

STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELING APPLIED TO SEX, ROMANCE AND LIMINAL BEHAVIOUR IN TOURISM CONTEXT: THE CASE OF FARO INTERNATIONAL BIKE MEETING

MODELAÇÃO DE EQUAÇÕES ESTRUTURAIS APLICADA AO SEXO, ROMANCE E COMPORTAMENTOS LIMINÓIDES EM CONTEXTO TURÍSTICO: O CASO DA CONCENTRAÇÃO MOTARD DE FARO

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ABSTRACT

Sex and romance are part of everyday life and therefore are part of the contemporary tourism experiences. Tourism, such as has been stressed by the literature, consists of a rupture with the everyday life – a liminal space-time which enables liminal behaviours. In these behaviours one can include a greater willingness for romance and sexual relationships. One of the dimensions of the theoretical articulation between tourism, romance and sexuality consists of the role played by these latter two dimensions in the decision of travelling and in the destination's choice. Sex and romance may be the main motivators for travelling or, if they are not important drivers, may occur in an “accidental” way while already at the destination. This research investigates an event where the environment (e.g. the omnipresence of erotic shows), combined with the liminal experiences, may contribute to attract tourists whose main motivations are sex and romance. The correlation between these variables was tested using structural equation modeling with latent variables, applied to 449 data surveys carried out with the bikers who visited the 29th Faro International Bike Meeting, in 2010. The results suggest that bikers come motivated not only by participation in the event but also by the expectations of having sex and getting involved in a romance. These aspects have influence in the experienced environment which, in turn, has influence in the adoption of liminal behaviours. Bikers' satisfaction is evident, as well as their intention to return, proving that a new market segment is rising up in the Algarve because of this event.

Keywords: Sex, Romance, Tourism, Liminality, Faro International Bike Meeting, Structural Equation Modeling with Latent Variables.

RESUMO

O sexo e o romance fazem parte da vida quotidiana e, como tal, fazem parte das experiências turísticas contemporâneas. O turismo, como tem vindo a ser sublinhado pela literatura, constitui uma ruptura com o quotidiano, um espaço-tempo liminar que favorece comportamentos liminóides, nos quais se pode incluir uma maior disponibilidade para o romance e para o envolvimento em relações sexuais. Uma das dimensões da articulação teórica entre o turismo, o romance e a sexualidade consiste no papel que estes últimos desempenham na decisão de viajar e na escolha dos destinos. O sexo e o romance podem ser os principais motivadores de viagem ou, por outro lado, quando não constituem *drivers* importantes, podem ocorrer de

modo “acidental” já no destino. Esta pesquisa incide sobre um evento onde o ambiente vivido (p. ex. a omnipresença de *shows* eróticos), aliado às experiências liminóides, pode contribuir para atrair turistas, cujas principais motivações são o sexo e o romance. A correlação entre estas variáveis foi testada usando a modelação de equações estruturais com variáveis latentes aplicada aos dados de 449 inquéritos feitos aos motards que visitaram a 29^a Concentração Motard de Faro, em 2010. Os resultados sugerem que os motards vêm motivados não só pela participação no evento, como pelas expectativas de terem sexo e de se envolverem num romance. Estes aspectos influenciam o ambiente vivido que, por sua vez, tem influência na adopção de comportamentos liminóides. A satisfação dos motards é evidente, bem como a propensão ao regresso, denotando que um novo segmento de mercado emergiu no Algarve por força deste evento.

Palavras-chave: Sexo, Romance, Turismo, Liminaridade, Concentração Motard de Faro, Modelação de Equações Estruturais com Variáveis Latentes.

JEL Classification: Z130

1. INTRODUCTION

Most of the studies on the relationship between sex, romance and tourism have been conducted by Asian and Oceanian countries (Bauer and McKercher, 2003; Carr and Poria, 2010, Oppermann, 1998; Pritchard *et al.*, 2000; Ryan and Hall, 2001; Ryan and Kinder, 1996; Trauer and Ryan, 2005; among others). Tourist trips are increasingly part of the imagination of individuals and, since sex is an integral part of life, it is natural that people also engage in sexual activities when travelling. Sexual experimentation does not stay at home; it goes on vacation as well! Perhaps because some of these countries are «sex tourism» destinations, the analysis focus of the majority of these studies has been on sex as the main driver in choosing a destination, where the established relationships almost always have a commercial character.

In contrast, scientific research over the relationship between these three variables (sex, romance and tourism) currently does not exist in Portugal. The knowledge produced until now is related to phenomena like prostitution, striptease or escort services (Coelho, 2009; Oliveira, 2011; 2004). Sex, when related with tourism, even if that relation is very incipient, appears in the national literature suggesting “illegal” behaviours. This is the case of the research carried out by Ribeiro *et al.* (2007), which portrays the work of some prostitutes along the border between Portugal and Spain, with the majority of their clients of Spanish origin. Even so, one cannot properly speak about a relationship between sex and tourism, since, in this case, the clients are not technically tourists but visitors.

Two of the first studies – if not the only ones – previously conducted by Portuguese authors which address the relationship between sex and tourism are the studies of Ribeiro and Sacramento (2007; 2006); however, they also focus on the «sex tourism» problem, in this case, in the northeast of Brazil.

However, the relationship between sex and tourism does not exhaust itself with the dark side of this dialectic. This relationship cannot and should not be observed only from the deviation angle (Ryan and Kinder, 1996). The majority of the literature on tourism and sex tends to focus on the unequal and exploitive nature of the encounters between tourists and their sexual partners. Specifically, literature concerns trafficking in women and children for

prostitution, the exploitation of sex workers, sex crimes, etc. In fact, many activities relating sex and tourism have negative, traumatic or exploitive characteristics; however, the use of prostitution or other forms of commercial sex represents only a small part of the sexual activity that unfolds in the tourism context. Considering an overall perspective of romantic, erotic or sexual relationships, many of them, if not most of them, are positive and gratifying for both intervenients.

The Algarve is a recognized tourism destination, and it is annually sought by thousands of national and foreign tourists. Although it is not considered a «sex tourism» destination, at least in the sense that the term has commonly assumed, it is a stage for friends, couples or families on vacation, where sexuality certainly plays an important role. Further, the setting of the Faro International Bike Meeting can be seen as a form of materializing the tourist experience in the Algarve. So the option for studying the visitors' behaviours at this bike meeting results from an explicit necessity of breaking the stereotypes usually associated with bikers and with this sort of event. Thus, in an apparently unruly environment, will the individuals adopt promiscuous behaviours? In which way does this type of tourism provide liminal behaviours? Will liminality be directly related, in one way, with the availability for sexual encounters and, in another way, with satisfaction and the intention to return?

The aim of this paper is to empirically test a proposed model using structural equation modeling with latent variables, in order to better understand the relationship between tourism and liminal behaviours and the influence of these, on the one hand, on the availability for sex and romance and, on the other hand, on satisfaction and intention to return. Through the questionnaire answers of visitors to the Faro International Bike Meeting, we intend to examine the relationships between the following constructs: environment, liminal behaviours, sex and romance, satisfaction and intention to return.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Modern societies are characterized by the repetitive character of everyday life (Goffman, 1993), by the need of managing impressions in terms of the social constraints and norms (Becker, 1963; Goffman, 1993; Xiberras, 1993), by the control of “moral makers” (Becker, 1963), by consumerism and by the lack of time for leisure activities (Giddens, 2002). All of these aspects create pressure on individuals and awaken the desire for an escape from the everyday inhabited space. Time and, more specifically, free time are the origins of the need for space consumption. This means that, in the era of Globalization, free time arouses the conquest of space through travel opportunities. Therefore, tourist trips are possibilities of liberation, in the sense of physical and psychological transportation from the fastidious reality of the everyday life (Bauer and McKercher, 2003). In the same sense, Ryan and Hall (2001) warn of the liminal character of tourism which stimulates the adoption of radically different behaviours from those of the everyday life. At the destination, tourists may exteriorize aspects of their *self* that are repressed by the social constraints in a normal situation (Pritchard *et al.*, 2000; Wickens, 2002). Also, Franklin (2003) admits that travelling provides anonymity and evasion of facing control, duty and obligations, additionally meaning the freedom for fantasy, imagination and adventure. This expression of *self* is related with two aspects of the individual's intimacy: first, the individual feels free to act in the way he wants in the tourism context, since he is away from the belonging society (Pritchard and Morgan, 2000); second, the individual feels that intimacy is constantly “watched over” in the normal context. This means that intimacy or, more specifically, the aspects related with love or sex orientation are restrained by the social morality and by the “double standard” that tightens sexual activity (Giddens, 1992). In contrast, the tourism context provides the

individual a greater availability and freedom to engage in sexual activities, either with their conventional partners or in casual encounters with strangers.

Although sex is part of the routine of life in bed at nighttime, it is persistently seen as an activity in which individuals may be themselves or get away from everyday life. As controversial as it may sound, the truth is that sex and sexuality are elements with decision power over the self-esteem and the well-being of the individuals because of its extraordinary character. As a result, what will be the connection between sexuality and the need for space consumption through tourism trips? According to Bauer and McKercher (2003), sex and tourism have been inextricably linked since the earliest days of travel. For as long as people have been travelling, they have been engaging in romantic and sexual encounters of various types.

The sociological reflection about tourism is relatively unanimous in the use of the concept of liminality (with origin in Anthropology of Ritual). However, much of the tourism literature that has addressed liminality prefers the use of Turner's concept of «liminal states» (Turner, 2008 [1969]). This conceptualization, applied by several noteworthy authors (Andrews and Les Roberts, 2012; Bauer and McKercher, 2003; Ryan and Hall, 2001; Selänniemi, 2003 *in* Bauer and McKercher, 2003), has been contributing to conferring intelligibility on the relationship between sex and tourism.

The tourism phenomenon as a liminal experience plays an important role in the sense that it provides a totally different space-time from that of production and work. In this situation, travelling can provide behaviours of transgression or, at least, opportunities for people to do things that they would not normally do at home. Indeed, the vacation trip constitutes a space-time in which it seems possible to realize all the fantasies and wishes that are denied to the social actors during their everyday life. The liminal nature of the vacation trip and of the tourism activities are effectively marked by the detachment from the worries of work; by the relaxation of social control; by the unusual consumption of foods, alcohol or even drugs; and by the «carnivalization» (Diken and Laustsen, 2004) and «staging» of these practices. All of these aspects may propitiate, or at least allow, a certain level of «depersonalization», transgression and excess that may provide increased opportunities for sex and seduction.

Sex is a natural part of life. If people participate in sexual activities at home, then certainly one must expect them to participate in sex when they travel (Bauer and McKercher, 2003). In fact, tourism simply provides another setting for sexual encounters. Moreover, sexual encounters during tourism are not necessarily associated to prostitution or escort services, although these are the most studied. The concept of liminality may be used likewise in the analysis and explanation of the non-commercial sexual activities. A «romance tourism» – lived by those who travel with the purpose of developing a vacation romance or by couples that want to invest in their relationship – may also occur (Ryan and Hall, 2001; Ryan and Kinder, 1996; Oppermann, 1998).

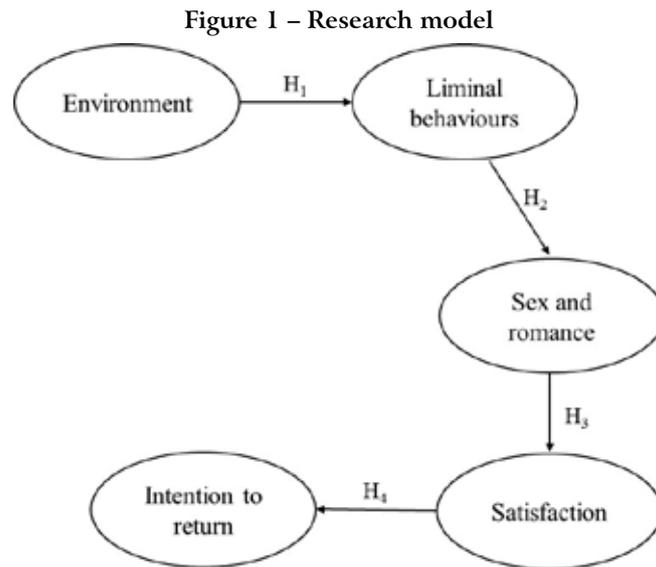
Sex and romance may be the main motivations for travel. Even when they are not – when sexual or romantic relationships occur in an «accidental» way at the destination – it is certain that they enhance the relationship between the tourist and the place and, consequently, their *place attachment* (Gu and Ryan, 2008). *Place attachment* derives from tourists' satisfaction and has impact on their intention to return and to recommend the destination. Accordingly, it has been encouraged by the tourism operators which are engaged in selling a particular place. The more «connected» to the destination that tourists become, the greater will be their probabilities of return, as well as of giving a positive message to family and friends (*Ibidem*). The economic benefits for the host regions and countries are evident, as well as the importance of gaining better knowledge of this market segment.

These are the main reasons that underline the will to understand pleasure and emotions during vacation trips, namely the way individuals live their sexuality in destinations such as

the Algarve. The tourism experience in the Algarve is materialized, in this case, at the Faro International Bike Meeting. The subsequent data analysis takes into account the answers given to a questionnaire by the bikers who attended this event.

3. RESEARCH MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

Based on the literature review of this subject and considering the unique context of this study – the biggest bike meeting in Europe and one of the biggest in the world; in other words, a liminal space-time par excellence – the proposed research model is the following (see Figure 1):



Source: Own elaboration

First, the model intends to analyse the relationship between the environment at the Bike Meeting and the adoption of liminal behaviours, suggesting that they are positively correlated. Second, the model evaluates the relationship between the liminal behaviours adopted during the event and the availability for sex and romance, suggesting that the excesses and the transgressions influence the availability for sexual or romantic activities. Third, it intends to understand the relationship between the availability for sex and romance and the individuals' degree of satisfaction, suggesting that they have a positive effect on tourists' satisfaction. Finally, it seeks to realize the relationship between tourists' satisfaction and their intention to return, suggesting that satisfaction has a positive effect on the intention to return.

There are several theoretical and empirical studies on the relationships between the environment, liminality, sexuality, satisfaction and loyalty to the destination (Andrews and Les Roberts, 2012; Bauer and McKercher, 2003; Carr and Poria, 2010; Dmitrovic *et al.*, 2008; Evans, Jamal and Foxall, 2006; Herold, Garcia and DeMoya, 2001; Jones and Sasser, 1995; McKercher, Denizci-Guillet and Ng, 2012; Oppermann, 2000, 1999, 1998; Oom do Valle *et al.*, 2006; Pritchard and Morgan, 2006; Ryan and Hall, 2001; Trauer and Ryan, 2005; Weichselbaumer, 2012; Wickens, 2002; Woodside and Lysonski, 1989; among others). However, none of them offers a simultaneous relationship between all of these constructs. Some authors (Andrews and Les Roberts, 2012; Bauer and McKercher, 2003; Pritchard and Morgan, 2006; Ryan and Hall, 2001) argue that the environment at the

destination or, in other words, the festive and relaxing atmosphere, enhances the adoption of liminal behaviours, because the true nature of tourism as a liminal experience is to represent a rupture in the everyday life. Following this line, the first hypothesis of this research is presented:

H₁ – Environment has a positive effect on the adoption of liminal behaviours.

Other authors (Andrews and Les Roberts, 2012; Bauer and McKercher, 2003; Carr and Poria, 2010; Pritchard and Morgan, 2006; Ryan and Hall, 2001; Selännemi, 2003 *in* Bauer and McKercher, 2003) claim that liminality, as a transition of everyday roles and responsibilities for new experiences that go beyond the norms, is inwardly related with the availability for sex and romance in a tourism context. In this sense, the second hypothesis is presented:

H₂ – Liminal behaviours have a positive effect on the availability for sex and romance.

The engagement in sexual or romantic activities contributes, in turn, to the tourists' satisfaction: with the vacation trip, with the destination, with themselves (Bauer and McKercher, 2003; Oppermann, 1998, 1999; Weichselbaumer, 2012; Wickens, 2002). On this basis, the third hypothesis of this study is proposed:

H₃ – The availability for sex and romance has a positive effect on satisfaction.

Finally, the literature suggests that high levels of satisfaction lead to high levels of loyalty, so it is possible to say that satisfaction has a direct impact on loyalty (Dmitrovic *et al.*, 2008; Evans, Jamal and Foxall, 2006; Herold, Garcia and DeMoya, 2001; Jones and Sasser, 1995; McKercher, Denizci-Guillet and Ng, 2012; Oom do Valle *et al.*, 2006; Oppermann, 2000; Trauer and Ryan, 2005; Woodside and Lysonski, 1989). This study is no exception, so the fourth and last hypothesis of this research is presented:

H₄ – Satisfaction has a positive effect on the intention to return.

4. METHODOLOGY

Based on a literature review about sexuality and tourism (Ilkcaracan and Jolly, 2007; Bauer and McKercher, 2003; Herold, Garcia and DeMoya, 2001; Ryan and Hall, 2001; Pritchard *et al.*, 2000; Oppermann, 1998; Ryan and Kinder, 1996; Gagnon *et al.*, 1995; Giddens, 1992; Kinsey, 1948, 1953, among others), a questionnaire was designed with 26 open and closed questions. The random sample¹ included 470 tourists visiting the 29th Faro International Bike Meeting in 2010. From the 470 collected surveys, 449 were validated, demonstrating a non-response rate below 10.0%.

To ensure confidentiality, the names of participants were not requested, and it was assured to all respondents that their responses would remain completely confidential and anonymous, and that they would only be used for academic purposes. Participation in this study was also completely voluntary. The questionnaire was self-administered in order to guarantee the respondents' freedom of expression, as well as the absence of the researcher's influence (Patton, 1990). According to Ghiglione and Matalon (1997) the self-administered

¹ The sample size was calculated for a confidence level of 95.0% and a maximum error margin of 4.5%, based on 30,000 visitors annually.

questionnaire is also applied when the questions are likely to cause some embarrassment, as it is in the case of sexuality. The variables used in this study are of ordinal categorical type, following the recommendations of Chin (1998), Fornell and Larcker (1981) and Gefen and Straub (2005), and it uses a Likert scale of five points² (Gilbert and Hudson, 2000; Gonzalez and Bello, 2002) except for the latent variable 'intention to return'³. However, the reduced dimension of the questionnaire – considering the specificity of the event – did not allow the collection of other useful indicators. Even so, the adopted procedures are a guarantee of the validity/reliability as well as of the fulfilment of the main objective of this study.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Faro International Bike Meeting is a homosocial event. Like the majority of the leisure sports that involve risk and physical effort, motorcycling is also typified as an activity of the male domain. Even so, and like other studies suggest, the female emancipation has been bringing more women to motorcycling (Roster, 2007). These results are not an exception. In fact, although the great majority of the Faro International Bike Meeting's visitors are male (67.0%), many women already participate in the event (33.0%). The ages of participants range from 18 to 76 years old, but the average age is 35. They are Portuguese (52.1%), Spanish (22.0%) or British (18.0%); the majority are married or living together (56.8%), but others are single (30.7%). Their education level lies primarily at the high school level (49.7%) or the university level (37.9%), and they are mostly employed (82.4%). They arrived in the Algarve by motorcycle (72.4%), in the company of friends (44.8%), with a spouse/partner (27.4%), or even alone (10.0%). They stayed at the camp of the Bike Meeting (79.5%) for about five nights, which is the reason that they are designated as tourists.

Partial Least Squares (PLS) was chosen to conduct the data analyses in this study. PLS is a non-parametric strand of the Structural Equation Modeling, also designated by SEM, and it aims to examine the significance of the relationships between research constructs and the predictive power of the dependent variables (Chin, 1998). Thus, PLS is suitable for predictive applications and theory building. PLS also does not place a very high requirement of normal distribution on the source data (Chin, 1998; Gefen and Straub, 2005) and has the ability to handle a relatively small sample size (Barclay *et al.*, 1995; Chin, 1998). SmartPLS 2.0 was specifically used in this study.

5.1. Measurement model

To assess the constructs, we conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using PLS. Based on the CFA results, we analysed convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability of all the multiple-item scales, following the guidelines of Fornell and Larcker (1981), Gefen and Straub (2005) and Hutchinson *et al.* (2009).

In PLS, the internal consistency of each item is evaluated by the loadings (or simple correlations) of the measures with their constructs. The rule accepted by most researchers is that one should retain all of the items with loadings above the cutoff of 0.70 (Chin, 1998). In our model, loadings ranged from 0.700 to 0.911. Cronbach's Alpha is regarded as the first measure to be used for assessing the quality of the measurement model (Churchill, 1979). However, some authors (Barclay *et al.*, 1995; Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Hutchinson *et al.*, 2009) consider that this measure is very restricted, taking into account the assumption that all indicators assume the same importance level. Instead, they propose a composite

² Scale of importance: 1 – Not important; 2 – Somewhat important; 3 – Moderately important; 4 – Very important; 5 – Extremely important; and Scale of agreement: 1 – Strongly disagree; 2 – Disagree; 3 – Neither agree nor disagree; 4 – Agree; 5 – Strongly agree.

³ Scale: 1 – No; 2 – Maybe; 3 – Yes.

measure that takes into account the weight of each item in the respective construct. In this case, composite reliabilities in our measurement model ranged from 0.665 to 0.935, above the recommended cutoff of 0.50. Convergent validity is given by the weight of each item (loadings) in the construct and the corresponding *t-bootstrap*. As mentioned above, the loadings ranged from 0.700 to 0.911 ($p < 0.05$). Discriminant validity was assessed by comparing the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of each individual construct with shared variances between this individual construct and all the other constructs. Higher AVE of the individual construct than shared variances and cross loadings suggests discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Comparing all the correlations and square roots of AVEs shown on the diagonal, the results indicated adequate discriminant validity. Tables 1, 2 and 3 show all the requirements for convergent validity and discriminant validity.

Table 1 – The assessment of the measurement model

Constructs	Items	Loadings	T-statistics	Composite Reliability	AVE
Environment	The Meeting environment facilitates disinhibition	0.820	2.790	0.935	0.819
	The erotic shows at the Meeting facilitate sexual interaction	0.879	3.624		
	The Meeting environment facilitates finding a new partner	0.866	2.710		
	The Meeting environment facilitates sexual opportunities	0.865	3.076		
	The Meeting organization facilitates encounters with sexual partners	0.878	3.147		
Liminal behaviours	At the Meeting I usually drink too much	0.787	2.627	0.906	0.706
	At the Meeting I feel completely anonymous, free and without rules	0.846	3.161		
	At the Meeting I can do different things that I don't do in everyday life	0.911	4.065		
	At the Meeting I do things totally radical and socially censurable	0.812	4.120		
Sex and Romance	At the Meeting I increase my sexual activity level	0.840	3.790	0.895	0.588
	At the Meeting I usually have sex with local people	0.745	2.432		
	At the Meeting I usually have sex with other tourists	0.797	2.746		
	On vacation I am willing to pay for sexual services	0.765	1.762		
	On vacation I am willing to have sex with an unknown person	0.703	1.690		
Satisfaction	Overall satisfaction with the Algarve	0.868	2.019	0.702	0.549
	Overall satisfaction with the Bike Meeting	0.700	1.683		
Intention to return	Intention to return to the Algarve	0.715	1.699	0.665	0.498
	Intention to return to the Bike Meeting	0.701	1.685		

Source: Own elaboration

Table 2 – Discriminant validity

	Environment	Liminal behaviours	Sex and Romance	Satisfaction	Intention to re
Environment	0.905				
Liminal behaviours	0.904	0.840			
Sex and Romance	0.833	0.719	0.767		
Satisfaction	0.391	0.346	0.398	0.741	
Intention to return	0.287	0.276	0.246	0.647	0.665

Note: Square root of average variance extracted (AVE) is shown on the diagonal of the matrix; inter-construct correlation is shown off the diagonal. Source: Own elaboration

Table 3 – Cross Loadings

Items	Environment	Liminal behaviours	Sex and Romance	Satisfaction	Intention to return
The Meeting environment facilitates disinhibition	0.820	0.715	0.594	0.285	0.219
The erotic shows at the Meeting facilitate sexual interaction	0.879	0.796	0.706	0.422	0.263
The Meeting environment facilitates finding a new partner	0.866	0.788	0.672	0.342	0.261
The Meeting environment facilitates sexual opportunities	0.865	0.779	0.685	0.291	0.224
The Meeting organization facilitates encounters with sexual partners	0.878	0.814	0.719	0.341	0.266
At the Meeting I usually drink too much	0.701	0.787	0.551	0.256	0.242
At the Meeting I feel completely anonymous, free and without rules	0.732	0.846	0.589	0.296	0.225
At the Meeting I can do different things that I don't do in everyday life	0.873	0.911	0.734	0.343	0.260
At the Meeting I do things totally radical and socially censurable	0.716	0.812	0.521	0.257	0.199
At the Meeting I increase my sexual activity level	0.838	0.760	0.840	0.409	0.251
At the Meeting I usually have sex with local people	0.665	0.587	0.745	0.263	0.201
At the Meeting I usually have sex with other tourists	0.703	0.599	0.797	0.352	0.213
On vacation I am willing to pay for sexual services	0.510	0.417	0.765	0.260	0.145
On vacation I am willing to have sex with an unknown person	0.443	0.356	0.703	0.221	0.121
On vacation I am willing to have sex without condom	0.514	0.421	0.744	0.255	0.144
Overall satisfaction with the Algarve	0.338	0.307	0.363	0.868	0.572
Overall satisfaction with the Bike Meeting	0.232	0.193	0.205	0.700	0.363
Intention to return to the Algarve	0.180	0.176	0.211	0.462	0.715
Intention to return to the Bike Meeting	0.225	0.215	0.134	0.450	0.701

Source: Own elaboration

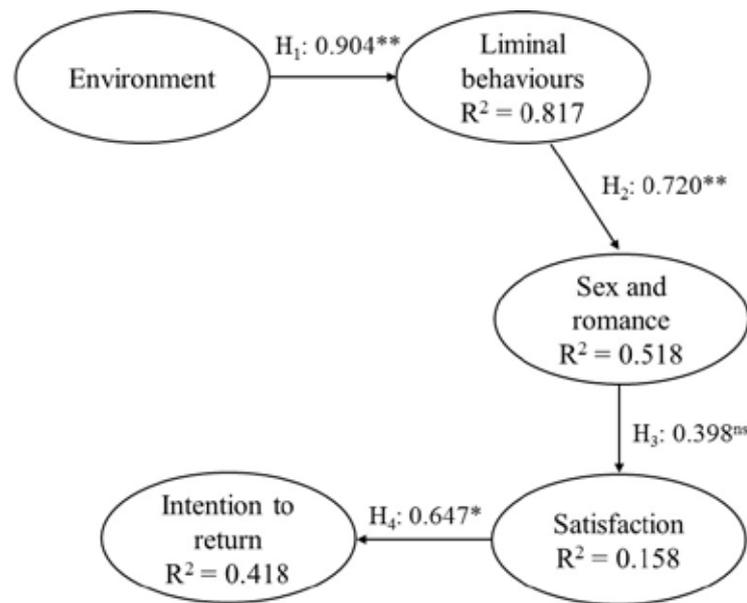
5.2. Structural model

To test the proposed hypotheses, the structural model was fitted using the full sample. Assessment of the structural model involves estimating the path coefficients and the R^2 values for each construct. Path coefficients indicate the strengths of the relationships between the constructs, while R^2 values measure the predictive power of the structural model and indicate the amount of variance explained by the exogenous variables (Hutchinson *et al.*, 2009). Through estimation via PLS, path coefficients were calculated for the hypotheses and the R^2 values for the endogenous constructs. The results are shown in Figure 2.

As indicated by path coefficients and the associated significance level, only the influence of the availability for sex and romance on satisfaction is not significant at the 0.05 level ($\beta = 0.398$, $t = 1.173$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting the rejection of H_3 .

However, the analysis of the remaining path coefficients reveals statistically significant relationships between the constructs. The significant path coefficient ($\beta = 0.904$, $t = 6.551$, $p < 0.01$) indicates that the environment has a positive effect on the adoption of liminal behaviours during the event, supporting H_1 . The adoption of liminal behaviours also has a positive effect on the availability for sex and romance ($\beta = 0.720$, $t = 3.133$, $p < 0.01$), supporting H_2 . Finally, the model shows that satisfaction has a positive effect on the intention to return ($\beta = 0.647$, $t = 1.687$, $p < 0.05$), supporting H_4 .

Figure 2 – Results of model testing



** *p*-value < 0.01; * *p*-value < 0.05;
ns: not significant.

Source: Own elaboration

As shown in Figure 2, the proposed model has a reasonable predictive power. It is the construct ‘liminal behaviours’ which has a greater predictive power ($R^2 = 0.817$), indicating that the model explains 81.7% of the variance in this construct. The latent variables ‘sex and romance’, ‘satisfaction’ and ‘intention to return’ have lower levels of R^2 (51.8%, 15.8% and 41.8%, respectively), thus anticipating the possibility of improving the model, including other latent variables such as the expectations, the motivations for travelling and the psychographic profile of the respondents. Still, it is noted that the variance explained by the constructs ‘sex and romance’ (around 52%) and ‘intention to return’ (around 42%) confirms the importance of sex and romance in the tourism context, as suggested by the literature, and the role they play in tourists’ place attachment (Gu and Ryan, 2008).

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study tests a structural equation model with latent variables applied to the relationships between environment, liminal behaviours, sex and romance, satisfaction and intention to return. The aim of the study is to understand the relationships between these variables and in which way they manifest in the behaviour of bikers attending the Faro International Bike Meeting. To this end, 449 visitors were queried at the 29th Faro International Bike Meeting, and the main results are presented below.

To begin, one must say that motorcycling is a homosocial practice. In other words, it is a sport of the male domain. This assumption is supported by the data collected, taking into account that the great majority of visitors to the Faro International Bike Meeting are male (67.0%). The representativeness of women in this kind of sport is minimal (33.0%), and many of them go to the meeting with their conventional partners (47.3%). This aspect is relevant in the way that sexual and romantic practices (measured through the items: ‘at the

Meeting I increase my sexual activity level', 'at the Meeting I usually have sex with local people', 'at the Meeting I usually have sex with other tourists', 'on vacation I am willing to pay for sexual services', 'on vacation I am willing to have sex with an unknown person' and 'on vacation I am willing to have sex without condom') are barred to more than half of the male visitors, or in other words, to those who go 'alone' or with 'friends' to the meeting. For them, the opportunity of finding "available" women is virtually non-existent – only 3.4% of the inquired women admitted to being alone at the meeting. This means that sexual or romantic practices during the event occur mostly with the usual partners. It is, therefore, a (re)investment in the conventional relationship, more than the search or the concretization of occasional sexual relationships.

The next topic worthy of discussion is the fact that the relationships between most of the constructs proposed in the model are statistically significant. Statistical significance is evident in the case of the relationship between the environment and the adoption of liminal behaviours ($\beta = 0.904$, $t = 6.551$, $p < 0.01$), supporting H_1 (environment has a positive effect on the adoption of liminal behaviours), in accordance with Andrews and Les Roberts (2012), Bauer and McKercher (2003), Pritchard and Morgan (2006) and Ryan and Hall (2001). In fact, an atmosphere that facilitates disinhibition, and that is characterized by a strong erotic component, acts as an invitation to the excesses and to the transgressions of the social norms. The item 'the erotic shows at the Meeting facilitate sexual interaction' is the one that mostly contributes to the construct 'environment' (*loading* = 0.879), and the item 'at the Meeting I can do different things that I don't do in everyday life' is the one that has higher "weight" in the construct 'liminal behaviours' (*loading* = 0.911). Besides these, the focus goes to the items 'at the Meeting I feel completely anonymous, free and without rules', 'at the Meeting I do things totally radical and socially censurable' and 'at the Meeting I usually drink too much', which significantly contribute to 'liminal behaviours' (*loadings* = 0.846, 0.812 and 0.787, respectively). This means that the environment at the Faro International Bike Meeting undoubtedly authorizes transgressive behaviours or, at least, behaviours susceptible of criticism in another social context, including behaviours such as the consumption of alcohol and drugs or a certain «carnivalization» (Diken and Laustsen, 2004).

In addition, the results of this study show that the liminal behaviours adopted at the meeting have a positive effect on the availability for sex and romance ($\beta = 0.720$, $t = 3.133$, $p < 0.01$), supporting the H_2 and in conformity with the literature (Andrews and Les Roberts, 2012; Bauer and McKercher, 2003; Carr and Poria, 2010; Pritchard and Morgan, 2006; Ryan and Hall, 2001; Selänniemi, 2003 *in* Bauer and McKercher, 2003). Indeed, it is easy to understand that the consumption of psychoactive substances, combined with the loosening of social rules, may facilitate the search of new sexual partners or a major availability for (re) investment in the established relationships. Moreover, the items 'at the Meeting I increase my sexual activity level' and 'at the Meeting I usually have sex with other tourists' are those that most contribute to the construct 'sex and romance' (*loadings* = 0.840 and 0.797, respectively). The importance they have provides evidence that the availability for sexual and romantic activities concerns conventional partners. Although some individuals manifest the willingness to get involved with strangers, their sexual opportunities are compromised, at least at the Bike Meeting where the number of single visitors is relatively small.

Despite the strong erotic component of this event, where sex and romance play important roles, the H_3 (the availability for sex and romance has a positive effect on satisfaction) was not confirmed by the results of this study ($\beta = 0.398$, $t = 1.173$, $p < 0.05$). The visitors' satisfaction seems to be more associated to the event itself, than to sexual or romantic practices. In addition, the relatively low predictive power of the construct 'satisfaction' (R^2

= 0.158) denotes the need to include more specific indicators to assess the participants' satisfaction.

In a general way, the bikers' satisfaction with the Faro International Bike Meeting and with the Algarve is high (89.1% and 90.6%, respectively). In this sense, and according to the literature on this topic (Dmitrovic *et al.*, 2008; Evans, Jamal and Foxall, 2006; Herold, Garcia and DeMoya, 2001; Jones and Sasser, 1995; McKercher, Denizci-Guillet and Ng, 2012; Oom do Valle *et al.*, 2006; Oppermann, 2000; Trauer and Ryan, 2005; Woodside and Lysonski, 1989), the intention to return is also high, supporting H₄ (satisfaction has a positive effect on the intention to return). The item that mostly contributes to the construct 'intention to return' is 'intention to return to the Algarve' (*loading* = 0.715), showing a higher degree of uncertainty about returning to the Bike Meeting. Two possible explanations might clarify this discrepancy: first, because the Bike Meeting is a scheduled event that may collide with individual availabilities; second, because the economic context of the country has been constraining family budgets, limiting participation in this type of event (primarily for the national visitors).

Finally, the results of this study contribute to the existing literature in several ways. On the one hand, it is a study about liminal behaviours that relates environment, liminality, sexuality, satisfaction and intention to return. The relationship between most of these constructs was proven. Only the relationship between the 'availability for sex and romance' and 'satisfaction' (H₃) was not statistically significant at a confidence level of 95%. On the other hand, because this study is about tourists with very particular characteristics, even if they come mainly motivated by participation in the Faro International Bike Meeting, many of them reveal their availability to get involved in sexual or romantic activities, either with their usual partners or occasional ones. They adopt liminal behaviours during the meeting and they are very satisfied with the Algarve and with the Bike Meeting, as well as showing a strong propensity for returning. Because many of them extend their stay beyond the event, choosing to spend a mini-vacation in the Algarve, the economic impacts of this aspect are fairly significant. Therefore, a deeper knowledge of their characteristics and behaviours is extremely important not only for the meeting's organization (Moto Clube Faro) but also for the hospitality sector in the region. A new market segment is growing in the Algarve due to the Faro International Bike Meeting.

Although the present study significantly contributed to the literature, it has several limitations. The dimension of the questionnaire is one of them. The context of the application did not allow exploring more questions. It was imperative that the questionnaire was as short as possible to ensure a good response from the respondents. The unruly nature of this event also prevented the choice of using other intimate questions of great importance for the study. To further determine the potential of the model, additional research is also needed, such as monitoring the study throughout other editions of the event and identifying differences in the answers according to gender.

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