

Perceptions towards **Tourism and Folk dance**: The case of University Students in Portugal

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Objectives | The purpose of this study is to analyse the perceptions that university students taking courses in tourism and management have of folk dance. These perceptions are important considering the students as being potential mediators of local image and identity, with an increased possibility of involvement in actions or policies that could have impact in social, cultural and economic fields, and contribute to the enhancement of tourism and culture.

Methodology | The method used for the study was a questionnaire given out to a convenience sample of 816 university students in the regions of the Algarve, Alentejo, Central Portugal, Lisbon and North of Portugal. The questionnaire was composed by likert scale and open-ended questions and was intended to identify: the level of interest in folk dance in relation to various other types of dance; different perspectives of folk dance as a tourism product; and, finally, what could be done to promote the enhancement and identification of folk dance and tradition from a perspective of tourism valorisation.

Main results and contributions | The results which have now come to light allow us to conclude that young people are neither very familiar or either appreciative of folk dance, with only 13.3% answering that they enjoy this type of dance, as opposed to 46.2% who say they prefer ballroom dance. The students tended to declare that they only assist performances of folk dance occasionally, which once again demonstrates their lack of interest in this type of dance. However, despite their own limited interest, they felt that it was important or very important that visitors, both foreign and Portuguese, should know about this type of dance (71.3% and 65.3 respectively), whereas it was not so important for residents to be aware of it (42.2%). In answer to what they considered to be folk dance's most important contribution, the aspects most valued were the revitalisation of traditions and the enhancement of cultural identity. In the students' opinion, the most important thing to do to stimulate residents' interest and identification with folk dance, would be to provide support for folk dance groups and promote them in a variety of ways (websites, articles, and others). The students considered taking actions in the context of formal education and pedagogic activities to be less important. Around 78.7% of respondents said that they felt the creation of new products associated with folk dance would constitute a valuable opportunity.

It is intended that this study will contribute to the enhancement of forms of cultural expression as important vehicles for transmit the authenticity of the place. If one considers folk dance as a cultural domain and tourism as an economic activity,

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the relationship between the two may constitute an interesting approach of enhancing cultural tourism, with a bearing on the territory, the enhancement of culture and the enrichment of the tourism experience.

Conclusions | The university students recognise the importance of folk dance as a vehicle of expressing cultural identity, however they consider the folk dance knowledge more important for visitors, namely foreign and Portuguese, than for the residents. This important finding reinforces the perception of folk dance as a tourist-orientated concept. The study concludes that knowledge of popular culture is an important tool for gaining knowledge of culture from the past, an essential condition if visitors' experiences are to be authentic, and which can only be guaranteed if residents identify with their own culture. To this goal, the enhancement and integration of this form of popular culture in an educational context is seen as being essential.