

Online Travel Agencies and the Creation of new tourist destinations: a study about Hurb and Olímpia

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Abstract English

The objective of this study is to understand the extent to which online tourism agencies can help in the creation of new destinations. The dissertation is based on the case study of Olímpia (SP) and focuses on Hurb's involvement in the destination development process. It follows a qualitative methodology - an exploratory research - about the influence of Hurb in the development of Olímpia. Six interviews were conducted with executives of Hurb and Olímpia, using a semi-structured script about the influence of Hurb in 5 tourism dimensions. In addition, the analysis of primary data from Hurb and Olímpia contributed to the illustration of the research hypotheses. The results show that Hurb played a fundamental role in the development of Olímpia as a destination. The platform was the city's main marketing tool, and the demand created by the platform had a direct impact on the city's tourism services. The demand created by Hurb was the beginning of tourism development of the destination and had an impact on the economic and social development of the region. The main limitations of the research are the difficulty of transferring the results to larger populations, linguistic ambiguities and biases in data analysis. In addition, the process of creating a destination was a 10-year process, and details may have been forgotten or not mentioned in the interviews. The study provided important insights into the importance of distribution channels in new destination creation and confirmed the importance of entrepreneurs in this process.

Keywords: *tourism, tourism destinations, distribution channels, destination structuring, online travel agencies, Olímpia (SP), Hurb*

Title: Online Travel Agencies and the Creation of new tourist destinations: a study about Hurb and Olímpia

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Abstract Portuguese

O objetivo deste estudo é compreender em que medida as agências de turismo online podem ajudar na criação de novos destinos. A dissertação é baseada no estudo de caso de Olímpia (SP) e tem como foco o envolvimento do Hurb no processo de desenvolvimento do destino. Segue uma metodologia qualitativa - uma pesquisa exploratória - sobre a influência do Hurb no desenvolvimento do Olímpia. Foram realizadas seis entrevistas com executivos do Hurb e Olímpia, utilizando um roteiro semiestruturado sobre a influência do Hurb em 5 dimensões do turismo. Além disso, a análise dos dados primários do Hurb e Olímpia contribuiu para a ilustração das hipóteses de pesquisa. Os resultados mostram que o Hurb desempenhou um papel fundamental no desenvolvimento do Olympia como destino. A plataforma foi a principal ferramenta de marketing da cidade, e a demanda criada pela plataforma teve impacto direto nos serviços turísticos da cidade. A demanda criada pelo Hurb foi o início do desenvolvimento turístico do destino e teve impacto no desenvolvimento econômico e social da região. As principais limitações da pesquisa são a transferência dos resultados para populações maiores, ambiguidades linguísticas e vieses na análise dos dados. Além disso, o processo de criação de um destino foi um processo de 10 anos, e detalhes podem ter sido esquecidos ou não mencionados nas entrevistas. O estudo forneceu insights importantes sobre a importância dos canais de distribuição na criação de novos destinos e confirmou a importância dos empreendedores nesse processo.

Palavras-chave: *turismo, destinos turísticos, canais de distribuição, estruturação de destinos, agências de viagens online, Olímpia (SP), Hurb*

Título: Agências de viagens online e a criação de novos destinos turísticos: um estudo sobre Hurb e Olímpia

Autor: Ana Carolina Vaz Feliciano

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism can be defined as a set of social, economic, political and cultural activities with a complex and systemic character (Carvalho & Pimental, 2015). When discussing the topic of tourism, it is usually assumed that the planning and creation of new destinations depends only on internal factors and the initiative of local actors (Carvalho & Pimental, 2015). But what if other market players also influence the creation of new destinations?

The growth of tourism in a region can have a direct or indirect impact on up to 17 other sectors: Hospitality, Food and Beverage, Transportation, Attractions, Shopping, Communications, Energy, Financial Services, Agriculture, General Services, Fuels, Utilities, Education, Real Estate, Hospitals, Entertainment, and Logistics (FGV Projetos, 2017). The creation of a new destination can impact the entire economy of this region.

This research aims to understand the impact of online travel agencies on the creation of new destinations by studying the influence of Hurb (former Hotel Urbano) on the creation of the Olímpia destination.

Olímpia is a city located in the northwest of the state of São Paulo, 430 km from the state capital. Olímpia used to be an agricultural town and is now known for its thermal water springs. The development of tourism in the city began in the early 2010s, and today Olímpia hosts the most visited water park in Latin America and the second largest in the world, with more than 2 million visitors per year.

Hurb is one of the largest online travel agencies in Brazil, selling around 60 thousand trips per month to hundreds of thousands of travelers. (Rolim, Simões & Figueiredo, 2020). The company's proprietary technological platform develops solutions to optimize and facilitate travel for everyone, connecting people and places. The company was founded in 2011 by an experienced team and a leader in the technology and tourism market. In less than 10 years, the company has reached 25 million registered travelers, 35,000 destinations around the world and more than 17 million followers on social networks, making it the largest fan page in global tourism. With 800 employees, Hurb is a global brand headquartered in Rio de Janeiro and operates throughout Brazil and abroad, with offices in Porto (Portugal), Sorocaba (SP) and in Montreal (Canada).

The objective of this research is to understand the extent to which Hurb has driven the development of Olímpia as a tourist destination, particularly in terms of the strategic

dimensions of tourism services and equipment, marketing, local economy, business capacity and social aspects of the city of Olímpia. The first hypothesis of the research is that the demand created by the Hurb directly influences the tourist services and equipment and the marketing dimensions of Olímpia. The second hypothesis is that the Hurb indirectly influenced the local economy, business capability and social aspects of the city of Olímpia, through the increase in demand for accommodation in Olímpia and the higher volume of tourists in the city.

This is a qualitative, exploratory research based on data collected through interviews with Hurb and Olímpia executives to understand the evolution of the tourist destination process and the role that Hurb played in it. The research also uses primary data collected from the Olímpia municipality website and data provided by Hurb.

The research is divided into 6 chapters to facilitate reading and understanding the research. The first chapter is the introduction, in which the object of the research is presented.

The second chapter is the literature review, where important literature for the topic is discussed. This chapter discusses the main author and the main concepts that will be discussed throughout the research. The main topics discussed are the definition of destinations, the tourism framework, the relationship between tourism and regional development, the definition of online travel agencies and distribution channels. The chapter also includes a brief discussion of destination competitiveness and tourism real estate development. Although these topics are not covered in detail in the study, it is important to discuss the concepts because of their relevance.

The third chapter is the methodology, which explains the methodology and data collection. The method used is qualitative research, and the instruments, data collection, population, and sample are also explained. The method and the form of application are explained to answer the problem and confirm the hypotheses.

The fourth chapter is the case study, in which the history of Hurb and Olímpia is discussed and how the development of tourism in the city took place. This chapter is the basis for the analysis of the research presented in the next chapter.

In the fifth chapter, the results of the investigation are explained and it is determined whether they confirm the hypotheses or not. This chapter also consists of the implications and limitations, and provides suggestions for future research on this topic.

The sixth and final chapter summarizes the findings and the results of the study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents important literature on the subject. The chapter is divided into two main dimensions, containing the main concepts discussed throughout the research.

The first dimension is in regards to Tourism Development and encompasses the concepts **Tourism** (Beni, 1991; Maia et al, 2022; FGV Projetos, 2017; Mtur 2007, Pezzi & Vianna, 2015; Abreu, 2008), **Tourism Destinations** (Buhalis, 2000;Buhalis 2013, Lamsfuss & Alzua- Sorzabal, 2013), **Tourism and Regional Development** (Speier, 2006; Abrantes, Nascimento & Costa, 2014; Cunha, 2013), **Competitiveness of a tourist destination** (Barbosa, Oliveira & Rezende, 2010), **Tourism Framework - SISTUR** (Beni, 1991; Carvalho & Pimentel,2015), e-tourism (Kazandzhieva & Santana, 2019; Buhalis, 2003; Şoavă and Bădică, 2008; Băbăiță, Ispas, Ghenescu and Hălălău, 2010; Jonathan and Tarigan, 2016; Navío-Marco, Ruiz-Gómez & Sevilla-Sevilla, 2018), Smart Tourism Destinations (Buhalis, 2013) and **Tourism and Real Estate Development** (Bertoldi, Cerruti & Russo, 2009; Silva & Ferreira, 2007).

The second dimension is in regards to Distribution Channels and encompasses the discussion of **Distribution Channels** (Yanamoto & Alberton, 2006; Santa Ana, 2019; Beni, 1998; Marin, 2004; Guimarães & Borges, 2008; Santa Ana, 2019; Gosson et al., 2014; Swarbrooke & Horner 2002), **Online Tourism** (Santa Ana, 2019; Flecha e Costa, 2014;Maia et al, 2022, Deloitte 2018; Xiang ,2018), **Travel Agencies** (Braga, 2008; Pazini & Abrahão, 2014; UNWTO,2001) and **Online Travel Agencies** (Buhalis & Licata ,2002; Buhalis & Connor, 2005; Pelizze, 2005; Candioto;2012; Santa Ana, 2019; Perinotto et al, 2020; Pazini & Abrahão, 2014;Navío-Marco, Ruiz-Gómez & Sevilla-Sevilla, 2018; Qi et al., 2010; Rezgo, 2019).

It is important to emphasize that this research will not study the level of competitiveness and the case of real estate development in Olímpia, but the researcher believes that it is important to present the concepts because of their relevance to the development of tourist destinations.

2.1 Tourism Development

2.1.1 Tourism:

Beni (1991) argues that tourism is an activity resulting from the combination of natural, cultural, social and economic resources. Tourism is a very important industry that generates jobs and income in countries around the world (Maia et al., 2022). According to FGV Projetos (2017), tourism directly affects the following economic sectors: Hospitality, Food and Beverage, Transportation, Attractions, and Shopping. Indirectly, tourism affects the following sectors: Communications, Energy, Financial Services, Agriculture, General Services, Fuels, Utilities, Education, Real Estate, Hospitals, Entertainment, and Logistics (FGV Projetos, 2017). When considering the economic impact of tourism, it is important to keep in mind that the value of the expenditures made by tourists is only part of the economic impact and other aspects must be taken into account, such as indirect impacts, such as purchases from suppliers and new businesses that are opened as a function of tourism revenues (FGV Projetos, 2017).

The Brazilian Ministry of Tourism (Mtur) divides tourism into 12 different types (Mtur, 2007). The tourism segments can be identified from the identity elements of the offer and also from the characteristics and variables of the demand. The segmentation is defined by the identification of specific consumer groups³ that are characterized based on their peculiarities in relation to some factors that determine their choices, preferences and motivations, that is, based on the characteristics and variables of demand (Mtur, 2007).

Table 1 - Segmentation of Tourism

Segments of Tourism	Definition
Social Tourism	It is the way tourism activities are carried out and practiced that promotes equal opportunities, justice, solidarity and the exercise of citizenship from the point of view of integration.
Ecotourism	Is a segment of tourist activities that uses in a sustainable way the natural and cultural heritage, promotes its conservation and seeks to form an environmental awareness through the interpretation of the environment that promotes the well-being of the population.
Cultural Tourism	Consists of tourist activities associated with the experience of significant elements of historical and cultural heritage and cultural events, enhancing and promoting the

	tangible and intangible assets of culture
Study and Exchange Tourism	Consists of the use of learning and training by professional activities for the purpose of demonstration, knowledge and professional learning
Sports Tourism	Consists of tourist activities resulting from the practice, involvement or observation of sports
Fishing Tourism	Consists of the tourist activities resulting from the practice of amateur fishing
Nautical Tourism	Is characterized by the use of nautical vessels for tourist movement
Adventure Tourism	Consists of tourist movements resulting from the practice of recreational and non-competitive adventure activities
Beach Tourism	Consists of tourist activities related to recreation, entertainment, or rest on beaches, due to the combined presence of water, sun, and heat
Business and Events Tourism	Consists of the totality of tourist activities resulting from professional, associative, institutional, commercial, promotional, technical, scientific and social gatherings
Rural Tourism	Consists of a series of tourist activities developed in rural areas dedicated to agricultural production, the valorization of products and services, and the rescue and promotion of the cultural and natural heritage of the community.
Health Tourism	Consists of tourist activities resulting from the use of resources and services for medical, therapeutic and aesthetic purposes

Source: elaborated by author with data from Mtur (2007)

Experiential tourism can also be considered as another segment of tourism. Pezzi & Vianna (2015) define experiential tourism as a term that describes a way of creating tourist products by making the tourist the protagonist of his own journey. To do this, it is necessary to understand the tourist's expectations, which go beyond the passive viewing of attractions. For the authors, "the concept of experience shows the possibility of living a unique, special,

extraordinary moment that occurs during certain experiences in different moments of life" (Pezzi & Vianna, 2015).

There are other segments of tourism, as Abreu (2008) pointed out when studying the Disney brand: "It is possible to observe the occurrence of different types of tourism, such as thematic tourism, leisure tourism, recreation and entertainment tourism, holiday tourism, educational tourism, this must be a vast tourist offer existing in the place" (Abreu, 2008, p.3)

2.1.2 Tourism Destinations:

There are some different definitions of tourism destinations in the literature. Bieger (2005), cited in Buhalis (2000), defines it as a region chosen by tourists that includes all necessary amenities - accommodations, restaurants, and entertainment (Buhalis, 2013). This definition takes into account the geographical boundaries of the destination.

Buhalis (2000) defines destinations as a mix of tourism products and services that are exclusively produced and offered to the potential customer as an integrated experience (Buhalis, 2013). Soteriades (2012) highlights that the relationship between tourism products and tourism destinations is extremely important due to the nature of the industry - tourism is a combination of components offered at different touch points that are perceived by customers before, during and after the trip. Destination definition depends on tourists' perceptions of what motivates them to travel (Lamsfuss & Alzua-Sorzabal 2013). Destinations can also be a perceptual concept (Buhalis, 2000) that can be interpreted differently by consumers depending on their itinerary, background, purpose of travel, education level, and previous experiences (Buhalis, 2000). Destinations allow the impact of tourism to be assessed at the regional level and demand and supply to be managed to maximize benefits for all stakeholders (Buhalis, 2000).

Buhalis (2013) argues that successful destinations can be structured according to the 6As :

1. **Attractions** - they can be natural, artificial or cultural.
2. **Accessibility** - transportation system within the destination.
3. **Amenities** - accommodations, dining, and recreational activities.
4. **Available packages** - availability of service packages through intermediaries to draw the attention of tourists to certain unique features of the destination in question

5. **Activities** - activities available at the destination for the tourist to enjoy
6. **Ancillary services** - services of daily use that are not primarily for the tourist's use

The main types of destinations are (Buhalis, 2000):

Figure 1 - Types of Destination

Types of destinations — main target markets and activities undertaken

Type of Destination	Customers	Activities
Urban	Business-MICE	Meetings–incentives–conference–exhibitions Education–religion–health
Seaside	Leisure	Sightseeing–shopping–shows–short breaks
	Business-MICE	Meetings–incentives–conference–exhibitions
Alpine	Leisure	Sea–sun–sand–sex–sports
	Business-MICE	Meetings–incentives–conference–exhibitions
Rural	Leisure	Ski–mountain sports–health
	Business-MICE	Meetings–incentives–conference–exhibitions
Authentic third World	Leisure	Relaxation–agriculture–learning activities–sports
	Business-MICE	Exploring business opportunities–incentives
Unique–exotic–exclusive	Leisure	Adventure–authentic–charities–special interest
	Business-MICE	Meetings–incentives–retreats
	Leisure	Special occasion–honeymoon–anniversary

Source: Buhalis, 2000

2.1.3 Tourism and Regional development:

Tourism is an important option when it comes to development (Speier, 2006). Tourism has a positive impact on improving the quality of life of the poor in developing countries (Bennett et al., 1999 apud Speier, 2006) and has potential for poverty alleviation and social and human development (Speier, 2006). According to Abrantes, Nascimento & Costa (2014), tourism is a regional driver of development. Cunha (2013) argues that tourism contributes to economic development because:

1. Tourism is the activity that can best endogenize local resources. It can contribute to the development of regions by exploiting local heritage and values. This use leads to prosperity and contributes to the sustainability of these resources.
2. Tourism facilitates the transfer of funds from richer to less developed regions. Tourists take advantage of local goods and services and thus represent a form of export. Basic activities such as tourism (where the funds for the goods or services offered by the region come from other regions) create jobs and lead to growth.

3. With the growth of tourism, the region needs investment in infrastructure that supports it and ultimately contributes to the well-being of the population. Examples include the construction of structures and access points, basic sanitation, and the expansion of other public or private services that grow as demand increases.
4. Tourism is an engine for wealth creation: as demand increases and the quality and therefore the competitiveness of these products increases. At the same time, tourism ensures the emergence and innovation of activities and related services that would otherwise tend to disappear.
5. Tourism promotes the revival and use of facilities that for some reason are no longer in operation, the dynamism of abandoned places, the use of all the resources associated with them, which represent a whole heritage that would otherwise be lost.

According to Abrantes, Nascimento & Costa(2014):

Tourism makes a relevant contribution to regional development (in accordance with the national plan and public policies in tourism), due to the use, exploitation and enjoyment of resources, namely endogenous resources, to the creation and improvement of activities and products characteristic of tourism specific to each region[...]Tourism also leads to local economic expansion, with the creation of jobs and services, preferably adequate and compatible with the regional product in focus. As an additional gain, it reinforces the sense of sustainable preservation of the natural (namely the landscape), cultural, historical and traditional heritage of the territories, not only important for being the object of economic exploitation, but also for contributing to the economic sustainability of a common heritage to keep and enjoy. (Abrantes, Nascimento & Costa, 2014, p.32)

The main positive effects of tourism are related to economic and cultural development (Speier, 2006). The economic indicators of tourism can stimulate local, national and regional development and diversify and expand the economy (Speier, 2006 citing Pearce & Butler, 1999):

Tourism's linkage to production in other economic areas boosts the overall economy and stimulates the importation of capital goods (Cattarinich, 2001) - the multiplier effect. These substantial linkages have offered prospects for and benefits to local entrepreneurs, boosting the extent of participation of both the formal and informal economic sectors (Bennett, et al., 1999). It is usually the informal sector that has the greater capacity to create micro and small enterprises, which potentially could provide jobs and the benefits for participation of some of the most disenfranchised people, such as women, the youth, and the poor (Bennett, et al., 1999; UNEP, 2002). In this way, tourism, particularly in developing countries, has been thought to be more labor intensive (Tisdell & Roy, 1998; Williams & Shaw, 1998) than other non-agricultural development options, such as manufacturing (Bennett, et al., 1999), and to offer significant employment especially for the unskilled and semi-skilled (Bennett, et al., 1999; Edgell, 1990; Berno & Bricker, 2001). In addition, the increased economic activity and growth have usually stimulated investment in infrastructure projects, such as transportation, roadways,

harbor facilities, airports, electric generating stations, and telecommunications. All these multiplier effects have made tourism uniquely more varied and expansive than many other development options. (Speier, 2006, p.8)

Tourism development is limited by the capacity of the local cultural environment (Speier, 2006), but can contribute to the preservation and maintenance of cultural heritage, "Tourism can potentially stimulate the revival of traditional festivals and customs, local cultural lifestyles, as well as artisanal production (Stabler, 1997; Sharpley & Telfer, 2002) and can further enhance the preservation of the local traditional cultural heritage sites". (Speier, 2006, p. 8)

2.1.4 Competitiveness of a Tourist Destination:

Barbosa, Oliveira, and Rezende (2010), in their study of Brazilian destination competitiveness, analyze 13 different dimensions that capture elements of destination competitiveness: general infrastructure, access, tourist services and equipment, tourist attractions, marketing, public policy, regional cooperation, monitoring, local economy, business capacity, social aspects, environmental aspects, and cultural aspects (Barbosa, Oliveira & Rezende, 2010):

Table 2 - Tourism Competitiveness Dimensions

Dimension	Definition	Variables
Infrastructure	The ability to support the development of tourism in the destination.	(i) medical care capacity for tourists in the destination, (ii) urban structures in tourist areas, (iii) electricity supply, and (iv) tourist protection services.
Access	Access to destination	(i) access to air transportation, (ii) access to road transportation, (iii) other modes of access (water and rail), and (iv) the transportation system of the destination itself.
Tourism Services and Equipment	Installed capacity of the destination	(i) tourist signage; (ii) tourist information centers; (iii) space for events; (iv) food and lodging capacity; (v)

		capacity to receive tourists; (vi) professional qualifications; and (vii) restaurants.
Tourist Attractions	What motivates tourists to travel from their usual living environment to tourist destinations: natural elements provided by nature; cultural assets and values of a tangible and intangible nature; planned events such as trade fairs, congresses, seminars; technical, scientific and artistic creations	(i) degree of current use; (ii) representativeness; (iii) support from local stakeholders; (iv) conservation status of surrounding landscape/environment; (v) infrastructure; and (vi) access.
Marketing	Marketing provides destinations with the tools to communicate with their target markets. Tourism businesses and public agencies responsible for managing tourism will address the strategies to be used to attract segments with predetermined demand	(i) marketing planning; (ii) participation in trade shows and events; (iii) promotional materials; and (iv) the destination's Internet website.
Public Policies	Public policies for the development of the tourism sector elaborated by local, state and federal governments	(i) degree of cooperation with the state government; (ii) degree of cooperation with the federal government; (iii) planning; and (iv) the existence of cooperation between the private and public sectors.
Regional Cooperation	The division of a geographical area into regions with different objectives, such as planning, management, promotion and sales related to tourism activities (MTur, Sebrae, FGV, 2007).	(i) governance; (ii) regional cooperation projects; (iii) route planning; and (iv) promotion and support of commercial activity.
Monitoring	Structural competitiveness analysis, as all variables are directly related to the	(i) demand studies, (ii) supply studies, (iii) tourism statistics, (iv) measuring the

	tourism industry.	impact of tourism activities, and (v) sector-specific destination studies and surveys.
Local Economy	The importance of other economic activities as a means of increasing and facilitating the development of tourism.	(i) the relative participation of the private sector in the local economy, (ii) community infrastructure, (iii) business infrastructure, and (iv) leveraged businesses and events.
Business Capability	-	(i) professional qualifications; (ii) presence of national and international groups in the tourism sector; (iii) competition and barriers to entry; and (iv) number of large companies, subsidiaries and/or branches.
Social Aspect	-	(i) education; (ii) jobs created by tourism; (iii) policies to deal with and prevent sexual exploitation; (iv) use of tourist attractions and facilities by the population; (v) civic awareness; and (vi) awareness and participation in tourism activities.
Environmental Aspects	-	(i) environmental structure and municipal legislation; (ii) ongoing activities that are potentially harmful to the environment; (iii) public water supply network; public network for the collection and treatment of wastewater; (iv) collection and public disposal of residues; and (v) protection facilities in the municipal area.

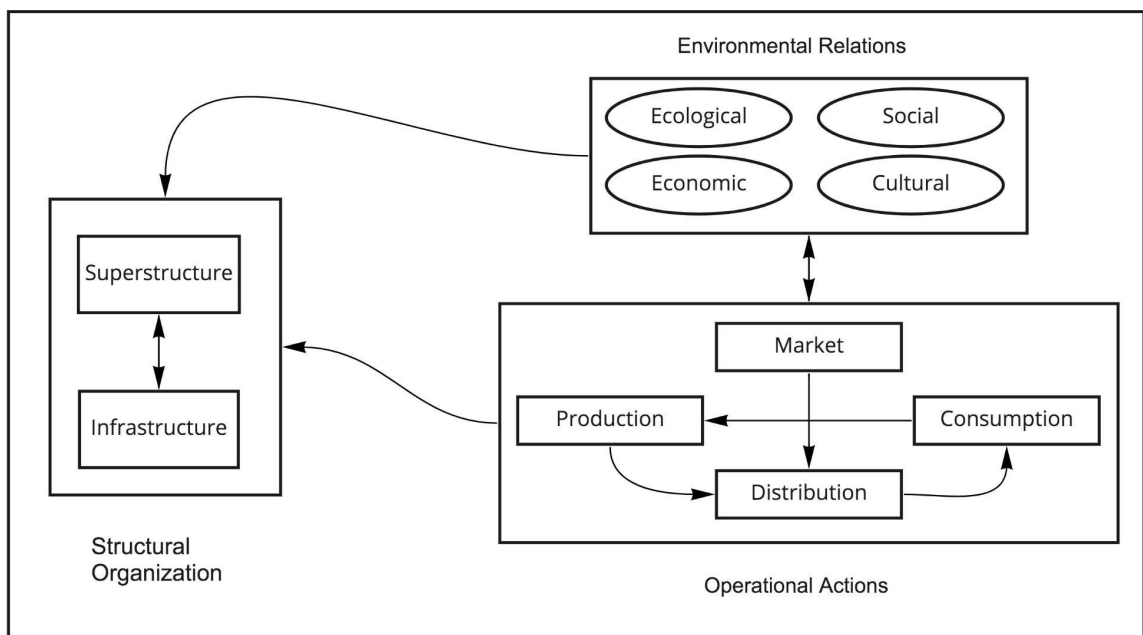
Cultural Aspects	-	(i) cultural production related to tourism; (ii) historical and cultural heritage; and (iii) municipal structure for cultural support.
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Source: Developed by author based in Barbosa, Oliveira & Rezende, 2010

2.1.5 Tourism Frameworks:

For Beni (1991), tourism is a system whose components must be analyzed as a whole rather than separately. Most tourism studies deal with one or more components and no attempt is made to relate them to other important aspects of tourism (Beni, 1991). The tourism system developed by Beni (1991) ("SISTUR") is a consolidation of tourism components.

Figure 2: SISTUR



Source: Developed by author based in Carvalho & Pimentel (2015), Beni (1991)

OTAs are inserted into the distribution function of the SISTUR model (Carvalho & Pimentel, 2015). For a better understanding of SISTUR, each subsystem of the model is explained in the following table:

Table 3 - SISTUR Explanation

Environment	Ecological	Contemplation and contact with nature
	Social	Social structure and mobility and their impact
	Economic	Economic contribution to the development of the touristic destination
	Cultural	Heritage and cultural patrimony
Structure	Superstructure	Management of SISTUR
	Infrastructure	Accessibility conditions of the tourist destination and services
Operations	Market	Supply & Demand
	Production	Intermediary
	Consumption	Travellers
	Distribution	Travel Agencies

Source: Developed by author based in Carvalho & Pimentel (2015), Beni (1991)

Beni (1991) was one of the first authors to recognize the importance of looking at tourism as a whole. Although there are more recent approaches, it is important to discuss his ideas.

Carvalho & Pimentel (2015) argue that the evolution of the interactions between the actors and organizations of the tourism system can be understood at three levels: the attraction, the destination and the region.

In a more recent approach, Kazandzhieva & Santana (2019) discuss the concept of e-tourism. The authors define e-tourism as.

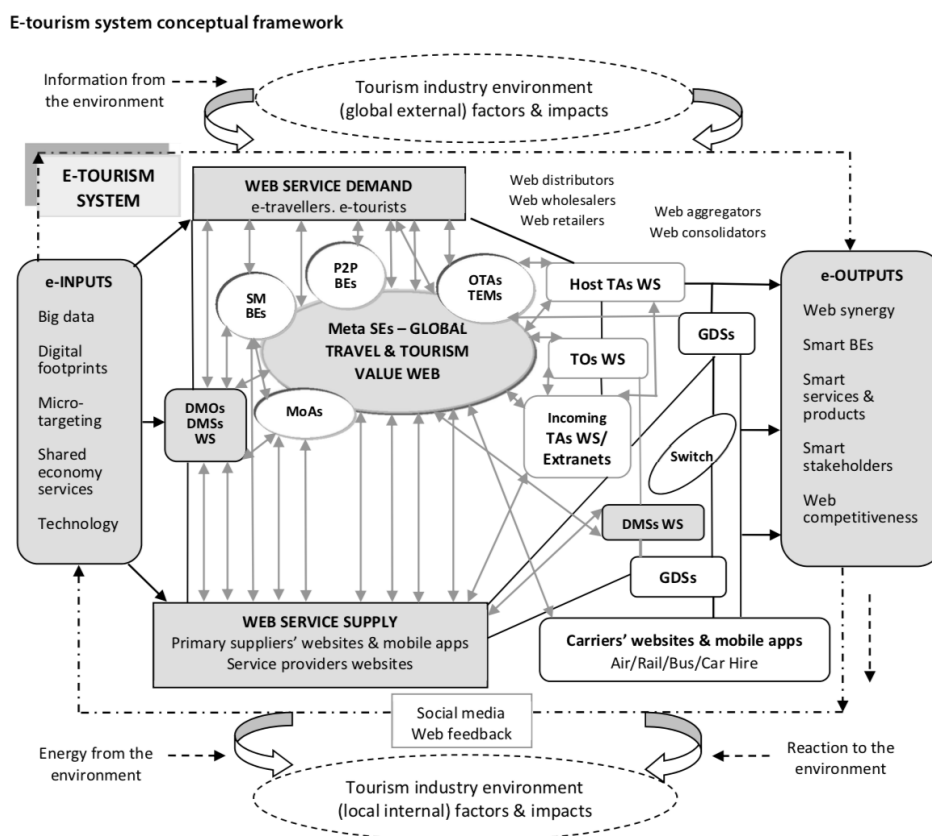
a process of digitization of all managerial and business functions, services and stages of the value chain of the tourism system in order to increase effectiveness in the interactions between tourism companies, consumers and public sector thus achieving competitive sustainability. (Kazandzhieva & Santana, 2019, p.5) .

Buhalis (2003) defines it as the "digitalization of all processes and value chains in the tourism, travel, hospitality, and restaurant industries." It includes:

...all business functions (e-commerce and e-marketing, e-finance and e-accounting, e-HRM and e-procurement, e-Research & Development and e-production) and processes of e-strategy, e-planning and e-management in all sectors of the travel and tourism industry: transport, leisure, tour operators and travel agencies, public sector. (Kazandzhieva & Santana, 2019, p.5)

For Şoavă and Bădică (2008), "is a phenomenon that involves both the consumer and the provider of a particular tourist service". They consider it as "part of e-commerce, which includes rapidly developing technologies (communication and information technologies), the hospitality industry and the management of strategic planning industry (Şoavă and Bădică 2008). For Băbăiță, Ispas, Ghenescu and Hălălău (2010), it is a phenomenon and an alternative form of business and includes the stages of information, reservation and payment, electronically performed tourist services (Kazandzhieva & Santana, 2019). Jonathan and Tarigan (2016) understand it as a way of economic stimulation for the travel and tourism industry at different levels and define it as equivalent to e-marketing and Internet tourism.

Figure 3: E-tourism system conceptual framework



Source: Kazandzhieva & Santana (2019)

According to the authors above:

The structure above reveals the e-tourism system as a non-isolated, non-static or closed system. Its genesis and development have been influenced by various global and local factors and conditions: political, economic, social and cultural, juridical ones. They affect all web subsystems and structural components, being dynamic, open, related and volatile. The strength, direction of impact and fluctuation probability determine to great extent stakeholders' level of appreciation and loyalty towards the complex results of the e-tourism system functioning. (Kazandzhieva & Santana 2019, p. 2)

For Buhalis (2003), business management, information systems and tourism constitute e-tourism (Kazandzhieva & Santana, 2019). The tourist is still the center of the tourism ecosystem, but with the advancement of technology, they become more proactive when it comes to content relationships with other tourists (Navío-Marco, Ruiz-Gómez & Sevilla-Sevilla, 2018). Tourists have become active managers of their business model, as consumers, producers, and developers of tourism activities. They have high expectations for efficiency and low tolerance for barriers to global mobility (Navío-Marco, Ruiz-Gómez & Sevilla-Sevilla, 2018).

Buhalis (2013) discusses the concept of smart tourism destinations. Smart tourism destinations are based on a massive tourism resource data center, supported by the Internet of Things and cloud computing, focused on improving the tourist experience through intelligent identification and monitoring (Buhalis, 2013). The authors argue that a technological platform is needed to share information about tourism activities:

This integrated platform has multiple touch points that could be accessed through a variety of end-user devices which will support the creation and facilitation of real-time tourism experiences and improve the effectiveness of tourism resources management throughout the destination at both the micro and macro level. (Buhalis, 2013, p.5)

In this framework, the main stakeholders are tourism organizations, governments, local residents and local communities, tourists and the environment. In Smart Tourism Destination, Public Private Partnerships are essential, to promote efficiency, to foster creativity and induce innovation (Buhalis, 2013).

Figure 4 - Smart Tourism Destinations

Table 2 Smart tourism destinations characteristics

No.	Stakeholders	Characteristics of outcome
1.	Tourism organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Function as smart hub that coordinates all relevant information and makes it easily accessible for users to access real-time information • Digitisation of core business processes • Optimise their energy use • Engage with local communities, tourists and government in co-creating tourism experience • Organisational agility, speed decision making and responsive to customers' needs based on just-in-time insights
2.	Governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Precision targeting and personalised service • Information governance that support data openness • Regulate data privacy • Establish Public-Private Partnership
3.	Local residents/local communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constantly connected • Sufficiently creative and empowered • Technology savvy • Citizen journalism • Actively involved in developing smart heritage/e-Culture
4.	Tourists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well-connected and well-informed • Active critics and buzz marketers • Demand highly personalised service • Engaged both socially and technologically • Dynamically discuss through social media • Co-create experience • Contribute to content • Utilise end-user devices in multiple touch-points
5.	Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interconnected through Internet of things • Presence of cloud computing services • Innovation ecosystem • Sensor networks throughout the environment • Combine digital information and social contexts which will augment geophysical reality • Interoperable social platforms

Source: Buhalis (2013)

The main priorities are (Buhalis, 2013):

1. Improving the travel experience of tourists
2. Providing a smarter platform for collecting and disseminating information within destinations
3. Facilitating and more efficiently allocating tourism resources
4. Integrating tourism providers at the micro and macro levels.

2.1.6 Tourism and real estate development:

Another important aspect of creating a new tourism destination is real estate development. Bertoldi, Cerruti & Russo (2009) argue that "culture is able to generate economic benefits for the area and activate productive sectors that are economically linked to it and can revitalize the city". According to the authors:

The externalities that culture is able to create in the surrounding territory are manifold: greater social cohesion, greater trade possibilities and thus the movement of information and ideas, perhaps also a greater capacity to attract investment from outside etc[...]It is considered that most of the value of intangible externalities is deposited, so to speak, in the increased value of the soil and buildings that, *ceteris paribus*, become more attractive. (Bertoldi, Cerruti & Russo, 2009, p.15)

In their studies of Turin and the impact of investments in culture in the city, they concluded that "the extended value of cultural assets is the direct, indirect and induced tourism generated by culture, worth about 1 billion euros" (Bertoldi, Cerruti & Russo, 2009). The rehabilitation and architectural restoration in the city increased the value of the buildings in the surrounding areas by about 100 million euros.

According to Silva & Ferreira (2007), tourist activities require a network of urban services, reception, accommodation and entertainment for visitors, which entails the creation of new spaces adapted to this new demand. Studying real estate development in the Brazilian Northeast Coast in the 1990s, they concluded that the acquisition of real estate by tourists in the Northeast increased by 200% and the real estate rented by tourists increased by 64.52%, with an upward trend. The tourist real estate industry is focused on the creation and turnover of financial assets and not only on the profit from the sale of the final product (Silva & Ferreira, 2007).

2.2 Distribution Channels

2.2.1 Distribution Channels:

According to Yamamoto & Alberton (2006):

" they can be defined as a set of interdependent organizations involved in the process of making the product or service available for consumption or use, or even as a scenario in which a free market system develops, where business involving exchange of products and services takes place"(Yamamoto & Alberton, 2006).

Distribution channels satisfy and stimulate tourism demand and are important for the distribution, marketing and promotion of products and services, reducing the costs of the provider (Santa Ana, 2019). When it comes to tourism products and services, there are endless possibilities offered by a large number of suppliers. The distribution channels work as intermediaries that distribute and sell the tourism product or "tourism package" to the final consumer (Beni, 1998; Marin, 2004; Santa Ana, 2019; Guimarães & Borges, 2008). The main role of tourism intermediaries is to make available to end consumers the services provided by primary suppliers, through the individual sale of each of these products or through packages that include some of these services (Gosson et al., 2014). They facilitate the search and classification of products and services demanded by consumers and help them consume a specific combination of product and channel services (Gosson et al., 2014).

Gosson et al. (2014) conducted a study to investigate the influence of tourism distribution channels on customers' accommodation decisions. Both customers and intermediaries are members of the channel, and power is defined as the conditions under which one member of the channel controls or influences the behavior of another member of that channel (Gosson et al, 2014; Ujma, 2001). For Swarbrooke & Horner (2002), the retailer exerts the strongest influence on consumer purchasing decisions, with the travel agent operating in the retail channel playing a fundamental role in favor of the travel agent's interests. For Gosson et al. (2014), travel agents and tour operators, as well as charter companies, reservation systems, and other travel distribution specialists, have far more influence on demand than their counterparts in other industries.

2.2.2 Online Tourism:

When discussing tourism, there are three basic components: the tourist, the destination, and the industry (Santa Ana, 2019).

The Brazilian tourism market is in a process of change due to the "digitalization" of the economy (Santa Ana, 2019). Xiang (2018) argues that there are three forces that change the world: technology, the market, and nature, which accelerate and change society. In the tourism industry, the Internet led to processes of disintermediation and reintermediation of the

distribution of the tourism product and facilitated technological innovation, new business practices, and the transformation of competition in different sectors (Santa Ana, 2019).

The tourist, driven by access to information and technological development, has changed his behavior and become more active in his desires. With easier access to information through easier access to the Internet, the tourist has become an "offer hunter" (Flecha e Costa, 2004) who is demanding and seeks to maximize convenience and profitability (Santa Ana, 2019):

The growth of tourism had as one of the great drivers the digital transformation or the digitization of the economy, a moment marked by rapid transformations in information and communication technologies, with the internet being one of the main components and Brazil, according to SANTA ANNA and JARDIM (2007) is the country in Latin America with the highest growth in internet advances (Santa Ana, 2019, p. 12)

Online tourism is defined by the integration of tourism and the Internet (Maia et al., 2022). Although online tourism has consolidated in developed countries, this sector is still small in emerging market economies (Maia et al., 2022), but has potential to grow. According to Deloitte (2018), "online bookings continue to increase, driving an increasingly competitive digital distribution landscape that connects travelers with more products and improves online travel planning." The Brazilian online tourism market reached \$10 billion in 2016, a 76% increase since 2013 (Maia et al., 2022)

2.2.3 Travel Agencies:

According to Braga (2008), travel agencies are an element of the tourism market that acts as a service aggregator. They are the ones that transform tourist destinations and different equipment into products, being involved in the production and distribution of tourist goods and services". They are private organizations responsible for the production and distribution of tourism products and services (Pazini & Abrahão, 2014). The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines travel agencies as "service enterprises whose main function is intermediation, from which other functions are derived, ranging from providing information and advice to the customer to organizing all kinds of activities related to the travel and tourism sector and elaborating their own products" (UNWTO, 2001).

2..2.4 Online Travel Agencies:

According to Buhalis & Licata (2002) and Buhalis & Connor (2005), cited in Santa Ana (2019), the travel industry has been particularly affected by the development of information and communication technologies (ICT), especially in the distribution of tourism products:

The role of distribution of tourist products and services was performed by export and receptive travel agencies and tour operators, supported by CRS (Computer reservation systems), GDS (Global distribution system) and tour operator systems. The development of the internet, ICTs, and the digitization of the economy, from the 1990s onwards, made the perspective of travel consumption shift from B2B (Business to Business), that is, a company-to-company relationship (travel agencies) for B2C (Business to Customer), that is, business to customer relationship. (Santa Ana, 2019, p. 12)

A new online marketplace has been developed with new contact points between merchants, suppliers and customers (Santa Ana, 2019). ICT and the Internet can be considered as one of the most effective tools to promote tourism (Qi et al., 2010), helping to create a dialogue between supply and demand (Navío-Marco, Ruiz-Gómez & Sevilla-Sevilla, 2018) in the tourism industry. With the possibility of selling tourism products online, leading to decreasing costs and more competitive advantages, the first online travel agencies (OTAs) were created. OTAs are travel aggregators that contact potential travelers via the Internet to sell travel-related products such as flights, cruises, holiday packages, hotel rooms, etc. (Rezgo, 2019). They are intermediaries that have the same definition as traditional travel agencies, but they have a B2C business model (Pelizze, 2005; Candioto, 2012) and focus on reaching a large number of consumers, at any time of day and without geographical boundaries. They can provide the customer with the entire product portfolio and easily make price updates (Pazini & Abrahão, 2014). Through OTAs, it is possible for the user to make a hotel booking anywhere in the world very quickly and easily (Perinotto et al., 2020). According to Santa Ana (2019):

[...]OTAs exceeded the time, distance and location limits and provided consumers with easier access to information and products and services. These companies invest heavily in technology, as they depend on their online platforms to develop their businesses and sales. The company ends up focusing on developing a large number of consumers, regardless of time and

without the geographic limits of a conventional sales operation of a travel agency. (Santa Ana, 2019, p.13)

OTAs are considered a tourism distribution channel (Santa Ana, 2019).

2.3 Conclusion:

This chapter presented the main authors and concepts that will be discussed throughout the research. The following table presents an overview of the literature discussed above:

Table 4 - Overview of the Literature Review

Dimension	Concept	Author	Definition
Tourism Development	Tourism	Beni (1991)	Tourism is an activity resulting from the combination of natural, cultural, social and economic resources
		Maia et al (2022)	Tourism is an important industry that generates jobs and income in countries around the world
		FGV Projetos (2017)	Tourism directly affects the following economic sectors: Hospitality, Food and Beverage, Transportation, Attractions, and Shopping. Indirectly, tourism affects the following sectors: Communications, Energy, Financial Services, Agriculture, General Services, Fuels, Utilities, Education, Real Estate, Hospitals, Entertainment, and Logistics
		Mtur (2007)	Tourism can be

			<p>segmented in 12 different types:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social - Ecotourism - Cultural - Study - Sports - Fishing - Nautical - Adventure - Business and Events - Rural - Health
		Pezzi & Viana (2015)	Experiential tourism as a term that describes a way of creating tourist products by making the tourist the protagonist of his own journey.
		Abreu (2008)	<p>Other types of tourism:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thematic - Leisure - Recreation - Entertainment - Holiday
	Tourism Destinations	Buhalis (2000)	Destinations as a mix of tourism products and services that are exclusively produced and offered to the potential customer as an integrated experience
		Buhalis (2013)	<p>Destinations can also be a perceptual concept that can be interpreted differently by consumers.</p> <p>6As of destination:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attraction - Accessibility - Available packages - Activities - Ancillary services
		Lamsfuss &	A destination depends on

		Alzua- Sorzabal (2013)	tourists' perceptions of what motivates them to travel
Tourism and Regional Development		Speier (2006)	Tourism is an important option when it comes to development, having a positive impact on improving the quality of life of the poor in developing countries. The main effects of tourism is on economic and cultural development
		Abrantes, Nascimento & Costa (2014)	Tourism is a regional driver of development.
		Cunha (2013)	Tourism can contribute to the development of regions by exploiting local heritage and values and facilitates the transfer of funds from richer to less developed regions. Tourism is an engine for wealth creation, as demand increases and the quality and therefore the competitiveness of these products increases and promotes the revival and use of facilities that for some reason are no longer in operation
Competitiveness of a Tourist Destination		Barbosa, Oliveira e Rezende (2010)	<p>Tourism dimensions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Infrastructure - Access - Tourism Services and Equipment - Tourist Attractions - Marketing - Public Policies - Regional Cooperation - Monitoring

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Local Economy - Business Capability - Social Aspect - Environmental Aspects - Cultural Aspects
	Tourism Framework	Beni (1991)	Tourism is a system whose components must be analyzed as a whole rather than separately
		Carvalho & Pimentel (2015)	<p>The evolution of the interactions between the actors and organizations of the tourism system can be understood at three levels: the attraction, the destination and the region.</p> <p>OTAs are inserted into the distribution function of the SISTUR model</p>
		Kazandzhieva & Santana, 2019	E-tourism as a process of digitization of all managerial and business functions, services and stages of the value chain of the tourism system in order to increase effectiveness in the interactions between tourism companies, consumers and public sector thus achieving competitive sustainability
		Buhalis (2003)	E-tourism as the digitalization of all processes and value chains in the tourism, travel, hospitality, and restaurant industries
		Șoavă and Bădică (2008)	E-tourism as a phenomenon that involves both the

			consumer and the provider of a particular tourist service, being considered a part of e-commerce
		Băbăiță, Ispas, Ghenescu and Hălălău (2010)	E tourism as a phenomenon and an alternative form of business and includes the stages of information, reservation and payment, electronically performed tourist services
		Jonathan and Tarigan (2016)	E-tourism as a way of economic stimulation for the travel and tourism industry at different levels and define it as equivalent to e-marketing and Internet tourism
		Navío-Marco, Ruiz-Gómez & Sevilla-Sevilla, (2018)	The tourist is still the center of the tourism ecosystem, but with the advancement of technology, they become more proactive when it comes to content relationships with other tourists. They have high expectations for efficiency and low tolerance for barriers to global mobility
		Buhalis (2013)	Smart tourism destinations are based on a massive tourism resource data center, supported by the Internet of Things and cloud computing, focused on improving the tourist experience through intelligent identification and monitoring. The main stakeholders are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tourism

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> organizations - Governments - Local residents/local communities - Tourists - Environment
	Tourism and Real Estate Development	Bertoldi, Cerruti & Russo (2009)	Culture is able to generate economic benefits for the area and activate productive sectors that are economically linked to it and can revitalize the city
		Silva & Ferreira (2007)	Tourist activities require a network of urban services, reception, accommodation and entertainment for visitors, which entails the creation of new spaces adapted to this new demand
Distribution Channels	Distribution Channels	Yamamoto & Alberton (2006)	Distribution channels are a set of interdependent organizations involved in the process of making the product or service available for consumption or use, or even as a scenario in which a free market system develops, where business involving exchange of products and services takes place
		Santa Ana, 2019	Distribution channels satisfy and stimulate tourism demand and are important for the distribution, marketing and promotion of products and services, reducing the costs of the provider

		Beni, 1998; Marin, 2004; Guimarães & Borges, 2008	Distribution channels work as intermediaries that distribute and sell the tourism product or "tourism package" to the final consumer
		Gosson et al. (2014)	Their main role is to make available to end consumers the services provided by primary suppliers. They facilitate the search and classification of products and services demanded by consumers and help them consume a specific combination of product and channel services.
		Swarbrooke & Horner (2002)	The retailer exerts the strongest influence on consumer purchasing decisions, with the travel agent operating in the retail channel playing a fundamental role in favor of the travel agent's interests
	Online Tourism	Santa Ana (2019)	The Internet led to processes of disintermediation and reintermediation of the distribution of the tourism product and facilitated technological innovation, new business practices, and the transformation of competition in different sectors
		Flecha & Costa (2004)	Tourist has become an "offer hunter", due to easier access to information through easier access to the Internet

		Maia et Al (2022)	Online tourism is defined by the integration of tourism and the Internet, being a small sector in developing countries
		Deloitte (2018)	Online bookings continue to increase, driving an increasingly competitive digital distribution landscape that connects travelers with more products and improves online travel planning.
		Xiang (2022)	Three forces changed the world: technology, the market, and nature, which accelerate and change society
	Travel Agencies	Braga (2008)	Travel agencies are an element of the tourism market that acts as a service aggregator
		Pazini & Abrahão (2014)	Travel agencies are private organizations responsible for the production and distribution of tourism products and services
		UNWTO (2001)	Service enterprises whose main function is intermediation, from which other functions are derived, ranging from providing information and advice to the customer to organizing all kinds of activities related to the travel and tourism sector and elaborating their own products
	Online Travel Agencies	Buhalis & Licata (2002) & Buhalis	The travel industry has been particularly affected

		& Connor (2005)	by the development of information and communication technologies (ICT)
		Pelizze (2005) & Candioto (2012)	OTAs are intermediaries that have the same definition as traditional travel agencies with a B2C business model
		Santa Ana (2019)	OTAs are a tourism distribution channel
		Perinotto et al (2020)	OTAs make it possible for the user to make a hotel booking anywhere in the world very quickly and easily
		Pazini & Abrahão (2014)	OTAs can provide the customer with the entire product portfolio and easily make price updates
		Navío-Marco, Ruiz-Gómez & Sevilla-Sevilla, 2018	ICT and the Internet helped on the creation of a dialogue between supply and demand
		Qi et al., 2010	ICT and the Internet can be considered as one of the most effective tools to promote tourism
		Rezgo, 2019	OTAs are travel aggregators that contact potential travelers via the Internet to sell travel-related products such as flights, cruises, holiday packages, hotel rooms

Source: Developed by Author

Tourism is one of the industries with the greatest potential for economic impact in a region, being an important tool and path when it comes to development. A tourist destination can be a geographic region or it can derive from the traveler's perception and encompasses the

tourist products and services offered in the locality. Its spillover effect affects industries not directly related and can change the destiny of a region, promoting a growth in economic activity and the development of civil construction. With the advancement of ICTs and the internet, new players have emerged in tourism ecosystems, such as OTAs, which function as a distribution channel in the tourism industry, but with a B2C business model. Due to their proximity to the final customer, OTAs have a greater power to influence the traveler's purchase decision than other actors in the system.

No literature was found expressing the role or importance of OTAs in creating a tourist destination. The present research intends to understand to what extent OTAs can influence the tourist development of a region, through qualitative research.

3. METHOD

The objective of this research is to understand to what extent the Hurb promoted the emergence of the tourist destination Olímpia, taking into account the tourism dimensions discussed by Barbosa, Oliveira & Rezende (2010). The hypotheses of the study are:

H1: The demand created by the Hurb has contributed to directly promote the tourist services and facilities, as well as the marketing dimensions of Olímpia.

H2: The Hurb has indirectly promoted the local economy, the business capacity and the social aspect of Olímpia through the increase in demand for accommodation in Olímpia and the higher volume of tourists in the city.

Quantitative and qualitative research usually represents two different paradigms. While quantitative research is empirical by nature (Ochieng, 2009), qualitative research is interpretive. Both approaches have different paradigmatic bases (Tuval-Mashiach, 2021). Positivism serves as the foundation of quantitative research (Tuval-Mashiach, 2021) and presumes that the object of the study is real, existing even without researchers and their perspectives (Tuval-Mashiach, 2021). It aims to "to explain, predict, and control the studied phenomena, and emphasize cause-effect linkages of phenomena that can be generalized" (Tuval-Mashiach, 2021, p. 366). Phenomenology is defined as "the study of that which can be experienced" (Williams, 2021, p. 367) and is considered the foundation of qualitative research. Qualitative research "requires detailed observation, explanation and assumes that it is impossible to define exactly what elements are important and crucial and should be considered to the exclusion of others" (Ochieng, 2009, p. 13). To understand the development of Olímpia as a tourism destination and the role Hurb had on it, it is necessary to understand the context of the phenomenon and, therefore, follows a qualitative research approach.

The objective of the qualitative exploratory research was to understand the relationships between the variables, questions and hypotheses. There is little literature addressing the role of online travel agencies in developing new tourism destinations, and even less on Olímpia, so the qualitative research was exploratory in nature. Qualitative research provides the opportunity to examine identifiable cultural and local contexts and, despite its subjective nature, offers a greater degree of flexibility in the theoretical framework (Santa Ana, 2019).

For this research, primary and secondary data were used and interviews were conducted with Hurb and Olímpia executives throughout the process of creating the destination. According to Yin (2021, p. 121), "the use of multiple sources of evidence in case studies allows the researcher to address a wide range of historical, behavioral, and attitudinal issues."

Hurb's historical data, based on all sales to Olímpia between 2011 and 2022, were used for primary data collection. In addition, Hurb also provided the supplier database of all Hurb hotel partners in Olímpia. Official data on Olímpia's tourism figures were obtained from the Olímpia Municipality website and from interviews with Olímpia executives.

This research aimed to better understand the process of creating a destination through observation, recording, and interpretation of data, and to show the relationships between the literature, the development of the destination, and the primary data collected. It is considered explicative research because "it aims to clarify factors that contribute in some way to the occurrence of a phenomenon" (Costa & Costa, 2017).

Interviews were conducted with key people in the establishment of the partnership, both on the side of Hurb and on the side of the City of Olímpia:

Table 5 - Respondents Profile

Respondents	Occupation
R1	Senior Vice President of Hurb
R2	Accounts Payable Manager at Hurb
R3	Founder at Hurb
R4	Former President of Thermas de Olímpia Resort
R5	Mice Manager at Hot Beach Park
R6	Tourismologist of Olímpia

Source: Developed by author

The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured script that takes into account the dimensions of tourism discussed by Barbosa, Oliveira & Rezende (2010). The script was prepared for the two types of interviewees - Hurb executives and Olímpia executives - in

order to analyze the different perceptions of destination development by the two target groups. The script can be found in the appendix.

The script was modified and adapted during the interviews to reflect new information in real time. During the interviews, respondents were asked to share their impressions and opinions about the development of Olímpia as a destination and the importance of the Hurb in the city.

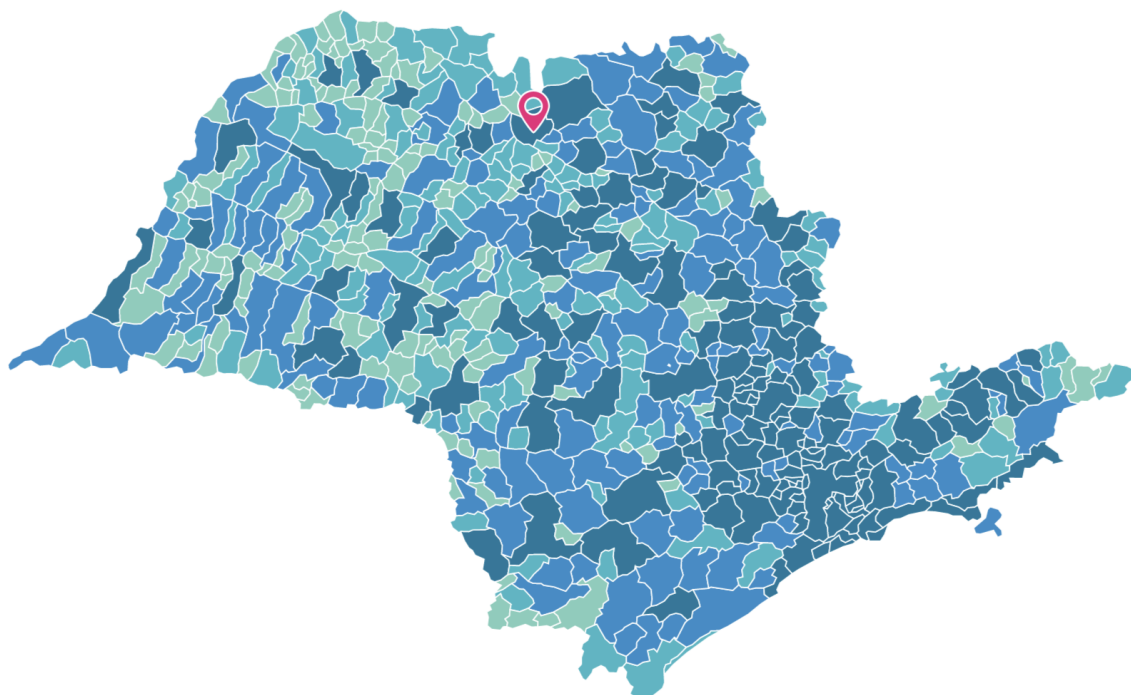
Seven people were invited to participate in the research, but only 6 executives accepted the invitation. Six interviews were conducted using a semi-structured script - 3 Hurb representatives, 2 Olímpia executives, and 1 Olímpia public sector representative. The management level ranged from general manager to company founder. The names of the executives were kept confidential. Interviews took place in person (R1) and online (R2, R3, R4, R5, and R6) between April and May 2022. Interviews lasted 45 minutes and were transcribed immediately after they were conducted. The main points of analysis related to the research subject were collected through exploratory qualitative research, with the aim of understanding how the process of creating the Olímpia tourist destination was, to what extent and in what dimensions the Hurb helped in this process.

4. CASE STUDY

4.1 Olímpia

Olímpia is a city located in the northwestern region of the state of São Paulo, 430 km from the state capital. The municipality consists of the headquarters and the districts of Baguaçu and Ribeiro dos Santos, and is part of the metropolitan region of São José do Rio Preto, in the interior of São Paulo.

Figure 5: Map of the State of São Paulo indicating the municipality of Olímpia



Source: IBGE, 2022

According to Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE) (2022), the estimated population of the city in 2021 is 55,477 people. In 2019, 33.1% of the population was employed in formal jobs. The average wage of workers is 2.4 minimum wage. The per capita GDP of the city is R\$38,559.28. In 2015, 56% of the city's revenues came from external sources. The city's human development index was 0.773 (IBGE, 2022). The main

economic activities are tourism, which represents 65% of the city's income (Olimpia, 2022) and agriculture - with an emphasis on the cultivation of sugarcane.

4.2 History

Olímpia, like every city in the interior of São Paulo, went through three economic cycles, first coffee, then oranges and finally sugar cane (Gallão, 2020).

Despite the history of expeditions to explore and capture the natives, colonial settlement of the region between the Pardo and Grande rivers occurred on a very small scale until the first decades of the 19th century. (Gallão, 2020;Marangoni,2001)

The creation of the municipality of Olímpia itself is linked to the process of settlement of the west and north of São Paulo, which began with the expansion of coffee plantations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The district, named Vila Olímpia, was created on December 18, 1906, by State Law No. 1035, and was part of Barreiros (Gallão 2020). Olímpia became an independent city on December 7, 1917, by Law No. 1571.

It was christened "Sertão dos Olhos d'Água", because of the numerous springs that exist there. A large part of the urban area of Olímpia is crossed by the rivers Turvo and Cachoeirinha, in addition to about sixty streams, including Olhos D'Água, named after the original place.

The city developed thanks to the coffee industry and the expansion of railroads through the west and north of São Paulo, whose main objective was to transport this variety grown in the interior. Coffee cultivation in Olympia began in 1910, and since too much coffee was grown in the surrounding regions (Gallão, 2020), production exceeded global consumption of the product, and it was not possible to maintain coffee cultivation in the long term, since the export of the product was affected:

As a response to the problem, representatives from Vale do Paraíba and from the older West region near Campinas proposed a ban on new plantations, which, in theory, in addition to preventing the uninterrupted increase in the Brazilian stock, would encourage settlers to remain in those areas [...] (Gallão, 2020, p.30)

It wasn't the prohibition itself that stopped coffee cultivation, but the economic crisis in which the country found itself in 1904-1905. In 1906, the federal government had to intervene in the valuation policy for coffee, which was a real obstacle for coffee producers (Gallão, 2020). Coffee production continued in Olímpia until the 1920s, but in 1929, the year

of the Great Depression in the United States, the coffee crisis began, directly affecting Olímpia (Gallão, 2020).

That same year, farmers in Olímpia began growing oranges. Oranges were so important to the city's economy that Olímpia was renamed the "National Capital of Orange" (Gallao, 2020). Oranges were the main source of income for the city until 2002:

In addition to high production, which reduces the price, Brazil was heavily harmed by NAFTA, as this agreement meant that Mexican orange juice suffered an immediate reduction of 50% in taxes and a progressive regression that would reach zero in 15 years. Thus, Brazilian juice gains a new competitor for the North American market, the Mexican juice, although Brazil has great advantages over Mexico, but it has geographic proximity and the agreement. (Gallão, 2020, p.33).

At the beginning of the 20th century, the cultivation of oranges became impracticable and sugar cane began to be grown in the region (Gallao, 2020).

The city is popularly known as the "National Capital of Folklore" through the Folklore Festival, where groups from different states of the country gather to perform typical dances of their regions, and the "Cidade Menina Moça".

4.3 Hurb

Hurb, formerly Hotel Urbano, is an online travel agency founded in 2011 by João Ricardo Mendes, José Eduardo Mendes and Antonio Gomes (Tuninho). At that time, the company started as a collective purchasing platform for the hospitality industry (Sales & Souza, 2011).

Buhalis (1998) argues that travel agencies can use two strategies:

1. Add value to the service with a high standard of quality, which differentiates the purchase of a trip by a specialized professional.
2. Adopt a more aggressive stance, with competition for the lowest price and the highest sales volume, for products with broad marketing

Hurb has chosen the second strategy since its inception:

Its users receive offers from 70% to 40%. That way, consumers buy products at prices much higher than we can get you to buy. The partner establishments are promoted through a structure, where their brands are exhibited in the

largest on the internet portals, on social networks and in the best communication vehicles in the country. However, it is because of this marketing strategy, because HotelUrbano only earns nothing through the advertisement of marketing promotion on the value of the packages sold (Sales & Souza, 2011, p.12)

According to Feijo, 2014:

Basically, what Hotel Urbano does is sell travel packages in the low season, with short stays (generally, no more than three nights) in hotels, inns and resorts. Prices are at least 40% lower compared to the value in periods of high demand. In order to fit into the pocket of the middle class, the payment is divided into installments that do not usually exceed 200 reais per month. Hotel Urbano takes an average commission of 20%. (Feijo, 2014, site)

In its first months, Hotel Urbano reached 30% of visitors to tourism websites in Brazil (Feijo, 2014). The experience confirmed the founders' original idea: there was indeed a demand for cheap travel, suppliers already willing to offer it, and the possibility of interesting profit margins. The strategy of the collective shopping platform wouldn't be sustainable in the long run, as it was necessary to bring together several people interested in the same hotel at the same time, without the possibility to change or cancel the purchase. But it soon became clear that the collective selling system would be a limiting factor (Feijo, 2014). Customers began to complain about this system, and within five months Hurb became an online travel agency with more destinations and tools to select check-in and check-out dates at hotels (Feijo, 2014).

In less than 10 years, Hurb reached 800 employees, 25 million registered travelers, 35 thousand destinations around the world and 14 million followers in social networks, being considered the largest fan page in global tourism and online travel platform in Brazil. The company is based in Rio de Janeiro and operates throughout Brazil and abroad, with offices in Porto and Lisbon (Portugal), Sorocaba (SP) and in Montreal (Canada).

4.4 Tourism in Olímpia: A history and the participation of Hurb

The discovery of thermal water in Olímpia occurred in the 1950's, when Petrobras was trying to find new sources of oil in Brazil. Instead of oil, the company discovered thermal water springs with temperatures between 26 and 38 degrees Celsius (Gallão, 2020).

In 1987, the "Therma dos Laranjais" recreational club was opened in the city to allow Olímpia residents to enjoy the thermal waters (Termas, 2022). According to R4, the club was not a company, but a civic association of the city. The club was not originally intended for tourism - but as R4 mentions in his interview, it began to attract the attention of the local population.

In 2008, entrepreneur Benito Bernatti commissioned the construction of a new resort in Olímpia that would have 500 rooms - the equivalent of 1250 beds. Before the construction of this resort, the city had 400-500 beds in small hotels and guesthouses, as reported by R4. R5 states that there were only 5 hotels in Olímpia at that time.

The Tutti Resort was inaugurated, and in 2011 the company was on the verge of bankruptcy. According to R4, the manager of the hotel at the time, there were 300 rooms that could be used and 200 rooms that were still under construction. Of the 300 available rooms, the hotel was at 5% occupancy and charged R\$600 per night. The daily rate at that time included all meals and the entrance ticket to Thermas dos Laranjais, there was no room for flexibility.

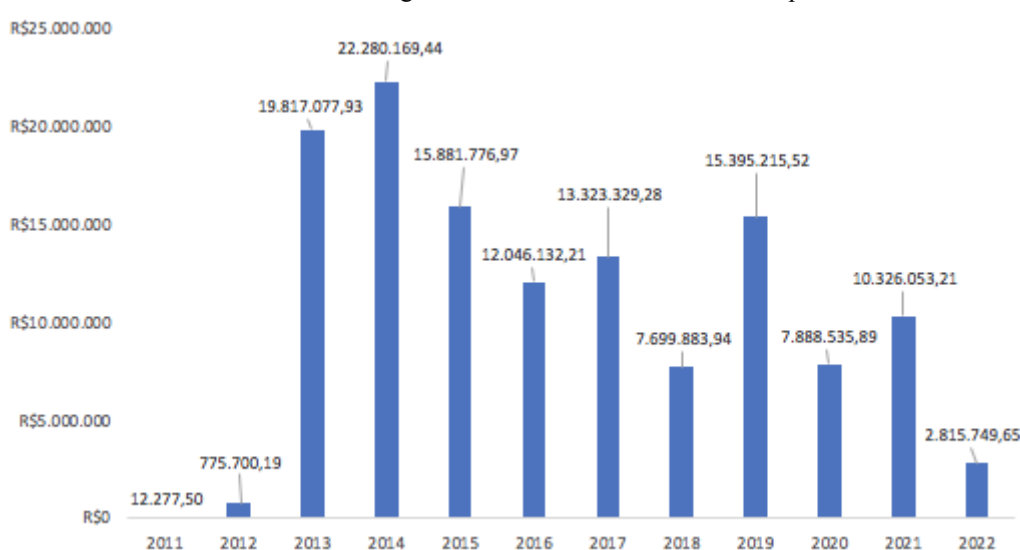
Since Olímpia was not a well-known destination at the time, R4 understood that traditional travel agencies would not help the Tutti Resort situation. At that time, Hurb had just entered the market and became an alternative for hotels that were not in traditional destinations.

On a trip to Campinas, Brotas and Itirapina, R1, Hurb's senior vice president, met the manager of Broa Golf Resort, the first resort in the area. At this first meeting, R1 had his first contact with Olímpia and the Tutti Resort. The manager shared this discovery with the other founders of Hurb, and together they saw the opportunity to develop a destination there. In April 2012, R4 contacted Hurb for the first time and began a partnership with one of Hurb's founders. R4 discussed with Hurb that it was not possible to sustain the low occupancy rate for an extended period of time. R4 reiterated that traditional travel agencies would not have even been willing to talk to him because Olímpia was so far away from a tourism perspective. R1 and R3 also stated that Hurb was the only platform that had Olímpia on its product shelf at that time.

R4 argued that Hurb developed a new strategy for hotels: Instead of working with an average daily rate, hotels should work with an average monthly income composed of different daily rates that include early and late season prices. This strategy would allow hotels to become more "interesting" financially.

Hurb agreed to sell weekday travel packages for Tutti Hotels. The prices were lower than those previously practiced. R4 explains that these travel packages - which did not include transportation or the entrance ticket to Thermas dos Laranjais - were a great success. Although Tutti Resorts and Hurb never had an exclusive contract, Hurb accounted for 90% of all nights sold at Tutti Hotels and Tutti Hotels accounted for 40% of all attendees at Thermas dos Laranjais. Within a year, Tutti Resorts reached an occupancy rate of 85%, which was maintained for 5 years as long as R4 managed the hotel.

Figure 6: Historical Sales Hurb - Olímpia



Source: Own elaboration, based on data available of Hurb

The hotel also created new types of daily rates - some included all meals, some included only breakfast, and some did not include a single meal. For R4, it was necessary to create these new rates to increase revenue on the Hurb platform. It is important to note that Hurb did not have the rights to sell tickets to Thermas de Olimpa, as R4 claims. The park had an exclusivity contract with another company at the time. Even without the revenue from ticket sales, Hurb was able to generate this demand for Tutti Resorts.

During the years of the partnership between Tutti Resorts and Hurb, the hotel had an annual income of 30-35 million reais. Tutti left the management of Olímpia Resorts in 2018.

The Municipal Secretariat of Olímpia conducts monthly surveys on the occupancy of the hotel chain, which provides information on the occupancy of the chain on a monthly basis, consolidated annually and also in relation to holidays. The hotels and other lodging establishments themselves provide the municipality with data on the occupancy of their beds.

Table 6 - Hotel Occupancy Rate and Total Tourists in Olímpia (2016-2021)

	2016 ¹	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Annual hotel occupancy rate	44,5%	55,6%	54,1%	46,4%	39,8%	33,8%
Total people/year	0	2.050.740	2.645.603	2.981.866	1.185.574	2.372.412

Source: Own elaboration, based on data available on the Tourism Department website.

Table 7 - Hotel Occupancy Rate, month by month and annual average (2016-2021)

Month/Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
January	69,6%	77,8%	83,9%	60%	68,7%	33,6%
February	36,1%	49,6%	58,9%	36,8%	52,9%	19,1%
March	44,1%	40,8%	52,5%	43,9%	-	-
April	33,5%	56,7%	49,5%	40,3%	-	-
May	24,4%	30,8%	34,5%	26,5%	-	-
June	17,4%	33,9%	33,8%	33,6%	-	10,9%
July	74%	75,5%	70,3%	69,4%	-	48,8%
August	47,3%	51,4%	52,7%	47,2%	-	23,9%
September	40,8%	57,5%	50,5%	44,6%	-	37,5%
October	46,9%	66%	49,6%	48,5%	45,4%	38,8%
November	37,6%	56%	57,3%	48,9%	27,7%	35%
December	62,4%	55,6%	54,1%	46,1%	33,6%	33,8%
Annual Average	44,5%	55,6%	54,1%	46,4%	39,8%	33,8%

Source: Own elaboration, based on data available on the Olímpia Tourism Department website.

Table 8 - Number of Beds Available in Olímpia - 2016 x 2021

Month/Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
January	9.654	9.809	10.087	16.577	19.716	19.438
February	9.654	9.809	9.887	16.577	19.910	19.386
March	9.673	9.789	9.887	16.577	19.910	19.386

¹ The 2016 data was not available in the Municipality website

April	9.534	9.789	10.736	16.577	19.910	19.386
May	9.653	9.852	10.736	16.527	19.910	19.386
June	9.650	9.853	9.913	16.527	19.910	18.887
July	9.650	9.878	13.540	16.527	19.910	21.877
August	9.697	9.906	16.240	16.527	19.910	22.265
September	9.697	9.906	17.372	16.527	19.910	28.262
October	9.697	9.906	17.372	20.100	19.441	26.440
November	9.776	9.906	17.472	20.100	19.441	27.391
December	9.776	9.906	17.472	20.100	19.396	26.658

Source: Own elaboration, based on data available on the Olímpia Tourism Department website.

According to R1 and R4, 10 years ago, at the beginning of the partnership between Tutti Hotels and Hurb, it wasn't common to buy accommodations and travel packages on an online platform. R4 explains that the partnership had three main objectives: to increase Hurb's credibility as a travel platform, to create Olímpia as a destination, and to increase Tutti Hotel's credibility.

Today, Olímpia has more than 34,000 rooms. The state of São Paulo receives up to 20 million visitors per year, and Olímpia represents 10% of the state's tourists.

Table 9 - Olímpia - Visitors per year

2017	2.050.740
2018	2.645.603
2019	2.981.866
2020	1.185.574
2021	2.372.412

Source: Own elaboration, based on data available by the Municipality of Olímpia

In 2020 and 2021, the number of visitors decreased due to the Covid 19 pandemic, after which the municipality, in a declared emergency situation, stopped activities for tourist purposes, such as parks, on March 23, 2020, and resumed only on October 1, 2020, but at 40% of capacity. In July, the hotel sector resumed operations for tourism purposes, according to a plan that envisaged a gradual resumption of capacity. In 2021, this sector will also be

closed at 100% of capacity until temporary closure and gradual resumption of operations (Olímpia, 2022). In 2022, 3.5 million visitors are expected and by 2024, 6 million tourists per year should be reached (Olímpia, 2022).

The main attractions are:

Therma dos Laranjais is the precursor of tourism in the municipality. It was established in 1987 by its founder and current president, Benito Benatti, and over the years it has gained structure and prominence, transforming the city of Olímpia. Currently, the park has more than 60 attractions and is considered one of the most visited in the world and the first in Latin America (Olímpia, 2022). The Therma dos Laranjais have a maximum capacity to receive 32 thousand visitors per day.

Hot Beach Park has more than 15 attractions for the whole family, with a structure of national and imported equipment from Canada and Mexico and pools with a water temperature of 32 °C. Hot Beach belongs to Grupo Ferrasa, which has two integrated resorts "in the sand", Hot Beach Resort and Hot Beach Suites, with a total of almost a thousand apartments (Olímpia, 2022). Hot Beach Park can receive up to 8,000 visitors per day and is one of the 10 most visited water parks in Latin America.

Dinosaurs Valley is a theme park dedicated to the Jurassic period that opened in 2019 (Olímpia, 2019). The park is the first in the Southeast and the third in Brazil. The other two are located in Canela/ RS and Foz do Iguaçu/ PR. The attraction has 38 animatronic dinosaurs imported from the U.S. and China, and all the replicas move, make sounds and even "breathe," making the experience even more realistic. The project is a partnership between a group of investors and Dreams Entertainment Group.

The Dreamland Wax Museum, which will open in 2021 (Panrotas, 2021), is another Dreams Entertainment Group project built in a 6,000-square-meter space on Avenida Aurora Forti Neves, the city's main street. It is the largest unit of the group in the country, with more than 40 characters and celebrities from Brazil and the world, in 70 scenarios (Olímpia, 2022)

The Museum of Folklore and History Maria Olímpia is a museum dedicated to Maria Olímpia, goddaughter of engineer Robert John Reid, one of the founders of the city. The museum was conceived by Prof. José Sant' Anna and is considered one of the most complete collections on folklore in the country. It preserves not only memories of the history of the city, but also objects that tell the story of folklore during the festival. The museum is

housed in a historic building, the former home of David de Oliveira, an important entrepreneur in the history of the city (Olímpia, 2022).

The Museum of Sacred Art and Religious Diversity is located at the seat of the former History and Folklore Museum, Palacete Tonanni, which has been completely restored, preserving the original features of the building. The Olímpia Museum of Sacred Art is the first of its kind in all of northwestern São Paulo. It opened in late 2020 and houses masterpieces by important and recognized Brazilian and even international artists of sacred culture. In collaboration with the Museum of Sacred Art of São Paulo (Olímpia, 2022), it will host temporary exhibitions of the rich collections.

The Goddess Nikki Monument pays homage to the relationship between Brazil's Olímpia and ancient Olympia in Greece, and is intended to honor the importance of the bonds built between the nations (Olímpia, 2022)

The Olímpia Cultural Station is a project in partnership with the state government that includes the preservation and restoration of the original features of the old station building to accommodate exhibitions, cultural spaces and presentations. The building has been transformed into a cultural and tourism center, called ECO - Cultural Station of Olímpia, to strengthen local culture and provide another tourist attraction in the city. The official opening is scheduled for December 2022, with exhibitions by renowned artists. A historic, cultural and commercial district will also be created in the area surrounding ECO, preserving historic buildings and encouraging the establishment of stores for leisure and entertainment (Olímpia, 2022).

The Church of St. John the Baptist was rebuilt more than 40 years ago and is a modern church with one of the largest spans in the country. Located in the center, the church is named after the patron saint of Olympia and is considered one of the most beautiful in the state of São Paulo (Olímpia, 2022).

Olímpia is also home to the Folklore Festival, a festival that each year presents numerous folklore and parafolklore groups from several Brazilian states and receives visitors from all regions of the country (Folclore Olímpia, 2021). The festival attracts about 150,000 visitors each year (Olímpia, 2021):

The Folklore Festival is a gathering of Brazilian culture. In addition to preserving and maintaining popular culture, the Festival promotes commerce, tourism and services in the city and throughout the northwest region of the State of São Paulo. Olímpia maintains and encourages local folkloric groups throughout the year, which today are 15 (fifteen) Folkloric and 3 (three) Parafolkloric. (Folclore Olímpia, 2021, site)

According to Olímpia (2022), about 80% of visitors to the city come from the state of São Paulo, with 56% coming from the capital and the metropolitan region. These are tourists who visit the city mainly during the high season (vacations, long holidays and weekends), since in most cases the visit requires accommodation due to the distance. Other characteristics of visitors from São Paulo and in general are that they are families (couples with children) between 26 and 50 years old, who stay in the city for an average of 4 days.

Table 10 - Therma dos Laranjais - Visitors per year

2014	1.939.000
2015	1.761.000
2016	1.959.000
2017	2.007.140
2018	1.971.000
2019	1.845.000

Source: Own elaboration, based on data available on Olímpia, 2021

Table 11 - Hot Beach - Visitors per year

2017	243,000
2018	462,000
2019	608,000

Source: Own elaboration, based on data available on Olímpia, 2021

Table 12 - City Infrastructure

Hotels	21
Inns	47
Rural Hotels	2
Flats	1
Resorts	8
Holiday Homes	392
Travel Agencies	52
Restaurants	52

Snack Bars	49
Pizza Restaurantes	10
Steakhouses	4
Convenience Stores	9
Cafeterias	8
Bakeries	19
Ice Cream Stores	24
Rotisseries	2
Others	51
Total beds available	24.612

Source: Own elaboration, based on data available on Olímpia, 2021

Tourism in Olímpia continues to grow. Despite the impact of the pandemic, the municipality continued to invest heavily in this sector. The municipality expects to surpass 2019 visitor numbers (pre-pandemic period). Olímpia has already received about 1 million tourists from January to April 2022, which is more than 30% of the total number of visitors in 2019, when almost 3 million people came (Olímpia, 2022). According to Olímpia (2022), the city's main new projects are the following:

- **Construction of an airport** - the availability of an area between Olímpia and São José do Rio Preto for the construction of the airport and the concession was approved by the National Civil Aviation Authority with a 35-year concession for construction and exploration. The authorization was published in the Federal Gazette on June 14, 2021. The airport has a capacity of an estimated 500,000 flights per year and could even accommodate flights from Latin America in the future. Currently, the necessary studies are being carried out and private investors are looking for its execution.
- **Construction of the Olhos D'água Ecological Park.**
- **Construction of an outlet** - the outlet will include 100 stores and a cinema, and will be the first outlet in the northwestern region of São Paulo. The area, adjacent to the future Ecopark, has an area of 120 thousand square meters and the estimated investment is R\$ 120 million.

- **Construction of new resorts:**
- Solar das Brisas - construction is announced for the end of 2020, the project will have a total capacity of 840 apartments with 4,000 beds, with the first phase, corresponding to half of the resort capacity, scheduled for delivery in 2025.
- Hot Beach You - is a new resort that will be part of the complex integrated with Hot Beach Park, adding more than 1700 apartments to the other two developments. Completion is expected in mid-2024.
- Royal Prime - the project will have 600 apartments and a capacity for 2,200 people. The first phase is scheduled for completion in 2025.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Results

The aim of this exploratory study was to understand to what extent the Hurb promoted the emergence of the tourist destination Olímpia. The two hypotheses are:

H1: The demand created by the Hurb has contributed to directly influence the tourist services and facilities and the marketing dimensions of Olímpia.

H2: The Hurb has indirectly promoted the local economy, the business capacity and the social aspect of Olímpia, through the increase in demand for accommodation in Olímpia and the higher volume of tourists in the city.

According to Barbosa, Oliveira & Rezende (2010), the tourism services and equipment dimension considers the installed capacity of the destination and the marketing dimension considers the tools available to the destination to communicate with its target markets. The local economy refers to other economic activities that promote and facilitate tourism development. Business capability refers to the local business environment: professional qualifications, number and characteristics of businesses in the area, etc. The social dimension refers to society and the impact of tourism on the social aspects of the region.

Regarding **H1**, R4 believes that the demand created by the Hurb platform was the beginning of the rise and development of Olímpia as a tourism destination. R1 also agrees with this assumption. R4 notes that Olímpia, a formerly agricultural city, has taken the opposite path to other cities in central São Paulo with the development of tourism in Olímpia.

Tourism has opened up this range. Tourism has opened up commerce, changed the way of seeing, opened options so that people no longer leave the city in search of work but capital and in the great centers. (Respondents R4)

This change was a historic milestone that is now irreversible. He played a big part in the publicity part. **The participation of Tutti and Hurb was essential.** (Respondents R4)

R4, R5 and R6 consider that the tourist development of the city is due to the work of the entrepreneur Benito Benatti, who initiated and financed the construction of the park

Thermas dos Laranjais. R3 also recognises the importance of Benito Benatti in the development of the city.

The growth of tourism in the city was due to Therma dos Laranjais, mainly to Mr. Benito Bernatti, who was the president of Therma dos Laranjais for over 20 years. He had the idea to activate the Guarani aquifer well, which are the hot water wells. (Respondent R5)

R6 also explains that tourist demand generated pressure for the construction of new businesses in the city.

The pressure was all from demand. There was pressure to stay in the city - tourists wanted to stay in the city, they started to come from further away and it was not possible to return on the same day[...] **The demand that forced the construction of new hotel developments.** (Respondent R6)

R4 states that prior to the partnership with Hurb, there was no type of marketing for Olímpia and its tourist facilities. R4 states that this promotion by the Hurb has changed the city. R5 agrees with the importance of Hurb in promoting the destination from a national perspective. R6 states that the Hurb gave visibility to Olímpia - with this visibility came the idea to build new resorts. R4 explains, **"from 5% occupancy of 1250 beds to 85% in 1 year is a work you can hardly repeat"**

There was content formation, narrative development around the destination, the creation of a story showing that the destination was close to you and that the road was good. (Respondent R3)

The main task we achieved: we took Olímpia out of a comfort zone and **put Olímpia in a zone of national and international visibility.** (Respondents R4)

Hurb had a **fundamental** role in the promotion of Olímpia as a tourist destination. (Respondent R5)

I think Hurb helped, because of the partnership that was made with the Hotel. The great partnership that was made with Hurb **activated the destiny to a great extent, without a doubt. It was a differential moment for the destination.** Until that moment, Olímpia was not known. (Respondent R5)

R3 explains that Hurb saw an opportunity in the Olímpia. The occupancy rate of the hotel was very low - during the week it was very empty and on weekends there was a public that already knew the city. Here they saw the opportunity - Hurb had a large customer base with about 2 million registered people. Hurb decided to inform the registered customer base about the Olímpia destination.

We understand that there was a great hotel asset there that was on the wane and it was an opportunity - let's create a product: we had a very large customer base that needed to understand the opportunity to travel on the weekend to a different and paradisiacal place. (Respondent R3)

R2 and R3 consider that 2 main factors were responsible for the increase in Olímpia's employment: Hurb's use of a portion of its marketing budget to actively promote the destination and the risk Hurb took by purchasing hotel occupancy in advance. Prepayment is a negotiation in which Hurb guarantees availability and/or a higher margin and/or an exclusive rate with the hotel. Hurb may prepay a certain number of room nights to guarantee availability, a fixed price and/or a better margin.

In addition to creating the content, **we worked hard to direct part of our marketing budget to the city of Olímpia** - to our surprise, the regional market started to join the cause. (Respondent R3).

The pre-payment provided the hotelier with security that if he offered the market a lower price, Hurb would be able to distribute to the market as a whole. It was a gamble on both sides - Hurb bet on Tutti, which was willing to charge a lower rate and receive hundreds of thousands of Hurb customers a year. (Respondent R3)

It was Hurb wanting to promote the destination - making the pre-purchase and putting the spotlight on the website for Olímpia - **and the entrepreneurs of Olímpia wanting to change the destination, causing improvements and investing in infrastructure.** (Respondent R2)

Between 2013 and 2017, **we spent over R\$ 15 million in pre payment for Olímpia** - and this amount does not include the normal room nights sold in our platform. (Respondent R2)

If I had to highlight the most important point for Olímpia to stand out, I would definitely highlight pre-payment.(Respondent R2)

R1 also believes that the partnership with Hurb provided the impetus for the development of Olímpia as a destination and its impact. R4 agrees with this assumption and R5 argues that Hurb's role in promoting Olímpia as a destination and its partnership with Tutti Hotels was important in this process. R3 states that Hurb had a direct impact on the development of the destination

At the time, the city still had little penetration, and **this partnership with Hurb** - as an online travel platform and one of the main hotel chains in the region - **mobilized the population and improved the infrastructure to encourage private investment in the hotel chain and commerce as a whole, generating jobs and tourism for the place.** (Respondent R1)

I think **Hurb had a role that gave a lot of visibility** - I remember that Tutti Resort was selling a lot and I remember that there were a lot of people

visiting. It was very popular in the city. I think that's where the idea of creating other resorts came from and they started looking for other investors and saw that it worked. (Respondent R6)

The city of Olímpia is a great example of how technology can boost business, generating interests and greater competitiveness for the economy. (Respondent R1)

Today I have a very clear vision: Olímpia was a combination of an entrepreneurial vision by Benito Benatti, with Tutti and Hurb - I don't say that Hurb was responsible, but **if it weren't for Hurb in the destination, Olímpia would take 10 or 12 more years to develop**. We accelerated the process - traditional operators didn't look at the destination - what Hurb did was to boost Olímpia for Brazil and the world. **We show the destination to millions and millions of Brazilians**. (Respondent R3)

R2 highlights that the quality of services offered in Olímpia has increased with the development of sales in Hurb.

The turning point was that Hurb bet on destiny and the prepayment was what gave a direction for this development. We pre-purchased and with these high values, **not only the name of Olympia started being promoted, but the hoteliers themselves began to focus on what they needed to improve**: do I need to improve my bedding? My breakfast? My check in structure? (Respondent R2)

We saw improvement in hoteliers' services. It was clear even in the reviews - before, it was "left to be desired, food was not so good. Then, going up to 2013, 2014, 2015, you start to see reviews like - super recommend, wonderful place, great for families. The time frame of our performance shows that there was, in fact, an improvement in the hotel's structure and a movement of entrepreneurs in the city to bring a better experience to the customer. (Respondent R2)

The above results are consistent with Gosson et al. (2014) and Swarbrooke and Horner (2002) when it comes to channel influence. Hurb is considered an online travel agency as a distribution channel and influences its customers to travel to Olímpia, increasing the number of tourists visiting the city.

Regarding **H2**, R4 argues that the tourism industry in Olímpia was responsible for the increase in the number of jobs available in the city and the qualification of the workers. R1 and R5 also agree with this assumption. R5 mentions that as the number of jobs in the city increased, so did the purchasing power of the population. The city, as mentioned earlier, was an agricultural region. The labor required for tourism is more skilled than the labor required for agriculture.

We didn't have any collaborators who weren't Olímpiese (local population of Olímpia). We really trained these people who came from other segments, who had never worked with a hotel. (Respondents R4)

R5 highlights the importance of tourism development for the regional development of the city:

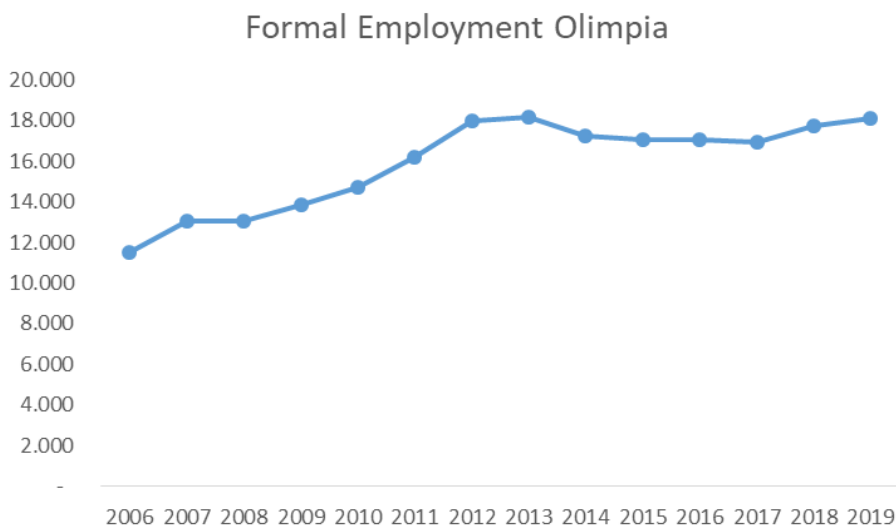
The demand created by Hurb generated the development of tourism in the city: the need for accommodation, the need for gastronomy, bars and restaurants, the need for other attractions, for modes of transport - all an investment in the city that changed the economy. (Respondent R5)

R6 agrees that the city has evolved since the development of tourism in the region. R6 stated that the main changes in the city are the number of businesses in the city, water supply, highways, education, health, and access to the city.

I was born in 1956. Today I am surprised when I go to the periphery and see the growth of commerce. **The city has advanced a lot.** In infrastructure, the city is under construction all the time - water supply is already being considered - it already has the capacity to reach 60,000 beds - highways, they are already working on it, - we know that access is complicated - the airport. In terms of education, we are well served by schools. We have elections courses in state schools about tourism - they are putting this discussion in schools now. (Respondent R6)

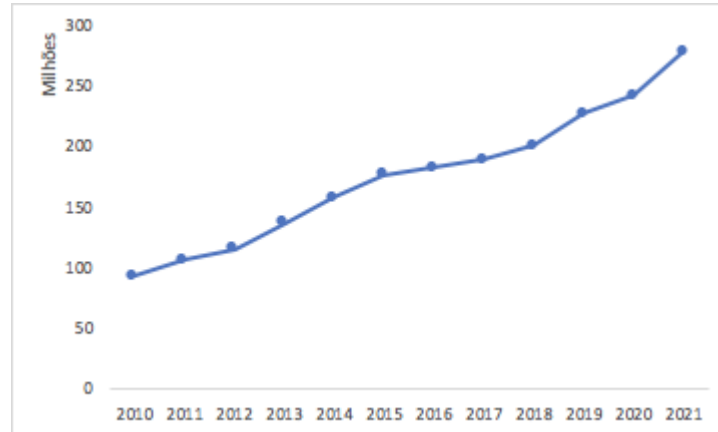
The population in Olímpia has also increased in the last 10 years, as indicated by R1, R4, and R5: they stated that the population has increased from 35,000 to 54,000 people. This figure differs from the official data: According to BGE (2021), the city's population increased from 50,024 to 55,477 people between 2010 and 2021, an increase of almost 10% in 10 years.

Figure 6: Historical Comparison (2006-2019)



Source: Own elaboration, based on data available on the IBGE website

Figure 8: Annual Tax Collections Evolution - Olímpia



Source: Own elaboration, based on data available on Olímpia, 2021

R5 argues that the entrepreneurial ecosystem in the city flourished with tourism:

When I arrived in the city (1990s), Olímpia had 22,000 inhabitants. Today it has 55,000 inhabitants. **The city had 5 hotels and today it has more than 80, including hotels, inns and resorts. There were 15 bars and restaurants, today there are 178. It was a city that lived off agribusiness, at the time oranges, and today tourism represents 70% of Olímpia's revenue.** (Respondent R5)

These results are consistent with Abrantes, Nascimento & Costa (2014), Cunha (2013) and Speier (2006). Tourism in Olímpia was an engine for the development of the town. It created new jobs and increased the availability and quality of services offered in the city. It increased the importance and participation of private companies in the city's economy. R6 argues the importance of the private sector in tourism and discusses the creation of a convention bureau:

With the pandemic, we realized the need to have an association of local entrepreneurs who will think about destiny. (Respondent R6)

R5 explains that one of Olímpia's main problems is the lack of skilled labor to meet current demand.

This is still a deficiency - we still don't have an educational unit that does this technical training. For many positions, you have to train and qualify the workers or hire from out of town and other markets. (Respondent R5)

R4 notes that the strategy needs to be readjusted: Tutti Hotels & Hurb has worked to develop Olímpia as a destination, but during the mandate of the previous administration, too many hotels and shared accommodations were created. The number of rooms available in the city does not match the maximum capacity of the water parks, resulting in lower occupancy rates in the city. R2 mentions that sales for Olímpia have stagnated on the Hurb platform and that this may be due to the number of rooms available in the city, which has grown at a different rate than the attractions in the city.

R6 believes that one of the main challenges in the development of Olímpia as a tourist destination was the lack of preparation of the population to receive tourists. As mentioned earlier, tourism in Olímpia began as a private sector initiative, and the population was unprepared for the change from an agricultural city to a tourist city. Nowadays, according to R6, it is necessary to develop and value the population that works with tourism

Of course, we have some problems, such as the preparation of the population for what is going to happen - there is a very large gap between what the population wants and tourism. We have a serious problem that the population is used to working during business hours and they do not accept working 6 days a week and 3 different shifts. Tourism still has the logic of the industry - the worker on the assembly line earns less than the factory manager. Who serves your customer? It's the receptionist, the maid and the waiter. And these people need to be valued. As long as we don't deal with these issues, we won't have people loving working with tourism. You have to develop these people and they need to be valued - it's no use paying a minimum wage to a maid if a cleaning lady in the city earns much more than her (Respondent R6)

5.2 Practical and Theoretical Implications

The research fulfilled the proposed objectives, answered the question and the proposed hypotheses, brought new information to the studied topic and expanded the possibilities to study the topic. The research had theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical point of view, the study contributed to the existing literature on the importance of tourism in regional development (Speier, 2006; Abrantes, Nascimento & Costa, 2014; Cunha, 2013; FGV Projetos, 2017), using Olímpia as an example and showing how tourism has transformed the city. It also agrees with the literature when it comes to the power of the influence of distribution channels on the decision-making of the final consumer (Gosson et al., 2014; Swarbrooker and Horner 2002), analyzing the role that Hurb had in creating demand for Olímpia - a former agricultural city without recognition as a tourist destination.

The study also sheds light on the importance of entrepreneurship in creating a destination. As Beni (1991) states, tourism is a system whose components must be analyzed as a whole and not separately - the actions of each member of the system influence the actions of the other members. Another interesting aspect of the study is that it shows that online travel agencies are indeed capable of creating new destinations because of their distribution power and influence. Hurb played a fundamental role in the creation of Olímpia - a role that is recognized by all the people interviewed.

5.3 Limitations and future research

The main limitation of qualitative research is that the results cannot be generalized to broader populations (Ochieng, 2009). Subjects with different profiles and different levels of involvement in the development of Olímpia were sought in order to obtain more perspectives and draw conclusions, but it cannot be guaranteed that the results will be the same as if more subjects had been interviewed. In addition, the results of the survey were cross-checked with the quantitative data from Olímpia and Hurb to support the analysis. Another limitation is that ambiguities may occur when analyzing verbal data - they are inherent in human language (Ochieng, 2009). The study is also limited by the interpretation of the researcher who works in the study area - the tourism industry, which on the one hand makes the vision specialized in the area and thus provides relevant information, but on the other hand is not exceptional in some aspects. In addition, the interviewees were asked to recall a process that lasted 10 years, and due to the time limitation of the interviews, details might have slipped their minds over time.

Future research on this topic should focus on understanding the development of the real estate industry in Olímpia and its importance to the development of the destination, as real estate development plays a critical role in the development of tourism. Another interesting topic for future research is what path Olímpia should take to sustain the tourism growth it has experienced in the last 10 years..

6. CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to understand the role of Hurb in the development of Olímpia as a tourist destination. The first hypothesis was that the demand created by the Hurb helps to directly promote the tourist services and facilities, as well as the marketing dimensions of Olímpia. The second hypothesis was that the Hurb indirectly promoted the local economy, the business capacity and the social aspect of Olímpia through the increase in demand for accommodation in Olímpia and the higher volume of tourists in the city.

As part of a qualitative exploratory study, 6 interviews were conducted with representatives of the Hurb leadership team, tourism officials from Olímpia, and a tourism scholar from the city of Olímpia. All interviewees were asked to give their opinion on the development of tourism in the city, their view on which actors have boosted tourism in the city, on the role of Hurb in the destination, and on the main changes the city has faced in the last 10 years due to the increase in tourism. Interviewees were also asked to share their views on the future of tourism in Olímpia and the main challenges facing the city. The interviews were conducted online and followed a semi-structured script.

The first hypothesis is supported by the data collected: The demand created by the Hurb had a direct impact on the marketing dimension, especially when it comes to promoting the destination, as well as on the dimensions of tourist services and facilities. All interviewees agreed on the importance of the Hurb in the development of Olímpia as a destination. All mentioned that the Hurb was fundamental in promoting the destination from a national perspective and that the demand created by the Hurb drove the creation of new ventures in the city - new accommodations, new attractions, new restaurants.

The second hypothesis is also supported by the data collected: It was the demand created by the Hurb that drove the development of tourism in the city. According to FGV Projetos (2017), the increase in tourism affects many other sectors and influences the development of these other sectors. All interviewees agreed that the demand created by the partnership between Tutti Hotels and Hurb started the development process of the destination. All interviewees agreed that the city has benefited from the increase in tourism, as the city's revenues have increased and the number of available jobs has increased. One of the interviewees also mentioned the increase in the quality of water supply, health care,

education, roads, and infrastructure. Comparing the data collected in the interviews with the data of the municipality of Olímpia, it is concluded that tax revenues have almost tripled in ten years, the number of inhabitants, the number of new businesses, the number of official jobs and the availability of rooms in the city have also increased during this period.

Tourism has the potential to completely change the outcome of a region, and Olímpia is a living example of this: a former agricultural town that has become one of the world's most important destinations for water parks. Hurb bet on the city and took the risk to promote and invest financially in hotels in the region, and had a great impact on the development of the region. May the lessons of Olímpia and Hurb be a lesson for the entire industry.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A - Interviews Script (Portuguese)

Hurb Executives:

1. Como o Hurb conheceu Olímpia?
2. Como o Hurb descobriu o seu potencial turístico?
3. Como era Olímpia antes do Hurb começar a vender pacotes para a cidade (dados de crescimento, dados de turismo e vendas da cidade) ?
4. Quando o Hurb começou a ofertar os pacotes?
5. Quanto custava em média?
6. Era um preço competitivo?
7. A parceria entre o Hurb e Olímpia foi firmada com alguma rede hoteleira?
8. Ao seu ver, como o Hurb afetou a economia local? Percebeu o aumento da quantidade de hotéis e outros empreendimentos disponíveis na plataforma?
9. Quais foram as consequências dessas vendas de pacote pros hoteleiros? Percebeu algum aumento no preço das diárias cobradas?
10. Você percebeu alguma mudança na sociedade com o incremento do turismo? Aumento no número de empregos, nível educacional da população?
11. Quais foram as consequências dessas vendas de pacote para o Hurb?
12. Como é a cidade hoje? Como são os números de venda para Olímpia?
13. Quais são os pontos turísticos e o que “move” a cidade? Alguma mudança entre antes da atuação do Hurb como canal de distribuição e após?
14. Ao seu ver, a cidade enxergou quais mudanças após a parceria com o Hurb?
15. Ao seu ver, qual é a perspectiva futura para Olímpia?

Olímpia Executives

1. Pode me contar um pouco da sua trajetória?
2. Como você conheceu o Hurb (antigo) Hotel Urbano?
3. Como era Olímpia antes do Hurb começar a vender pacotes para a cidade (quantidade de quartos disponíveis, quantidade de turistas, número de vendas) ?
4. Quando você começou a observar o aumento do fluxo de turistas na cidade?
5. Esse aumento foi expressivo?

6. Como a cidade se adaptou a esse novo fluxo de turistas?
7. Quanto era cobrada a diária antes do Hurb começar a vender para Olímpia? E depois?
8. Foi formada alguma relação de parceria com o Hurb na época?
9. Ao seu ver, como o Hurb afetou a economia local? Percebeu o aumento da quantidade de hotéis, empreendimentos?
10. Quais foram as consequências dessas vendas de pacote pros hoteleiros?
11. Quais foram as consequências dessas vendas de pacote para a população da cidade?
12. Você percebeu alguma mudança na sociedade com o incremento do turismo? Aumento no número de empregos, nível educacional da população?
13. A população frequentava os aparatos turísticos da cidade? E depois?
14. Como é a cidade hoje?
15. Quais são os pontos turísticos e o que “move” a cidade? Alguma mudança entre antes da atuação do Hurb como canal de distribuição e após?
16. A cidade enxergou quais mudanças após a parceria com o Hurb?
17. Ao seu ver, qual é a perspectiva futura para Olímpia?

Appendix B - Interviews Script (English)

Hurb Executives:

1. How did Hurb get to know Olímpia?
2. How did Hurb discover its tourism potential?
3. What did Olímpia look like before Hurb began selling packages to the city (growth data, tourism data and city revenue) ?
4. When did Hurb start offering package tours?
5. What was the average price?
6. Was it a competitive price?
7. Was the partnership between Hurb and Olímpia signed with a hotel chain?
8. What do you think was the impact of Hurb on the local economy?
9. What were the consequences of these package sales for hoteliers?
10. What were the consequences of these package sales for the population of the city?
11. What were the consequences of these package sales for the Hurb?
12. What does the city look like today?
13. What are the tourist attractions and what "moves" the city? (Example: Volta Redonda is the steel company CSN)?

14. Has the city experienced greater growth in tourism after the partnership? What are they?

15. What do you think is the future perspective for Olímpia?

Olímpia Executives

1. How did you meet Hurb?

2. What did Olympia look like before Hurb started selling packages to the city (growth data, tourism data, and city revenues)?

3. When did you start noticing the increase in tourist traffic to the city?

4. What was the daily rate before Hurb started selling to Olympia? And then?

5. Was a partnership relationship established with the Hurb at that time?

6. How do you think the Hurb impacted the local economy?

7. What were the consequences of these package sales for hoteliers?

8. What were the consequences of these package sales for the people of the city?

9. What does the city look like today?

10. What are the tourist attractions and what "moves" the city? (Example: Volta Redonda is the steel company CSN)?

11. Has the city experienced greater growth in tourism after the partnership? What are they?

12. What do you think is the future perspective for Olympia?

Appendix C - Researcher Presentation



Rio de Janeiro, 17 de maio de 2022 .

À Hurb

Ref.: Apresentação de Pesquisador

Apresentamos o pesquisador Ana Carolina Vaz Feliciano , discente do Programa **Master in Management** da FGV EBAPE que desenvolve uma pesquisa de trabalho final de mestrado sobre o tema “Online Travel Agencies and the Creation of new tourist destinations: a study about Hurb and Olímpia”, sob orientação do Professor Luiz Gustavo Barbosa .

Gostaríamos de contar com a colaboração de V.S.^a no sentido de disponibilizar ao pesquisador o acesso a dados e informações de documentos oficiais referidos ao programa, bem como a permissão para que sejam conduzidas entrevistas com alguns dos servidores envolvidos com o seu gerenciamento.

Ressaltamos que os dados e as informações obtidas serão utilizados exclusivamente para fins acadêmicos e servirão como subsídios essenciais para a consolidação do estudo. Após receberem o tratamento e a análise adequados, as informações resultantes serão utilizadas como elementos empíricos na elaboração do trabalho final objeto do estudo.

Contamos com a vossa colaboração e desde já transmitimos nossos agradecimentos, aproveitando a oportunidade para enviar protestos de estima e consideração.

Atenciosamente,

PROFESSOR DR. AUGUSTO CESAR SILVA SALLES
Coordenador Acadêmico
Master in Management