

Stakeholders' perceptions on tourism impacts of a Portuguese World Heritage historic center: the case of Oporto

LAURENTINA MARIA DA CRUZ VAREIRO * [lvareiro@ipca.pt]

RAQUEL MENDES ** [rmendes@ipca.pt]

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Objectives | The World Heritage List (WHL) is generally considered an important tool for national and international tourism campaigns. Sites inscribed on the WHL by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) are commonly used to promote the tourism industry, thus contributing to economic growth and development. Given that support for tourism development is affected by the perceived impacts of tourism, which may be both positive and negative, policy-makers and planners need to incorporate local stakeholders' opinions into tourism development by continuously monitoring these opinions in order to maximize the benefits and minimize the adverse effects.

This study employs a case study approach to explore the issue of the local stakeholders' perceptions of the importance of the World Heritage Site (WHS) classification of the historic centers by UNESCO. The case study is the historic center of the city of Oporto. It also measures the economic, social and cultural, and environmental tourism impacts on the municipality of Oporto, perceived by local stakeholders.

Methodology | The research adopts the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Questionnaire surveys to local people who live in/around the WHS are adopted for the former, and semi-structured interviews with local specialists, who are familiar with the WHS, tourism and heritage conservation, are used for the latter. Data regarding local people will be collected using a self-administered survey applied to convenience samples of local residents of Oporto in the beginning of 2017. Based on the purpose of this study, two public secondary schools, located in this municipality, will be used for constructing the survey samples. The questionnaires will be mailed to the directors of two classes (an 11th grade class and a 12th grade class) selected by the headmaster of each school. The class directors will distribute four questionnaires to each student of the selected classes. The student should answer one of the questionnaires, and family or friends that are residents in the city in analysis should fill in the remaining.

* **PhD in Economics** from the University of Minho (Portugal). **Professor** in the Department of Management of the School of Management, Polytechnic Institute of Cávado and Ave, Portugal and **member** of the Applied Management Research Unit (UNIAG) and Laboratory of Landscape, Heritage and Territory – Lab2PT, University of Minho.

** **PhD in Economics** from the University of Minho (Portugal). **Professor** in the Department of Management of the School of Management, Polytechnic Institute of Cávado and Ave, Portugal and **Member** of the Applied Management Research Unit (UNIAG).

The students will be asked to return the filled in questionnaires within a two weeks' time schedule. The questionnaire consists of three main sections. In the first section, information about the characteristics of the historic city center is collected. In the second section, respondents are asked to indicate to what extent they agree/disagree with statements about the tourism impacts of the world heritage classification on their municipality using a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neutral; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree). Various items are used to assess residents' perspectives of tourism impacts of the world heritage classification on this Portuguese city. These items are based on previous empirical research. In the final section, information on socio-demographic characteristics of the residents, such as gender, age, residence, marital status, education, and household income are collected. On the other hand, the sampling strategy for the semi-structured interviews was a combination of judgement/expert choice, and networking/snowballing (Jimura, 2011) and will start also in 2017. The quantitative data will be analysed using SPSS. The qualitative data will be analysed manually focusing on the changes after WHS designation and tourism impacts.

Main Results and Contributions | Considering that only in the beginning of 2017 data will be available for analysis, we don't have results to present at this moment. However, it is expected that stakeholders living/working closer to the historic center are more positive about tourism than those who live far from there. Also, it is expected that economic dependency on tourism and residents' attitudes towards tourism are related. Generally, the residents who benefit from tourism are more likely to regard tourism impacts as positive changes.

Limitations | A convenience sample of local residents will be used. Consequently, there should be caution in generalising the results.

Conclusions | This study aims to measure stakeholders' perceived positive and negative tourism impacts of the UNESCO world heritage classification on the Portuguese city of Oporto. It is expected that the main results are consistent with previous empirical research. Hence, it is expected that stakeholders consider that since the world heritage classification tourism development has brought both positive and negative social, economic, and environmental impacts. It is also expected that, overall, the perceived positive impacts outweigh the perceived negative effects. Insight gained from the empirical analysis undertaken in this study may be an important tool for policy-makers and tourism planners in the development of strategies with regard to the future management of the certified site and tourism development associated to it.

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