate for the loss of habitats due to the submersion of a very large area, EDIA has acquired the Noudar Nature Park (approximately 1,000 ha), which is representative of a genuine natural environment of this region. This park, located in the southeast area of the Lake, is included in the Natura 2000 network, forming an ecological set with Spanish protected areas. Noudar Nature Park is managed according to the maintenance of biologically diverse silvo-pastoral systems adapted to the necessities of conservation, which will promote the sustainable development of this area, making agriculture, forestry and tourism compatible (PNN). The maximization of the positive effects on biodiversity is at the crux of the management model of this park, which is also well prepared in terms of tourism, including comfortable accommodation for families and a portfolio of outdoor activities.

Another important attraction which has profoundly increased the value of the natural environment at Alqueva Lake is related with its sky. Alqueva was the first site in the world to receive the "Starlight Tourism Destination" certification, awarded to visitable places characterized by excellent quality for the contemplation of starry skies and the practice of tourist activities based on this resource. The Alqueva Dark Reserve is an area of 3000 km<sup>2</sup> and is spread over the lakeside villages. The ideal conditions for an excellent observation of the dark sky are ensured by this site with an average of 286 clear nights a year, a low level latitude (38degN) and minimal light pollution (DARK SKY ALQUEVA... 2012).

## Cultural Factors

As has already been observed, the sudden creation of this enormous mass of water massively transformed the landscape. Sixteen villages are now located on the lakeshore, and underwent a profound transformation. Hence, the cultural and historic attraction of the lake is interweaved with this new territory that defines the Alqueva Lake as a lake-destination area. Despite the fact that these villages are not well prepared for tourism, they preserve and

value the history and living experiences of the local people over the centuries. As Cooper states “*local community is a key consideration on the cultural appraisal of lakes as a recreation and tourism resources*” (2003: 29). Regardless of their lack of infrastructures, their potential for tourism was already identified and recognized (*PE~AQUA...* 2012). In general they attract the visitor’s attention with similarly-shaped white houses, framed in a deep blue, grey or yellow colour. Hence, the peaceful atmosphere surrounded by a rural landscape is worthy of interest.

Nevertheless, it is reasonable to remark upon some significant cultural attractions located alongside the lake. The medieval town of Monsaraz is one of the oldest Portuguese settlements of southern Portugal, occupied since pre-history, where visitors can walk and feel the atmosphere with a view over the lake. Also, there is a considerable number of castles spread over the surrounding area from the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries (Castles of Moura, Mourão, Terena, Alandroal, Portel, Noudar, Monsaraz)<sup>4</sup>. Additionally, northwest of the lake it is important to highlight the Juromenha Fortress (Alandroal) where the original fort was built in 1167 by the founder of Portugal in order to protect the area from the Moors and rebuilt in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Despite its historical and cultural importance the fortress remains in bad condition requiring a programme of conservation.

Along with this heritage, a particular reference should be made to the remarkable process involved with the settlement of a new village (“Luz Village”) totally built when the original village was flooded by the Alqueva dam. The procedure of relocation of the village was unique and has been pointed to as an example of how ethical values can be conciliated with the necessity of constructing a dam. In order to share this legacy, the Museum of Luz was founded in 2003 with the purpose of promoting and safeguarding the tangible and intangible heritage of Alqueva in the context of the Alentejo region, becoming one of the village’s “memory buildings”. From a small window in one of the museum’s rooms, it is possible to identify exactly where the old Luz village once stood. A final consideration goes to the city of Évora which, despite the distance from the Lake (about 60 km from Monsaraz, Alandroal or Amieira), can be easily reached by car. Évora has been classified by UNESCO as World Heritage since 1986, preserving the remains of over a thousand years of history under Celtic, Roman, Visigoth and Arabian influences. This city is one the main touristic attractions in the Alentejo region.

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<sup>4</sup> For more information about Portugal and Alentejo visit to the promotional websites of Portugal at <http://www.visitportugal.com> and Alentejo at <http://www.visitalentejo.pt>.

## Tourism Infrastructures

As previously observed, the Alqueva Lake is a new resource for tourism in the Alentejo region. The evolution of tourism is intertwined with the evolution of destinations, which go through a cycle similar to a life-cycle of a product. In general, destinations go through different stages of development due to their dynamic nature: exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation (BUTLER 1980). Framed by this well known analytical model applied to the Alqueva Lake, the following considerations might emerge: (a) the delimitation of the physical boundaries of Alqueva as a lake-destination area is very recent, and sometimes is still misleading; b) the type and scale of tourism for Alqueva in particular and the Alentejo in general is being discussed within a recent tourism regional plan; b) the relatively recent foundation of a Destination Management Organization for Alentejo and Alqueva named as “Terras do Grande Lago Alqueva” (TGLA)<sup>5</sup>, within the intervention of the public sector in tourism; c) the absence of a clear and well defined image and positioning in the market; d) the implementation of initiatives to promote the destination, and provide the tourism product development such as the Dark Sky certification. Arguably, it could be concluded that Alqueva as a lake-destination area is at the very beginning of the life-cycle, apparently at the “involvement stage”.

Therefore, the concept of a life cycle helps to understand how situation-specific life-cycle conditions influence the level of touristic infrastructure development in a particular destination. In the case of the Alqueva Lake and in terms of its supply there is some accommodation, although a qualification process should be implemented. TGLA is in the process of developing and collating information, monitoring the state of the tourism supply on the Alqueva Lake. A preliminary version of the accommodation inventory was undertaken by the TGLA and identified 31 accommodation establishments, mostly classified as rural tourism within the categories of rural hotels and farmhouses, according to the Portuguese legislation. The houses are located in a rural and calm environment, rustic or in old manor houses, in direct contact with nature and local traditions. Some of them provide opportunities for tourists to take advantage of the immense landscape extending through the

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<sup>5</sup> “Turismo Terras do Grande Lago” (TGLA) is the Local Management Organization responsible for the management and marketing of Alqueva as a lake-destination area, founded in 2008, according to the TGLA ordinance 1151/2008 de 13 Outubro. However, it must be noted that the Portuguese Government has announced a significant change in the structure of the public administration of tourism, which probably will lead to the integration of TGLA in the current Regional Management Organization promoting the Alentejo as a destination (ERT Alentejo). Presently, (August 2012) the final decision has not yet been announced which, in fact, contributes to some uncertainty related to Alqueva’s management as a lake-destination in the future.



plains with various sport activities such as horse riding, cycling, bird watching, canoeing, among others. Most of the accommodation already existed before the rise of this large body of water; however new small projects were then installed after the Alqueva reservoir due to its significant potential. Meanwhile, new major tourism projects are projected on the lakeshore, in accordance with the POAAP (Alqueva and Pedrogao Dam Plan). This territorial planning instrument clearly defines the guidelines for the land-use in the Alqueva area, particularly for tourism.

As destinations are an amalgam of components and experiences, water-based activities are of paramount importance for lake-destinations. On the Alqueva Lake, this type of activities is primarily based on the first major nautical project located in “Amieira village”, one of the sixteen “lakeside villages” already mentioned in this paper. The programmes on the Lake consist of scheduled passenger cruises (SPC) and houseboat renting (HBR). In terms of SPC, this service is provided by three cruise boats, stopping at various points of interest located in some of the “lakeside villages”, of which three have the capacity for 25 passengers and one for 120 passengers; the HBR consists of a different concept of accommodation offering the ultimate freedom for tourists who love the water, with a plot composed of seven houseboats with a capacity that ranges from 4 to 12 passengers (*Amieira Marina* 2012). Apart from this service, there are five more nautical companies according to the TGLA inventory, mainly small and family projects, focused on sailing and motorboat cruises, with or without crew. It is also noteworthy to mention some infrastructure requirements vital for the development of water-based activities on lakes. Presently, Alqueva Lake has only one marina installed near Amieira village with all the basics, and some small wharfs spread out among the lakeside villages. It is expected that in the future more appropriate infrastructures will come into existence in response to the tourism and recreational potential of the Lake, following the rules established by the POAAP (Spacial Planning of Alqueva and Pedrogão Reservoirs) implemented since 2002.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

So far the previous sections have provided a description of the Alqueva Lake project as well as its potential for tourism development. There is no doubt that Alqueva is at the very beginning of the life-cycle as a lake-destination area. The purpose of this section is to introduce and briefly discuss, based on a literature review of lake tourism, important issues concerning the Alqueva Lake as a future lake-destination area.

Firstly, an integrated lake management approach should be implemented since lakes are complex destination systems (COOPER 2006). Coordination is essential in all types of destinations, but even more on lakes as open systems. The vulnerability of lakes since they represent fragile eco-systems, the multiple uses of lakes, the level of complexity of coordinating all the different stakeholders involved in the destination, demands a holistic view of the lake. In the case of Alqueva, the large number of organizations implicated in the management of the lake leads to a high level of responsibility fragmentation<sup>6</sup>. Given the difficulty of managing the Alqueva Lake as a single entity due to the fact that this reservoir didn't exist until 2002 and now a new reality has arisen, crossing different territorial boundaries; in the near future it will be useful to implement a specific authority consisting of representatives from the different public sector agents involved in the management of the lake. Additionally, a partnership task force could emerge with public, private sector and community that could provide strategic advice and recommendations in the creation, monitoring and review of policies for developing and managing the Alqueva Lake and any issues related to its future.

Secondly, and in line with the earlier discussion, it will be of a great value if an integrated and specific management plan for Alqueva Lake could be implemented by the government of Portugal. This important planning instrument would be considered as the main driving force for the destination and, simultaneously could aggregate all the multiple stakeholders involved in the management process. According to COOPER (2006) the management of the Lake District in UK and the Great Lakes in North America are two good examples of a holistic management. The former, because there is a particular Development Plan for the Lake District under the supervision of a specific Authority (Lake District National Park Authority); the latter for the reason that each lake of the Great Lakes (five in total) has its own management plan but are still linked, and also because the management programme is subject to an international management agreement between USA and Canada. The same situation happens on the Alqueva Lake, since this is a lake that crosses two different countries (Portugal and Spain).

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<sup>6</sup> The management of the Alqueva Lake involves multiple organizations, each one with a more direct or indirect impact on its development in various fields. These are some examples of the large number of entities involved: IPA (Portuguese Environment Agency) responsible for implementation of the national policy of water resources; EDIA responsible for the management of the Alqueva Dam, already presented in this paper; CCDRA (Coordination Commission of Regional Development of Alentejo) implements the government policy for planning, environment and development in Alentejo; ATTGLA (Association of the Alqueva Evolving Municipal Areas in Portugal and Spain); TGLA (Alqueva Lake Great Lands) responsible for management and marketing Alqueva as a tourism destination; ERT Alentejo (Regional Tourism Organization for Alentejo), responsible for management and marketing Alentejo as a tourism destination.

Thirdly, tourism on lakes takes place in the surrounding area of the lake and not exclusively on the lake itself (HALL and HÄRKÖNEN 2006). Naturally, linked to the definition of lake tourism is the idea that there is a geographical entity with particular environment characteristics. This feature becomes, probably, more evident on natural lakes which always existed in a particular place than on lakes artificially created. Given the background of Alqueva as a new lake that has existed only since 2002, one of the central discussions is the need for a clear delimitation of the territorial boundaries of Alqueva as a lake-destination area. This has been an undefined process considering the fact that there are two different standpoints: (i) the first was established in 2003 (*PE-AQUA*) by EDIA based on the concept of sixteen “lakeside villages” within seven municipalities adjacent to the lake (ii) the second was adopted by TGLA from 2008 more focused on the municipal areas (six), which are not exactly the same as the former. Therefore, it is important and urgent to define a single position towards a geographical delimitation of Alqueva as a lake-destination, which must be assumed by the whole tourism industry. The future marketing planning for this destination is totally dependent on this particular, but fundamental aspect.

Lastly, marketing, product development and promotion are of paramount importance for the development of destinations. Also in lake-destination areas successful marketing is linked to a strong destination image (ERKKILÄ 2006). Therefore, it is important to continuously understand its formation process (BALOGLU and MCCLEARLY 1999, GARTNER 1993), within a geographical expansion of image studies applied to non-traditional entities (such as lake destinations), over almost forty years of an evolutionary research (RODRIGUES et al. 2012). Since the Alqueva Lake is at the very beginning as a lake-destination, consistent work on water-image formation should be implemented framed by the experience economy as the 21<sup>st</sup> century’s paradigm. Moreover, waterscapes are considered to be a significant challenge for tourism marketing, because of their pleasantness as an environment and attractiveness as a landscape (TUOHINO and PITKÄNEN 2004). An image study will then provide valuable information for positioning, differentiation, and promoting Alqueva as a lake-destination area in the future within a national and a regional marketing strategy.

In terms of product development, the idea of the gateway approach first proposed by GUNN (1979) which GARTNER (2006) explored applied to lake areas, could be implemented in the Alqueva Lake in terms of product development, promotion and distribution. Gateways are seen as consumption centres, which offer products from different service providers in a central location. However, gateways are not only applied in terms of location in a physical space, but nowadays they can be understood in terms of new technologies in tourism.

This idea of gateways, in the case of lake destinations, is of great importance due to the complex destination system as mentioned before. Presently, the concept of gateways applied to lakes involves the existence of a website as a promotion and distribution tool, providing information from the multiple services providers (e.g. accommodation, activities, events, restaurants) on the lake in an integrated and coordinated model. Alqueva Lake should in the future develop a website, since from a customer point of view destinations are viewed like any other product<sup>7</sup>. In a more developed stage with a considerable level of supply in nautical activities, the adoption of the “Nautical Resort” concept developed in Spain and France for sea water could also be explored on lakes, specifically on the Alqueva Lake. Undoubtedly, this model of “product engineering” development should be rooted in a strong destination image of the lake.

In conclusion, the aim of this paper was to draw attention to a new reservoir located in a rural region of Portugal. The potential of the Alqueva Lake and the adjacent areas for tourism is mainly due to the specific natural environment, typical landscape and cultural resources of an essentially non-urbanized territory. As a lake-destination, Alqueva is at the very beginning of the life-cycle, which leads to the need for a successful marketing approach and action. Further research will contribute to determine the main attributes that should promote the Alqueva Lake for tourism purposes in the near future.

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<sup>7</sup> There are good examples of websites for lake-destinations areas. The website of Lake District in Italy is a good example of product development, promotion and distribution tool of a destination-lake area. For more information visit the <http://www.distrettolaghi.it>.

- [http://www.opw.ie/hydrology/data/speeches/National Hydrology Seminar 2000 No 6](http://www.opw.ie/hydrology/data/speeches/National%20Hydrology%20Seminar%202000%20No%206), access: 20.07.2012.
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