

## **Are destination perceptions and recommendation intentions the same for residents, domestic and international visitors? A case study of the city of Aveiro**

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**Objectives** | Destination image is a subjective construct, and the way in which different groups perceive it differs (Casali et al., 2021). Previous studies concluded that domestic and international visitors' perceptions of a destination tend to diverge (Iordanova & Stylidis, 2019). Also, residents are recognized as key informants that could influence visitors' perceptions of the destination, and so it is important to know their image of the place they live in (Stylidis, 2022; Woosnam et al., 2020). In this context, the objective of this study is to analyse and compare perceptions of a destination of three groups (i.e. residents, domestic and international visitors) and their intentions to recommend (i.e. cognitive, affective image and intention to recommend the destination to friends and relatives).

**Methodology** | This is an exploratory study carried out in the context of a coastal tourist destination, the city of Aveiro (Portugal). In this study, a quantitative approach was adopted to analyse image variations and recommendation intentions between the three groups. Data were collected from 1033 usable questionnaire surveys from Aveiro (Portugal) residents (n = 307), domestic visitors (n = 381) and international visitors (n = 345), between August and October 2019 in the city centre, using heterogeneous purposive sampling. The questionnaire was self-administered, and participants were approached at a random day/time. The representativeness of the sample was increased by applying the questionnaire either during weekdays or weekends, at different times of day. Respondents were approached in the city centre, near the Aveiro canals, where most tourist experiences occur, and this was thus deemed an appropriate place to collect their impressions regarding the construct involved in the study. Data protection was assured since the survey is anonymous and the confidentiality of the responses was assured. Destination image attributes were defined using established scales. All items were assessed using a five-point Likert

scale "0 = totally disagree" to "5 = totally agree". The data analyses were carried out using SPSS v.28 and adopted the one-way ANOVA procedure, with Tuckey and Games-Howell post-hoc tests, which are considered the most suitable when groups are of different sizes (Field, 2017). These tests were then carried out to examine differences between the three sample groups (i.e. residents, domestic and international visitors) regarding cognitive and affective image and intention to recommend Aveiro to friends and relatives.

**Main results and contributions** | The sample included respondents aged over 18 years old. The three groups are mainly composed by women (residents – 57%; domestic – 58.5% and international – 63.2%). More than 50% of residents and domestic visitors are in the age range 18–34 years old and the international visitors in the range 18–44 years old. All groups are dominated by participants with university or higher studies; however, it is in the residents group where the highest percentage can be observed (i.e. 89%). The results indicate that there are significant differences in most of the attributes of cognitive image and affective image, as well as in recommendation intentions between the groups. In this study, the aim was to evaluate the perceptions of three distinct groups of residents and visitors (domestic and international) regarding a coastal tourist destination. It contributes to providing some strategic information for destination managers and planners as it reveals relevant information regarding the way residents and visitors perceive the destination and adopt recommendation intentions.

**Limitations** | This study has several limitations. One is related to the generalization of the results, which is limited. The study was carried out in one Portuguese coastal city in an urban context and during the peak season, with the effect of tourism pressure, and the results could be different in low season. Another is that is an exploratory study and control variables, e.g. gender, were not considered. Also, it would be interesting to replicate the study after the COVID-19 pandemic to assess whether the results reveal differences and also to adopt a longitudinal approach, collecting low season data to assess if there are differences in perceptions.

**Conclusions** | Residents, domestic and international visitors play an important role in a tourist destination. Their image perceptions of a destination or the place they live in could have several repercussions for the destination economy, as destination image is recognized as a powerful tool for the tourism industry (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020). Residents are ambassadors that can establish an interaction with visitors, which can influence their perceptions of the place (Stylidis et al., 2022). Visitors are important assets for tourist destinations as they contribute to their economy (Stylidis et al., 2017). The way the three groups perceive image and adopt intentions to recommend the destination to their friends and relatives are of key relevance for destination promotion. The value of this study lies in making destination managers and planners aware of the

importance of residents, domestic and international visitors' image perceptions and intentions for the destination dynamics in the tourism market.

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