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Residents' Perceptions Towards Tourism Activity: The Case of Bragança, Portugal

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Abstract: Residents' perceptions of tourism can vary depending on the location, context, and individual experiences. Tourism is commonly perceived as a potential economic resource, presenting features that can increase quality of life. However, there are concerns about the negative effects of tourism on the quality of life of residents living in these destinations. In this sense, this study aims to understand the residents' perceptions of the effects of tourism in Bragança, Portugal, and whether there are any variations in how residents perceive the activity, particularly if the residents' involvement with tourism leads to any changes in these perceptions. The research was conducted by collecting data through 203 online questionnaires, analysing the data obtained using both descriptive and inferential analysis. This study reveals residents' overall positive perceptions and recognition of tourism's economic potential, including job creation and revenue generation. However, concerns were raised about tourism's adverse effects on quality of life, such as pollution and traffic congestion. The research emphasises the need for resident-inclusive tourism planning and enhanced communication to ensure mutually beneficial outcomes for tourists and the local community.

Keywords: Development; Residents' Perceptions; Strategies; Tourism; Bragança.

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1 Introduction

There is widespread agreement that tourism impacts the development of destinations. Therefore, its planning should be created on strategies capable of increasing the tourist experience responsibly while safeguarding the residents' quality of life (Soares et al., 2022).

Understanding residents' perceptions regarding the effects of tourism is crucial for policies to promote the short and long-term sustainability of tourism (Scalabrini & Remoaldo, 2022). Several authors have dedicated themselves to studying residents' perceptions, analysing both the negative and positive impacts on communities using different research methods and analysis techniques (Scalabrini & Remoaldo, 2022). Through the analysis of these authors, a consensus emerged on how these perceptions should be evaluated, considering their effects on communities, which are divided into three categories: economic, sociocultural, and environmental (Andereck et al., 2005).

Understanding the residents' perceptions of different realities is important in this context. Considering that no similar study was identified in the city of Bragança, Portugal, this research aimed to understand the residents' perceptions towards tourism in this location. The study also tried to identify if there are any differences in perception between residents that have some relation with tourism activity. The study adopts the approach of categorizing effects into three categories: economics, socio-cultural, and environmental.

Accordingly, the paper is presented in four parts, in addition to the introduction. Firstly, a theoretical overview to residents' perceptions and tourism in the study area was presented. Secondly, the methodology used to conduct this research was described. Subsequently, the research results were presented and analysed. Finally, the study concludes with some final considerations, including the limitations of the study and proposals for future studies.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Residents' Perceptions Towards Tourism

It is important to mitigate the potential costs of tourism when considering the comfort of residents, as identified in recent decades (Lopes et al., 2019).

Studies on community attitudes towards tourism have been increasing, reflecting the significance of residents' involvement in tourism for sustainable development (Nunkoo et al., 2013).

Understanding residents' attitudes towards tourism is crucial to gaining active support, which makes development of tourism easier. Without resident support, developing sustainable and socially compatible tourism is difficult. Therefore, it is necessary to consider all residents' perspectives to demonstrate that their opinions and desires are taken into account regarding the development of tourism in their community.

Several authors affirm that there are economic costs associated with tourism that limit its benefits. Among the positive impacts are revenue generation, employment, and opportunities for the host community. Negative impacts include economic costs, excessive dependence on tourism, and seasonal price inflation in tourist destinations. All these impacts influence residents' quality of life (Roberts et al., 2022).

A common theoretical framework for assessing residents' perspectives on tourism development is the Social Exchange Theory (SET). This is a sociological theory that explains how individuals and groups exchange resources in an interactive context (Gursoy et al., 2019a).

According to SET, individuals assess the outcomes of an exchange based on the benefits and costs they experience, and the distribution of these outcomes influences the nature of the interaction among the exchange partners. This approach has been extensively used to examine residents' attitudes towards tourism development (Gursoy et al., 2019a).

When individuals perceive change as beneficial, there is a greater likelihood of a positive evaluation and acceptance. On the other hand, those who perceive that the change will bring more costs than benefits will evaluate it negatively (Gursoy et al., 2019a). Drawing on tourism literature, the Social Exchange Theory (SET) posits that an individual's attitude towards tourism and their willingness to support its development depend on their appraisal of the outcomes that tourism brings to the community (Andereck et al., 2005).

Generally, residents recognise the benefits of tourism but are sensitive to the negative impacts it can create (Sca-

labrini & Remoaldo, 2020). Although they accept and support tourism when it demonstrates benefits, the same does not occur when they perceive disadvantages. Thus, analysing residents' perceptions is an important tool to support governments and stakeholders in tourism planning, development, and policymaking (Soares et al., 2022).

2.2 Tourism and Economic Development

Andereck et al. (2005) suggest that tourism is often seen as a viable economic base, offering components that can enhance quality of life, such as job opportunities, income, and economic diversification. However, they also acknowledge concerns about the adverse effects of tourism on quality of life (Andereck et al., 2005). Similarly, Fernandez (2019) recognises tourism as an industry that has a substantial impact on global economic performance, as evidenced by the academic, scientific, and business sectors.

As stated by Vaz (1998), tourism tends to distribute development away from industrial centres and towards regions of the country that have not been extensively developed, thus offering few economic activities and providing limited development prospects.

Portugal possesses numerous physical resources (heritage, culture, nature, and diverse landscapes) and intangible assets such as historical content, enabling a wide range of diverse experiences (Fernandes, 2015). According to Turismo de Portugal (2023), tourism plays an important role in the country's economic development, contributing to the growth of the Gross Domestic Product and job creation. There is also a positive impact on various sectors, such as retail, services, and transportation. Furthermore, tourism encourages the demand for local products, handicrafts, and authentic experiences, benefiting small businesses and local communities (Turismo de Portugal, 2023). However, it is important to note that tourism has its challenges, as its growth can lead to overcrowding in certain areas, creating pressure on natural and cultural resources.

2.3 Tourism in Portugal

According to Turismo de Portugal (2023), the sector responsible for tourism in the country, this activity is an important economic activity generating employment and increasing the PIB. International tourism in Portugal contributes significantly to reducing the economy's financing needs and serves as a source of resource creation in external markets (Fernandez, 2019).

In 2022, the tourism sector in Portugal surpassed the values of tourist revenue by +15.4%, with 26.5 million

guests recorded, representing a strong performance for tourism in Portugal. However, these numbers were slightly lower than in 2019, as the COVID-19 pandemic led to a decline in many tourism sectors.

The “Tourism Strategy 2027” plan reveals an increase in accommodation capacity, growth in new forms of accommodation, an increase in tourism animation activities, and annual tourism revenue growth outperforming its competitors. Portugal was the second country with the best performance in revenue evolution from 2005 to 2015.

During that decade, several positive factors emerged, such as a more qualified territory and tourist resources, development-supporting infrastructure, growth in various tourism demand indicators, improved quality of accommodation, new forms of accommodation and tourism animation, growing creative entrepreneurship, increased availability of tourism animation activities, international recognition and awards in various areas of Portuguese tourism, and increased air connections (Turismo de Portugal, 2023).

However, Turismo de Portugal (2023) explains that there are some areas for improvement regarding company capitalisation, human resource qualification, tourism workers’ incomes, bureaucracy and contextual costs, digitisation of the tourism offer, seasonality, regional asymmetries, information about Portugal in foreign markets, network collaboration and joint promotion, co-creation, and destination and company sustainability.

To achieve the defined aims and positioning, of Portugal as one of the world’s most competitive and sustainable tourism destinations, Portugal aims to lead tourism of the future by becoming a sustainable, innovative, and competitive destination. The country envisions a cohesive territory where work is valued and where it is possible to visit, invest, live, and study. Additionally, Portugal aims to demonstrate its openness and global connectivity, becoming a reference as an international hub specialising in tourism (Turismo de Portugal, 2023).

3 Methods

3.1 Study Object

The study focuses on the city of Bragança, located in the Northeast of continental Portugal in the NUT III - Terras de Trás-os-Montes. This city has a population of 34,582 inhabitants and a population density of 29.5 inhabitants/km² in the year 2021. Additionally, there was a mean of

1.2 guests per resident in tourist accommodation establishments and a proportion of 18.1% non-resident guests, along with a total revenue of 2,787 thousand euros in tourist accommodation establishments (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2022). Tourism represents an important economic activity in the city.

3.2 Data collection

In this study, a quantitative approach method was used, and a questionnaire survey was conducted from April to May 2023. A total of 203 online questionnaires were collected through Microsoft Forms and were presented in Portuguese or Spanish.

The applied questionnaire was divided into four parts. The first part concerns the relationship with tourism, while the second part addresses questions about the effects of tourism. It is further divided into 30 statements, of which 6 address economic effects, 18 address socio-cultural effects, and 6 address environmental effects. In these questions, the response options are provided using a Likert scale (1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree).

The third part of the questionnaire concerns the opinion about the current tourism reality, while the fourth and final part addresses questions related to the socio-demographic profile of the respondents.

3.3 Data analysis

After data collection, a Microsoft Excel database was created, and it was subsequently processed using IBM SPSS Statistics software, version 27. Frequency analysis and descriptive analysis of the socio-demographic profile of the respondents were conducted. In the next step, a descriptive analysis was performed on the respondents’ relationships with tourism and their opinions on the current tourism reality in Bragança. Following that, a descriptive analysis of the residents’ perceptions towards the effects of tourism was carried out, as well as an analysis of the overall mean of the different effects.

To understand if there were differences in perception between residents who work or have worked in the tourism industry and residents unrelated to the field, a t-student test was conducted, considering a significance level of 5% (Hair *et al.*, 2019).

To address this research aim, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H₁: There are differences in the perception of economic effects between residents who work or have worked in tourism and residents who do not.

H₂: There are differences in the perception of environmental effects between residents who work or have worked in tourism and residents who do not.

H₃: There are differences in the perception of sociocultural effects between residents who work or have worked in tourism and residents who do not.

H₄: There are differences in the perception of overall effects between residents who work or have worked in tourism and residents who do not.

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Sociodemographic and Professional Profile of the Sample

Regarding the socio-demographic and professional profile of the sample, a total of 203 valid questionnaires were analysed. Relating to the place of birth of the respondents, 44.8% of the respondents were born in Bragança and the mean number of years residing in the municipality was 20.34 years (± 19.36). Most of the respondents were female (54.7%), with a mean age of 36.01 years (± 14.42) and single (57.1%). Related to the educational level, 72.4% had higher education.

4.2 Residents and the relationship with tourism

Understanding the relationship that tourists have with tourism is important because this relationship can affect the perceptions that residents have about this activity. Regarding the respondents' relationship with tourism, 79.3% answered no to the question "Do you work or have you ever worked in any tourism-related activity," while 20.7% responded affirmatively.

Regarding changing their lifestyle or activities to avoid tourists, 14.3% of the respondents answered yes, while 85.7% responded no. Concerning their displeasure towards any type of tourist, 83.3% of the respondents stated that they do not feel displeased, while 16.7% responded affirmatively. Out of the total respondents, 60% stated that there are places in their residential areas where they enjoy seeing tourists, and only 4% responded negatively to this question.

Regarding the places where they would prefer not to see tourists, only 10% of the respondents answered yes, while 50% responded no, indicating a positive perception of tourism among the respondents.

4.3 Residents' perceptions towards tourism effects in Bragança

Through the analysis of responses related to the tourism effects, it is possible to understand that residents demonstrate a highly positive perception of economic effects, and an even higher perception of positive effects. These results are similar to other studies (e.g., Roberts, 2022).

Regarding economic effects, these can be divided into positive and negative, and the positive economic impact that presented the highest mean being that tourism brings more visibility to the municipality, potentially attracting more tourists, with a mean of 4.06 points ± 1.037 .

Related to the negative economic effects, the one that is most perceived by residents is the price increase of goods and services (3.21 points ± 1.115). This is a common indication in studies on residents' perceptions (e.g., Vargas-Sánchez et al., 2015; Scalabrini & Remoaldo, 2020), as this is one of the most sensitive effects, considering that the increase in the cost of goods and services directly affects residents.

Concerning sociocultural effects, residents demonstrate a more positive perception than a negative one. Similar findings were identified in previous studies indicating that residents believe that there is not a significant loss or alteration of traditions and cultural identity (e.g., Gursoy et al., 2019b; Roberts et al., 2022). This is frequently because socio-cultural effects are more difficult to recognise, and measure compared to economic and environmental effects.

Residents are aware that tourism stimulates local culture and craftsmanship (3.92 points ± 0.950). They also perceive that it increases the number of people circulating in shops, restaurants, hotels, and services (3.96 points ± 0.979). The results also show that residents do not perceive an increase in delinquency or conflicts with tourism (2.33 points ± 1.013 ; 2.45 points ± 0.971). This result may be associated with the municipality not having high crime rates and being considered a safe city. Similar results were identified in other Portugal cities, namely Faro (Roberts et al., 2022), where the crime increase was not perceived negatively.

Relating to environmental effects, residents have a slightly more negative perception than in other areas, although not very pronounced. One explanation may be

Table 1: Means of the tourism effects

Effects	n	\bar{x}	s	Overall mean \pm s
Economic				3.58\pm0.550
Create jobs for residents	203	3.88	1.062	
Increase in prices of goods and services*	203	3.21	1.115	
Gives more visibility to the destination, attracting more tourists	203	4.06	1.037	
Job vacancies are occupied by people who did not previously reside in the destination	201	2.61	0.953	
Opportunities for local businesses	203	3.82	1.054	
Increases the residents' income	199	3.55	1.047	
Sociocultural				3.51\pm0.427
Increase crime rates*	203	2.33	1.013	
Encourages residents to be more culturally active	203	3.68	0.820	
Promotes contact with different cultures	200	4.00	0.927	
Limits residents' access to leisure sites*	202	2.42	1.044	
Encourages local culture and handicrafts	200	3.92	0.950	
The quality of services is better	203	3.46	1.105	
Local people change their behaviour to mimic the tourists	203	2.61	1.016	
Increase the stress*	201	2.75	1.058	
More public investment in the cultural sector	201	3.63	1.017	
Increases traffic*	199	3.43	1.037	
Parking is difficult*	201	3.34	1.116	
Increase cultural offers	200	3.75	0.930	
Improve infrastructure and local facilities	199	3.71	0.956	
Increases public security *	201	3.26	0.946	
Increases the number of people circulating through shops, restaurants, hotels, and services	202	3.96	0.979	
Increases the sense of pride of the residents	202	3.79	0.987	
It is more difficult to preserve local values, customs, and traditions*	200	2.58	1.034	
Conflicts between tourists and residents*	197	2.45	0.971	
Environmental				3.34\pm0.576
Generates excessive noise*	201	2.66	1.033	
Increase in air and water pollution*	200	2.74	1.030	
Provides consciousness for the preservation of natural areas	200	3.46	0.923	
Increase in rubbish*	202	3.00	1.060	
Decreased water supply *	200	2.63	0.916	
Infrastructure and visits to natural areas are improved	201	3.63	0.935	
Global effects				3.47\pm0.420

Note: *Inversion of the items for the calculation of the overall means, by impact. n = sample; \bar{x} = mean; s = deviation standard.

Source: Own elaboration.

the location of Bragança presenting many natural areas. It is concluded that the negative effect for which residents have the highest perception is the increase in litter in the streets with a mean of 3.00 points (± 1.060), and the negative impact with the least perception is the decrease in water supply with a mean of 2.62 points (± 0.916). Regarding positive environmental effects, residents believe that tourism enables infrastructure improvements and visits to natural areas of the municipality (3.63 points ± 0.935).

Through the analysis of the positive effects, it can be observed that economic effects are the most perceived by residents, followed by sociocultural effects, and finally, environmental effects are the least perceived by residents. These findings corroborate other studies in which economic effects are the most perceived, followed by sociocultural and environmental effects (e.g., Sorcaru et al., 2022). As mentioned before, this may be because economic effects are more easily perceived by residents.

To address the second research aim, to understand whether there are perception differences between residents who work or have worked in Tourism and residents not related to the field, a t-student hypothesis test was conducted, considering a significance level of 5% (Hair et al., 2019). The following research hypotheses were formulated:

H₁: There are differences in perception of economic effects between residents who work or have worked in tourism and residents who do not/do not have.

H₂: There are differences in perception of environmental effects between residents who work or have in tourism and residents who do not/do not have.

H₃: There are differences in perception of sociocultural effects between residents who work or have worked in tourism and residents who do not/do not have.

H₄: There are differences in perception of overall effects between residents who work or have worked in tourism and residents who do not/do not have.

The table below demonstrates that, since the p-value > 0.05, there is not enough evidence to reject H₀. Therefore,

there are no statistically significant differences to suggest disparities in perceptions between residents who work or have worked in tourism and residents who do not/do not.

Although the t-student test did not reveal statistically significant differences between perceptions, it is noted that there is a higher perception within the group of residents who work or have worked in tourism. This is because, in terms of perception of all effects, there is a higher mean in this group compared to the group that reported never having worked in tourism. Individuals who are more informed and more involved tend to have more positive perceptions of tourism compared to other groups. People employed in the tourism industry or expressing dependence on it also have more positive attitudes towards it (Andereck et al., 2005; Lopes et al., 2019; Soares et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2023).

5 Conclusions

In summary, this research aimed to understand the residents' perceptions of tourism in the city of Bragança. Through the analysis of the effects (economic, sociocultural, and environmental), this study provided important insights for improving tourism planning in the region.

It was found that residents have a positive attitude towards tourism and believe that there could be more investment in this industry, as they perceive it as a potential source of economic benefits for the city, including job creation and revenue generation.

Additionally, it was concluded that residents are aware that tourism enables important cultural exchanges that enhance the value of traditions and customs. However, there are also negative perceptions regarding tourism. Residents believe that it can negatively affect their quality of life through increased littering, pollution, and traffic congestion. Understanding these perceptions can help tailor tourism strategies to mitigate these negative effects and avoid frustration or disruption of residents' quality of life, ensuring a positive experience for both tourists and residents.

Furthermore, this study highlights the importance of involving residents in decision-making processes and fostering effective communication with the host community. Increasing the participation of industry workers in surveys would provide clearer insights into their perceptions compared to residents in unrelated occupations.

One limitation of the study is the method used to administer the questionnaire, as not all residents have internet access and online distribution may have limited the number

Table 2: Means of the tourism effects

	Positive	s	Negative	S
Economic effects	3.82	0.897	2.91	0.801
Sociocultural effects	3.71	0.747	2.74	0.728
Environmental effects	3.54	0.827	2.76	0.836
Global effects	3.69	0.722	2.80	0.647

Table 3: t-student test: Differences between perceptions between residents who work in tourism and residents who do not/were not.

Effects	Tourism relation	n	\bar{x}	s	p-value (Levene's Test)	p-value (t-student)	Hypothesis results
Economic	Yes	42	3.70	0.581	0.913	0.117	No validated
	No	161	3.55	0.54			
Sociocultural	Yes	42	3,5	0.452	0.615	0.513	No validated
	No	161	3.5	0.421			
Environmental	Yes	41	3.37	0.611	0.972	0.736	No validated
	No	161	3.33	0.569			
Global	Yes	41	3.54	0.438	0.704	0.288	No validated
	No	161	3.46	0.416			

Source: Own elaboration.

of respondents. Future research in this field could focus on exploring specific strategies that take residents' perceptions into account. Conducting long-term studies to track changes in residents' perceptions over time would be valuable for assessing improvements. It would also be important to conduct segmented studies based on sociodemographic or socioeconomic characteristics to identify groups that may require adapted strategies or awareness campaigns to enhance their understanding of the industry and, consequently, improve support for its benefits to the community.

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