

Perspectives for tourism in Petrópolis (RJ): impacts of Covid-19 and the rains in the summer of 2022

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Perspectives for tourism in Petrópolis (RJ): impacts of Covid-19 and the rains in the summer of 2022

Abstract

Between the years 2020 and 2022, Petrópolis endured economic and social losses that were results from the crises generated by the Covid-19 pandemic and by the heavy rains in the summer of 2022. Petrópolis is city category A on the Brazilian tourism map, and it had the tourist activity essentially paralyzed in these moments of crisis. Thus, the general objective of this article is to reflect on the tourism phenomenon in the context of these crises. Based on a bibliographical and documentary research and on interviews with representatives of the tourist trade, it was possible to notice that, despite the municipality having gone through situations that temporarily made tourist activities unfeasible, strategies were created to manage the crises, the tourist board remained active, new segments and products were consolidated beyond the historic center and the calendar of events was strengthened.

Keywords: Crisis Covid-19. Climate vulnerability. Tourism. Petrópolis-RJ.

Reflexões sobre o turismo em Petrópolis-RJ: impactos da Covid-19 e das chuvas no verão de 2022

Resumo

Entre os anos de 2020 e 2022, Petrópolis-RJ sofreu perdas econômicas e sociais decorrentes das crises geradas tanto pela pandemia da Covid-19 quanto pelas chuvas fortes no verão de 2022. Petrópolis é um município categoria A no mapa do turismo brasileiro e teve a atividade turística praticamente paralisada nesses momentos de crise. O objetivo geral deste artigo é refletir sobre o fenômeno turístico no contexto dessas crises. Com base numa pesquisa bibliográfica e documental e em entrevistas com representantes do *trade* turístico, foi possível perceber que, apesar de o município ter passado por situações que inviabilizaram temporariamente as atividades turísticas, criaram-se estratégias para contornar as crises: o Conselho Municipal de Turismo

permaneceu ativo, consolidaram-se novos segmentos e produtos para além do centro histórico e se fortaleceu o calendário de eventos.

Palavras-chave: Crises. Covid-19. Vulnerabilidade climática. Turismo. Petrópolis-RJ.

Perspectivas para el turismo en Petrópolis-RJ: impactos de la Covid-19 y las lluvias en el verano de 2022

Resumen

Entre los años 2020 y 2022, Petrópolis-RJ he sufrido pérdidas económicas y sociales derivadas de las crisis generadas tanto por la pandemia de Covid-19 como por las fuertes lluvias del verano de 2022. Petrópolis es un municipio de categoría A en el mapa brasileño del turismo y ha tenido la actividad turística prácticamente paralizada en estos momentos de crisis. Así, el objetivo general de este artículo es reflexionar sobre el fenómeno turístico en el contexto de estas crisis. A partir de una investigación bibliográfica, documental y de entrevistas a representantes del sector turístico, se pudo percibir que, a pesar de que el municipio he atravesado situaciones que temporalmente inviabilizaron las actividades turísticas, se crearon estrategias para sortear las crisis, la junta de turismo se mantuvo activa, se consolidaron nuevos segmentos y productos más allá del centro histórico y se fortaleció el calendario de eventos.

Palabras clave: Crisis. Covid-19. Vulnerabilidad climática. Turismo. Petrópolis-RJ.

Introduction

The municipality of Petrópolis was one of the first tourist destinations in Brazil, today, it is one of the main tourist destinations in the state of Rio de Janeiro. From 2020, with the world pandemic of Covid-19, the municipality suffered economic and social losses. In the middle of that year, tourist activities, suspended because of social isolation, resumed slowly. In February 2022, when part of the population was already immunized, and tourism was in a complete recovery process, the municipality suffered a new crisis due to the impact by heavy rains on February 15 and March 20, 2022.

Both situations caused crises that required articulated actions by the public power, the private sector, and civil society to face them. It is important to reflect on the crisis, considering

the loss of life, housing, companies¹, jobs, financial instability, and the resulting social, political, and environmental relationships.

Concerning tourism, different views have been established in the face of the post-crisis. In the case of Covid-19, Carneiro and Allis (2021) assume that it would be an opportunity to develop tourism more ethically and sustainably, precisely due to everything humanity has experienced during the most acute period of the pandemic. Other authors, such as Lobo et al. (2020), believe that the sector will recover at previous levels, maintaining the same tourism model developed before or even the coexistence of the two forms of tourism. There are many variables to be considered, such as informational issues, crowd tourism, ethics, and sustainability. Furthermore, crises have always promoted changes.

In this context, the paths that the tourism sector has taken in Petrópolis facing the crises established in 2020 to 2022 and what are the lessons learned from this moment to envision a better and more sustainable future for the sector are questioned.

Thus, this article aims to reflect on tourism concerning the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic impact (social, political, and economic) and the extreme weather event that the municipality of Petrópolis experienced in 2022. Furthermore, it aims to identify perspectives for tourism after these events based on bibliographic and documentary research, and on interviews with representatives of the tourist trade².

Petrópolis: tourism and environmental vulnerabilities

Located in the Metropolitan Region of the state of Rio de Janeiro [RMRJ], the municipality of Petrópolis is located at the top of Serra da Estrela, covering an 811 km². Currently, its territory consists of five districts, as shown in Figure 1: Petrópolis (center), Cascatinha, Itaipava, Pedro do Rio, and Posse (Santos et al., 2017) (Figure 1).

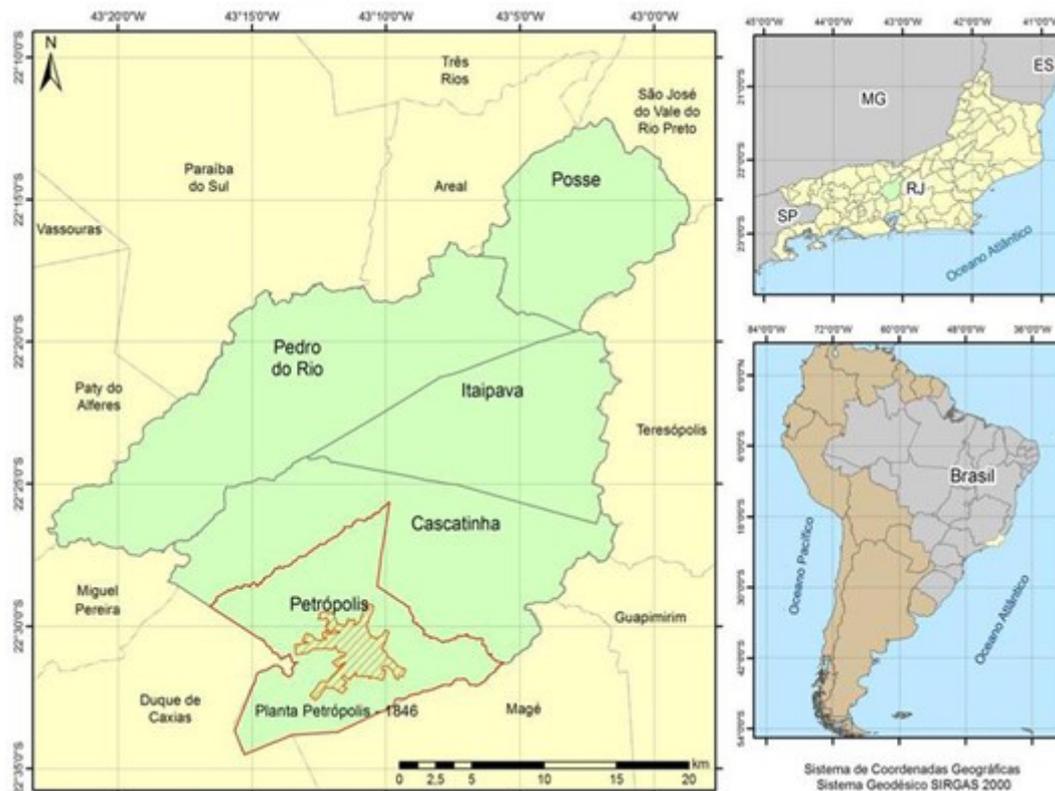
According to Soares (2009), in the 19th century, Dom Pedro II hired the engineer Júlio Frederico Köeler to build his Summer Palace (currently the Imperial Museum) and an urbanization plan for the locality. This plan, called Köeler Plan, defined the urban core of Petrópolis, a territory that previously consisted of the former Córrego Seco farm, added to the area of the Quitandinha farm, making it one of the first planned cities in Brazil (Antunes; Fernandes, 2020).

Then, at the beginning of the 19th century, during the summer, Petrópolis became the Empire's capital. The residents of Rio de Janeiro and members of the court went up the mountains to the villegiatura – a period of recreation outside urban areas in search of a mild temperature and fun (Daibert, 2010). This climatic motivation, the accommodation structure, and other facilities for visitors that were created there ended up making Petrópolis the first Brazilian climatic tourist resort (Ignarra, 2001).

1 Linked directly or indirectly to this sector.

2 This investigation is carried out within the scope of the International Tourism Network in Times of Pandemic. This multi and trans-scale analysis began studies on tourism and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Petrópolis was one of the cities selected by the research team in the core of the state of Rio de Janeiro, and with the advent of extreme weather events in 2022, the studies included this topic.

Figure 1 – Districts of Petrópolis and Petrópolis in the state of Rio de Janeiro



Source: Santos et al (2017).

Still, in the 19th century, European and Middle Eastern immigrants were attracted to work in the works of the Köeler Plan and later in agriculture. In the last quartile of the 19th century, the municipality became a vital textile hub in the country until 1937 (Antunes; Fernandes, 2020). The brewing industry also emerged in that century.

Even with the end of the Empire, Petrópolis continued to be a territory of political, economic, and cultural prominence. It became a leisure tourism destination for politicians, personalities, and artists. One of the exponents of this type of tourism was built in the 1940s, the Palácio Quitandinha hotel-casino. This casino was one of the most important in Brazil, where major national and international events took place until the ban on gambling in Brazil in 1946. It is currently a cultural space managed by the Social Service of Commerce (Sesc) and a private residential condominium (Garcia, 2017), but it remains an important tourist attraction in the municipality.

Another change in the 1940s was that cultural tourism began to identify the tourist destination established in mass tourism (Daibert, 2010). Petrópolis still maintains its image associated with cultural tourism, mainly in its central region, where the Imperial Museum is its most expressive attraction. However, other types of tourism occur in other districts, motivated by shopping (in the textile and furniture sector), haute cuisine, ecorrural circuits, cycling, and adventure. Various events are added to these attractions, such as Bauernfest, Bunka-sai, Ubuntu, Serra Serata, Imperial Christmas, and weddings (Petrópolis, 2019).

In 2019, Petrópolis tourism represented 6% of the municipality's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), approximately R\$ 13,650,000.00. In the same year, the city received two million tourists, which indicates that tourism is an economically significant sector (Petrópolis, 2019).

For Ambrozio (2008), the economic and population changes that started in the 19th century and intensified in the 20th century induced significant territorial changes in the municipality and made the city expand beyond the territory stipulated in the Köeler Plan. With the lack of urban lands, which could account for the economic and population growth, residences were installed on the slopes and ridges of the municipality and, in 1970, the Köeler Plan stopped being followed, which changed how to occupy its territory (Antunes; Fernandes, 2020), causing deforestation and lack of sanitary infrastructure, favoring the intensification of floods that were already occurring due to the area's geographical characteristics.

Petrópolis is a municipality with high environmental vulnerability. Floods, inundations, and landslides are not recent events in its history. They have occurred since before the municipal foundation decree. The first was recorded in 1834 and recurrent in the 19th and 20th centuries. In the 21st century, floods also occurred in 2001, 2004, 2008, 2011, and 2013 with economic, social, and environmental damages, according to Freitas (2022). In 2022, an extreme weather event, the object of our discussion, is fully recovering from the pandemic period.

Thus, after characterizing tourism and the environmental vulnerabilities present in Petrópolis, in the next section, we discuss the crises generated by the Covid-19 pandemic and the heavy rains in the summer of 2022 and some impacts.

The confluence of risks and crises in Petrópolis, from 2020: impacts on tourism

The word crisis comes from the Latin word *crísis*, which means “moment of decision, of sudden change,” mainly in the context of medicine. In Greek, *krísis* means the moment in the disease evolution in which it is defined between worsening – and death – or cure – and life. The Chinese character *weiji* (crisis) is formed by combining the characters “danger-*wi*” and “crucial-*ji*”. In the 19th century, the word left the scope of health, migrating to economics.

Lefebvre (2009) states that, when judging himself above everything and everyone, the human being, supported by rationalism and science, placed *having* above *being in* and *with* nature. This condition led to the creation of presuppositions for crises. It brings us to contemporary crises such as the climatic and social recurrent in the world.

In neoliberal contemporaneity, the state of exception, which would be the meaning of crisis, no longer has this meaning and is now seen as a normal life position, as if it were natural (Sousa Santos, 2020³ apud Moura; Guerra, 2020). The crisis is no longer explained, but it is transformed into a matrix of meanings to clarify other situations, such as changes in legislation and taking advantage of crises for manipulating people.

3 Sousa Santos, Boaventura de **A cruel pedagogia do vírus**. Coimbra, PT: Almedina, 2020.

Discussing a recent post by Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Moura and Guerra (2020) question the social and economic model necessary to direct the post-pandemic world. Neoliberalism, a model in force in many countries, including Brazil, has faced more difficulties resolving the crisis caused by Covid-19. In this case, the political orientation needs to be changed. Sousa Santos' proposal is directed towards a more participatory democracy, oriented towards solidarity and cooperation against orientation towards entrepreneurship and competitiveness.

At the beginning of 2020, Petrópolis is affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, like much of Brazil and the World. With an estimated population of just over 300,000 people, between March 2020 and July 2022, the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Petrópolis was 86,027, and the number of deaths was 1,704 (Table 1).

Table 1 – Impacts of Covid-19 in Petrópolis

year	confirmed cases	number of deaths	mortality rate
2020	17,249	431	1.41
2021	33,457	1,152	3.75
2022 (until July)	35,321	97	0.39
total	86,027	1,704	–

Source: Petrópolis ([2022]).

Covid-19 reached 26% of its population of Petrópolis, leaving many people sick and dead. Although a vaccine was already available in 2021, this was the year with the highest number of serious cases and lethality because cases continued to occur until the vaccine reached most of the population⁴.

In 2022, with the population immunized and tourism in full recovery, February 15 presented the highest volume of rain recorded in the history of Petrópolis. According to the National Center for Monitoring and Early Warning of Natural Disasters (Trigueiro, 2022), the volume of rain during six hours reached 259 mm, surpassing the previous record of 168.2 mm of rain in 1952. The following month, in the afternoon on March 20, heavy rain caused seven deaths and left dozens of people homeless – it is noteworthy that on this day, the record was again broken with the highest rainfall ever measured in Petrópolis, greater than 520 mm (Puente, 2022).

These two extreme weather events caused 233 deaths, loss of R\$ 665 million, about 2% of Petrópolis' GDP (Souza, 2022).

Methodological procedures

This is a qualitative research, with a time frame from the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic (March 2020) until the end of the second half of 2022 to achieve the proposed objectives. The first phase of the research was based on the literature review on the municipality,

4 Due to the federal government's position on vaccination and the delay in closing contracts with vaccine manufacturers and suppliers, there were delays and staggering by age group in the vaccination of the population of the country, which extended vaccination throughout 2021 to reach all age groups of the population.

particularly data related to the historical trajectory, urban planning, and tourism. Other sources consulted were reports published in digital media, municipal decrees, and the minutes of meetings of the Municipal Tourism Council (Comtur).

In the second phase, semi-structured interviews were carried out based on the following criteria: the ability to articulate Petrópolis' tourism and influences on public and private policies in the tourist sector. The first round of interviews, which took place in 2020, included the president of Comtur (October 2020), representatives of the Association of Guides of Petrópolis (AGP) (November 2020), representatives of the Brazilian Micro and Small Business Support Service (Sebrae) (November 2020), and representatives of the Convention & Visitor Bureaux of Petrópolis (C&VB) (February 2021). The second round interviewed again representatives of the AGP (July 2022) and the Academy (July 2022) - all members of Comtur.

During the research were analyzed the data collected from categories that allowed to classify and group elements, ideas, or expressions around a concept capable of covering the totality (Minayo, 1994). Three categories were listed: public policies, impact, strategies, and opportunities.

Tourism and the impact (social, political, and economic) of Covid-19 pandemic and the extreme weather event that occurred in Petrópolis in 2022

Based on the categories: public policies, impact, and strategies and opportunities, the results verified after data collection are presented.

(a) Public Policy

Considering public policy as a field of policy study that analyzes government in light of significant public issues (Mead, 1995) and relative to “what the government chooses to do or not do” (Dye, 1984), a study was conducted on (I) policies to prevent the contagion of the new coronavirus within the municipality and social participation in the decision-making process in the crisis period; (II) assistance to tourism sector workers (especially tour guides), and (III) public administration and discontinuity during crises.

(I) Policies to prevent the contagion of the new coronavirus within the municipality and social participation in the decision-making process in the crisis period.

Given the seriousness of the situation, in the first days after the pandemic's beginning, Decree n. 1.088 was issued on March 13, 2020, with temporary measures to prevent the contagion of the new coronavirus within the municipality. Such measures were renewed/modified through new decrees according to the epidemiological scenario and the conditions for treating the disease. Commercial, educational, cultural, and leisure establishments suspended their activities, leaving only essential services in operation to avoid agglomerations. Municipal postures and sanitary inspections were created to ensure compliance with the implemented legal actions (Petrópolis, 2022).

Many of the actions directly impacted tourism, as they included the cancellation of events; closure of parks and tourist attractions; implementation of sanitary barriers that prevented or limited the access of residents of other cities to Petrópolis, among others.

In June 2020, the easing of the preventive measures in place began, allowing the opening of trade and services for the resumption of daily activities in the municipality, including the hotel sector. In the second half of 2020, sanitary barriers reduce access restrictions if tourists present vouchers for accommodation or stores in the Petropolitan fashion hub (Petrópolis, 2022).

In March 2021, the increased number of deaths and hospitalizations motivated new restrictive emergency measures to try to contain the cases of Covid-19 in Petrópolis. April 2021 was the worst month in terms of deaths and infections. In that month, economic activities were in operation, except events, nightclubs, discos, and similar activities. In response to popular pressure, masks and social distancing were maintained, without measures to restrict access to the municipality (Petrópolis, 2022).

About the restrictions imposed to contain the pandemic, the vice president of Petrópolis C&VB reported the following:

We were closed for a long time; there was no reopening schedule. A victory for the trade was to make the sanitary barrier more flexible for those who had a store or hotel voucher. There was a lack of reading of the market and the needs of each sector. They locked the city and went to take care of their health. (Interview, vice president of C&VB, Feb. 2021).

This interviewee's position represents the view of the group of traders in the sector who were dissatisfied with the public power due to the lack of cooperation in decision-making. Similar discontent was also observed in the president of Comtur's interview in October 2020, who stated that the tourist council had not been consulted about municipal decrees and their measures. He highlighted that the actors in the sector, mainly representatives of the restaurants, exerted intense pressure to relax the restrictions that prevented tourists from entering the city (especially so because, initially, the restaurants were left out of the flexibilities in the barriers, through the presentation of vouchers that prove the use of accommodation or purchase at the fashion hub). This process of preventing/impairing free access to the municipality ended in mid-June 2021 when the barriers were deactivated (Machado, 2021).

In addition to the lack of consultation with the decision-making actors, these groups also had difficult access to information. The extract from the minutes of the Comtur meeting exemplifies this issue.

Mr. Guilherme Lacombe asked if there was any reopening prediction for the Serra dos Órgãos National Park (Parnaso), as the closure harmed Abih members working with adventure tourism. Mrs. Amanda Alvarez said she had not been informed about the park reopening. Mrs. Luciana Viveiros said that Parnaso, and the Imperial Museum, were federal areas. Therefore, they were governed by the Federal Government. She suggested that Mr. Guilherme Lacombe seek more information from the Ministry of Tourism. Mr.

Guilherme Lacombe informed this had already been done, and no response was given. Thus, he would like to know if there was any position at the municipal level (Minutes, Comtur Petrópolis meeting, Jul. 2020).

Thus, difficulties in coordinating the management of public policies for municipal tourism between the public and private sectors, failures in communication and vertical coordination between the actions of the federal public power (responsible for Parnaso and the Brazilian Institute of Museums) and the municipal governance are perceived, since Comtur is not aware of important tourist attractions in the municipality.

(II) Assistance to tourism sector workers (especially tour guides)

At the federal and state levels, some actions were established to maintain jobs and the sustainability of enterprises, including tourism (Costa et al., 2021). However, while professional categories claimed emergency income from state and municipal governments, they were not covered, including the tourist guides (self-employed workers whose income depends on tourist visitation).

In an interview held in November 2020, the director of the AGP reported the category's dissatisfaction due to the absence of public policies for financial support (emergency aid, mainly). Despite the mobilization and pressure on the municipal government through a letter reporting the situation of economic vulnerability that workers in the sector were living, their demands were not met⁵. Only in April 2021, according to the record in the minutes of Comtur, there is an action to help the category, from a partnership between Turispetro and Petropolitan Transit and Transportation Company. Through this action, tour guides were hired to assist tourists and visitors at sanitary barriers.

Thus, in the face of little support from the municipal government, workers in the sector sought creative solutions at zero cost, such as carrying out live streaming, campaigns to collect food parcels, and raffles to help tour guides who were helpless, without work and income (Trabalho desenvolvido..., 2020).

It is noteworthy that this pressure happened not only at the municipal scale, as there was a significant mobilization on the part of the Independent League of Tourism Guides of Rio de Janeiro to sensitize the state government about the calamitous situation in which these professionals found themselves and to pressure it to approve an emergency income program. However, the category was not successful with the state government, leaving the guides to claim emergency aid from the federal government and credit lines (loans) in federal (Fungetur or Pronampe, for example) and state (Supera Rio) programs.

Regarding the option for a loan, the director of the AGP, in 2020, reported the following:

5 There is also a record of such information in the minutes of the Petrópolis Comtur meeting in May 2020.

[...] I feel the State could have done more. They had a budget through AgeRio⁶, for tourism companies, but full of criteria for the person to obtain. As a tour guide who has been out of work for months, with no guarantees that he will be able to earn money, that he will earn some income... how will this tour guide access a loan to pay off a year from now? Both I and most of the guides did not dare to take out a loan. How will we be a year from now? Will I be working just like I was last year? (Interview, Neves, director of AGP, Nov. 2020).

The above report demonstrates insecurity about the future, given the pandemic context, and dissatisfaction with the format of the public economic policy presented.

(III) Public administration and discontinuity during crises

When overlapping crises occur in a municipality (Covid-19 and excessive rains), such a situation would be complicated for public management to develop their work. In addition, when experiencing a crisis related to political uncertainties, the scenario becomes even more complex. In Petrópolis, in two years, three mayors governed the municipality. Bernardo Rossi in 2020 (first year of the pandemic), Hingo Hammes (from January to November 2021), and Rubens Bomtempo (starts in December 2021). This resulted from the impediment that Bomtempo had to assume the prefecture after the 2020 election, as he was *sub judice* for an act of administrative improbity by his previous government. Temporarily, Hammes, the President of the Board of Aldermen, took over. In December 2021, the Supreme Court of Justice overturned the Rio de Janeiro Court of Justice's decision to suspend Bomtempo's political rights, and he took over the mayor's office. This fragmentation brought discontinuity of ongoing actions and political instability at a delicate moment that demanded action, cooperation, and coordination. In the tourism sector, instability is perceived by the change of staff in the municipal tourism agency and the presidency of Comtur.

Faced with the indefinite situation of the executive, whose term of office was indefinite, added to the difficulties of the pandemic crisis, and public managers' planning and action abilities were even more weakened. Bomtempo took over during a health crisis and, shortly after, had to address the problems caused by excessive rains (environmental crisis), which is not only a municipal responsibility, but also a federal and state responsibility.

Each of the powers has constitutional competence concerning preserving the environment, planning, and permanent defense against public calamities, particularly against floods. The coordination of actions that mitigate risks and provide the space with conditions of greater resilience is the responsibility of the three powers.

Thus, in addition to tourism, a survey conducted by Gomes and Coelho, A. (2022) on the municipal transparency portal showed that rain consequences could have been avoided with

⁶ On the difficult in accessing the credit line available for the tourism sector at the State Agency for Development (AgeRio), see Trentin, Costa e Moraes (2022).

more financial investments by the public power, whose funds were already provided for in the budget. Consequently, when the acting mayor was asked about reducing spending on disaster prevention actions, Bomtempo replied that decisions on investments made in 2021 were up to the interim mayor. Hammes responded that he assumed the temporary mandate during a critical moment of the pandemic and had to invest almost 40% of the municipal budget in health (Gomes; Coelho, A. 2022), which highlights the political crisis experienced in the municipality.

(b) Impact

In the International Tourism Network in Times of Pandemic's understanding, the impact is a force emanating from an action or an event with the power to generate direct or indirect implications "for what" or "for whom" is affected. It is essential to consider that, when socially experienced, its effects unfold dialectically in actions, reactions, and counteractions on the part of the affected society/social group/community. In the municipality of Petrópolis, the pandemic and the extreme rains caused numerous environmental, economic, political, and social impacts, and the tourism sector was included in this reality.

According to a study carried out by TurisPetro (Petrópolis, 2021), the main attractions of the central region of the municipality⁷ had a variation in their visits of around 85%, except Rio Negro Palace, whose variation reached 56%, but due to the months in which it was closed for renovation. In 2021, there was a positive balance, with 322,770 tourists visiting the attractions studied, exceeding the number of visits in 2019 (Petrópolis, 2021). However, segments such as pedagogical tourism, with a significant tourist flow between Monday and Friday, dependent on school activities, in 2019, totaled 143,838 visitors; in 2020, 2,023, and 2021, 4,058 (Petrópolis, 2021). These values demonstrate the pandemic's impact and the suspension of classes in public and private schools in the state in the segment.

Another vital segment, nature tourism, carried out in Parnaso, was also impacted since the protected area closed for visitation from march to December 2020, reopening only in February 2021. In 2019, there were 24,504 visits, and in 2020, 3,887 visitors (considering only the months before the closure due to Covid-19).

With the resumption of tourism in December 2021, two months before the 2022 flood, "normality" seemed to be returning to the sector. At the Imperial Christmas event in December 2021, around 300,000 tourists visited the city, and the hotel sector registered 85% occupancy during the high season, showing a relevant rate of return to tourist activities (Natal Imperial... 2022). This moment was highlighted with enthusiasm in the interviews carried out, as it was a moment when the trade celebrated the return of tourists.

The director of AGP, for example, recalled that many schools started contacting them to schedule visits to the city's attractions at the end of 2021 and beginning of 2022 – an encouragement for the category, as pedagogical tourism means the possibility of working in

7 Imperial Museum, Casa de Santos Dumont Museum, Cervejaria Bohemia Experience Center, Rio Negro Palace, Casa do Colono Museum, Yellow Palace, and Church of the Lutheran Confession

the working days. However, after widespread media coverage of the February 2022 extreme precipitation events, all bookings were canceled/postponed. She also reported that despite their efforts to convey a positive image of the municipality, “the feeling is that tourists are still afraid to come to Petrópolis, even though they publicize that the city has returned to normal life.”

The summer rains have always made tourists fearful about “climbing the Serra”, but the rains of 2022 made any activity related to tourism unfeasible in the short term. The chaos in the weeks following the rains caused a great upheaval in the lives of residents, with the destruction of infrastructure hindering access to the municipality and various businesses’ operations.

Shopping tourism was also affected, for example, on Teresa Street. This street is specialized in fashion and motivates the presence of many tourists in Petrópolis, generating thousands of direct jobs (Petrópolis, 2019). Commercial establishments had significant material losses and deaths due to the flooding of the February rains (Figure 2). The establishments on Teresa Street, which had already suffered from Covid-19, were again impacted by the extreme precipitation in February 2022. Many enterprises were rebuilt, and in March 2022, they were hit again.

Figure 2 – Impact of February rains on Teresa Street



Source: Fotos e imagens... (2022).

The historical heritage also suffered from the floods. The evaluation of the National Historic and Artistic Heritage Institute concluded that important national patrimonies were affected, such as Casa Princesa Isabel, which had its walls torn down; Eagle Square, the first floor of Rio Negro Palace and the gardens of Crystal Palace were flooded (Figure 3).

Figure 3 – Crystal Palace



Source: Coelho, H. (2022)

The representative of the Academy at Comtur, recalled that the main tourist attractions are in an urban axis conducive to flooding and, therefore, can always be strongly affected by other extreme weather events if there are no policies to mitigate or reduce floods and landslides.

The impact of heavy rains was the subject of the agenda at the Comtur meeting in March 2022. The Tursipetro representative presented some actions carried out within the scope of the Tourism Department, such as data collection on tourist attractions affected; verification of the impact of rains on attractions and their operation; participation in meetings with public bodies and other entities to develop the #AbracePetrópolis campaign (aiming to strengthen the destination's image), and meeting with AgeRio on economic actions for the affected tourist enterprises, among others (Comtur meeting minutes, mar. 2022).

The rain impact can also be verified through data from the hotel chains. In the months before the rains, occupancy was around 90% (in full recovery from the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic). However, in April 2022 (one month after the second rain), their occupancy decreased to 25%. Therefore, there was, for example, a decreased of workers hired and increased layoffs in the food and lodging sectors due to the absence of tourists (Principais setores... , 2022).

(c) Opportunities and strategies

As discussed in the theoretical framework of this research, the moment of crisis can mean the “moment of decision, of sudden change”; “of death or cure”. Thus, we sought to investigate, through the data collected, the perspectives for tourism after these events, based on the learning resulting from this moment, that can envision a better and more sustainable future for tourism in the municipality.

Despite the seriousness of some opportunities possible for Petrópolis, were created regarding the possibility of consolidating a new image of the municipality, boosting the districts, creating new tourist products, and strengthening tourist segments, among others.

In 2020, an edition of Bauernfest in the virtual format involved sponsors, technological resources, and important actions to promote the municipality. About this virtual event, the minutes of Comtur of July 2020 also showed the cultural impact of the action:

Mr. Marcos Carneiro said that, Agfap, it was vital to act, as the folk groups had been stopped, without rehearsal, since March, the beginning of the pandemic. Some couples, who are part of the association, performed the dances to compose the cultural program of Bauernfest at home. With more than 60,000 hits on the City Hall's YouTube page, the event registered the population's interest in German culture, which encompasses music, dance, gastronomy, and history, among other curiosities (Minutes, Comtur meeting, Jul. 2020).

Regarding the strategies, it is possible to mention the participation of the municipality of Petrópolis in the projects, seals, and sanitary protocols created by the state and federal governments, such as the Conscious Tourism Seal, the 'Rio Your Best Gift project, and the Seal of Compliance with Covid-19 Preventive Measures, among other policies (Costa et al., 2021).

Other segment trends and new tourist products were strengthened during the pandemic, especially in rural areas and districts. Our interviewees highlighted that tourism was most negatively impacted in the city center, during the pandemic and due to the rains.

A new phenomenon reported in an interview by the representative of the Academy at Comtur was the fact that several condominiums, which had characteristics of second home tourism (in Itaipava, Araras, and Vale das Videiras, among others), became the primary residence due to the possibility of remote work. According to our interviewee, "if before people were in isolation from Covid-19, now they are working at home office, looking for quality of life in Petrópolis." So, to meet this new demand, new ventures were inaugurated, mainly in gastronomy and craft products, which also stimulated the expansion of tourism development in districts that had less participation in this activity.

In this sense, a break is perceived in the paradigm of Petrópolis having the title of Imperial City as its main tourist appeal, to become a destination of Serra Multidestino, which is perhaps the most positive trend for the post-pandemic and weather extremes experienced there.

Between the opportunities identified, in the central area of the municipality, are actions such as creating walking routes sold at an affordable price to serve tourists who resumed their visit and found the main attractions closed. Still in its initial phase, the beer walking tour is another example of a product created whose by-product is a passport to be stamped at each attraction, encouraging visits to breweries and brewpubs concentrated in the center. In the central area, there was also the reopening of St. Peter's Cathedral with a guided tour from Crystal Palace.

The events sector is a significant highlight in the perceptions of the interviewed leaders. According to the AGP director, the postponement of Bauernfest 2022 was a strategy to give the city time to recover from the rain.

Events help a lot. Bauernfest will take place in August, from the 12th to the 28th. This postponement was very good. The event increases the demand for the city, and the guides end up with work. I, for example, am every weekend in August with groups scheduled for guidance (Interview, AGP representative, Jul. 2022).

In the minutes of the Comtur meeting of June 2022, the representative of Turispetro communicated that: “the expectation is that by the end of the year approximately 50 events will take place, among them small, medium. And large events heating the economy of the municipality.”⁸ Also, in this document, there is information that Petrópolis had received the title of “State Capital of Marriage” and that they were working to seek recognition at the national level.

In this context of “opportunities”, it is worth remembering that, even before the start of vaccination in national territory, the issue of Proximity Tourism was already a prominent theme in lectures, live streaming, and official documents. For example, the protagonism that the subject received in the document *Guia de Retomada Econômica do Turismo*, from the Ministry of Tourism, in 2021. Concerning this segment, the geographic location of Petrópolis is a solid point to consolidate because it allows easy movement of tourists residing in the RMRJ through road transport by BR-040.

Finally, it is essential to mention that Comtur remained active during the pandemic, holding meetings in a virtual format. Among the actions carried out, the regularity of monthly meetings, the presence of active Working Groups, and the use of financial resources from the Municipal Tourism Fund stand out. On this last point, they invested in contracting a university foundation to carry out the Municipal Tourism Master Plan from 2022 to 2030. Within Comtur’s scope, this plan was noted to be a subject that generates an optimistic expectation on the collegiate.

Final Considerations

This article analyzed the paths the tourism sector has taken in the face of the crises established in 2020 to 2022 in Petrópolis. Furthermore, the lessons learned from this moment can envision a better and more sustainable future for the sector, considering the effects of the social, environmental, political, and economic impacts that the crises caused. Under this prism, three categories were followed: public policies, impact, strategies, and opportunities.

In the first item addressed, one of the latent issues was noted to be related to the coordination and participation of the tourist trade in legal decisions to fight Covid-19, particularly restrictive decrees. This was a controversial issue, as the sanitary barriers prevented the entry of tourists, and the impacts resulting from this action were numerous. The trade regretted, for example, that the executive branch had not collectively discussed the content of these decrees and fought for flexibility (through vouchers) during the process. Without going into the merits of the importance of preserving lives versus saving the economy, in this case, there was an unfavorable positioning for more participatory democracy.

⁸ The calendar of municipal events is available on Turispetro’s website: <https://www.petropolis.rj.gov.br/turispetro/eventos>.

Regarding the barriers, there was an ambiguity there. They barred tourists, and concurrently they were used as a way for the city to redeem itself with the tour guides. The municipal executive hired some guides (paid) to approach the vehicles that stopped there. It is worth remembering that the category is organized through the AGP. This strong entity actively participates in Comtur and harshly criticized the lack of support from the municipal government for the guides at the beginning of the pandemic.

When defining public policies, different interest groups always seek to highlight their needs. Furthermore, it is worth considering that public policies must be conducted through democratic governance processes, building cooperation channels between the government, and organized civil society. In times of crisis, the state of exception is often instituted to speed up decision-making. However, policy coordination must consider that cooperation makes processes more productive, and that integration can bring better results.

It is worth noting that Comtur, the participatory arena for decisions related to tourism, remained very active during this research, and the collegiate was also not consulted about the decrees.

As for the issues of insecurity and discontinuity of executive power (three mayors in office during the research period), the lack of perspective regarding the duration of Mayor Hingo Hammes's term of office, for example, harmed the planning and execution of actions. In addition, it generated representation substitutions in Comtur. Furthermore, another crisis took place after complaints of irregularities that led to the opening of two special commissions (one in the Federal Senate and another in the Legislative Assembly of Rio de Janeiro) to supervise the conduct of the bodies involved in the recovery of the municipality after the heavy rains that happened in February and March 2022.

Regarding the impacts, it is essential to remember that the greater the economic dependence the territory has on tourism, the more significant the negative impact suffered by the restrictions of the pandemic. Petrópolis is a category A municipality on the Brazilian tourism map and has suffered several negative impacts due to the pandemic, such as the closing of shops; stoppage of activities in hotels and inns; closed restaurants or delivery-only activities; layoffs; drastic decrease in tourist demand, and event cancellation; among others.

Despite the difficulties faced in the most critical months of the pandemic, the commitment of Comtur representatives, who kept the Council active, holding monthly virtual meetings with debates and deliberations regarding tourism and the crises faced in the municipality stood out. The Council strengthened the Working Groups and took important decisions related to municipal planning, such as efforts to build the Tourism Master Plan and discussions on tourism planning.

Regarding strategies and opportunities, despite the importance of events as way to put the municipality back in the media, increase the flow of tourists, move the local economy, and generate jobs, events must be understood as an opportunity, valued, and encouraged. However, the caveat is that tourism policy does not depend only on events, as much as it is a fundamental strategy in the crisis (as was the creation of Oktoberfest in Blumenau or the proposal of the Rio de Janeiro a Janeiro Program (Brasil, 2018) for the state capital in the 2016 crisis), developing other public policy actions for the sector is required.

Another important point concerns the opposite position, on the part of the population, in promoting events, as they argue that investments made in this sector should be allocated to other areas of the municipality. They complain about the traffic chaos on the events' days or take the opportunity to question the allocation of funds that the municipality received after the rains. These criticisms were observed in posts/comments about the events on social networks, which leads us to question whether this would be the most suitable strategy for the municipality.

Thus, the research verified the opportunity related to a change in the tourism image in the municipality. It presents itself from the new segments and market niches that expand in its territory beyond the central and historical area. In this context, Petrópolis is no longer identified as the Imperial Capital to be a destination in Serra Multidestinos related to environmental, ecotourism, and gastronomic tourism, which goes beyond cultural tourism. This can be considered an opportunity arising from crises.

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Authors' contribution

Maria Angélica Maciel Costa: Reading of COMTUR Minutes, participation in interviews and analysis of interviews, contribution to data analysis, contribution to the introduction and conclusions.

Isabela de Fátima Fogaça: Participation in interviews, construction of the theoretical part, data analysis, contribution to the introduction, and conclusions.

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