

Cultural distance in UNESCO World Heritage destinations. The case study of Coimbra (Portugal)

Distância cultural em destinos Património Mundial da UNESCO. O estudo de caso de Coimbra (Portugal)

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Abstract

The empirical research studies carried out in cities with World Heritage Sites and the relationships between tour guides and visitors strengthen the destination and mobility characteristics that are important for analysing behavioural distancing in tourist destinations. The theme of this article is related to the concept of touristification, which makes it possible to valorise the risk implicit in the context of relations between groups of visitors and resident populations (local community). The main purpose is to identify the challenges in managing the tourist destination of Coimbra (UNESCO World Heritage) when considering cultural distance as the relationship between tourists of different nationalities, the local community and the professionals responsible for delivery services. The focus is on how interpreter-guides perceive different groups of visitors, based on a set of 20 interviews. The group consisted of professionals who often visit the city and the University of Coimbra, but who work both nationally and internationally. The text highlights four crucial factors in the analysis of cultural distance in a destination between residents, interpreter-guides and tourists, these being i) communication, ii) experience/learning, iii) hospitality, and iv) knowledge of local history and good organisation of the tour programme.

Keywords: Interpreter-guides. Behavioural distancing. Cultural distance. Touristification. Tourist (non) friendliness.

Resumo

Os estudos de investigação empírica realizados em cidades com Património Mundial e as relações entre guias turísticos e visitantes reforçam as características de destino e de mobilidade importantes para a análise do distanciamento comportamental nos destinos turísticos. O tema deste artigo está relacionado com o conceito de turistificação, que permite valorizar o risco implícito no contexto das relações entre grupos de visitantes e populações residentes (comunidade local). O objetivo principal é identificar os desafios na gestão do destino turístico de Coimbra (Património Mundial da UNESCO) ao considerar a distância cultural como a relação entre turistas de diferentes nacionalidades, a comunidade local e os profissionais responsáveis pela prestação de serviços. O foco é a forma como os guias-intérpretes percecionam os diferentes grupos de visitantes, com base num conjunto de 20 entrevistas. O grupo era constituído por profissionais que visitam frequentemente a cidade e a Universidade de Coimbra, mas que trabalham a nível nacional e internacional. O texto destaca quatro fatores cruciais na análise da distância cultural num destino entre residentes, guias-intérpretes e turistas, a saber: i) a comunicação; ii) a experiência/aprendizagem; iii) a hospitalidade; e iv) o conhecimento da história local e a boa organização do programa turístico.

Palavras-chave: Guias-intérpretes. Distanciamento comportamental. Distância cultural. Turistificação. (Não) convivialidade do turista.

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1. Introduction

The repercussions of distance and its cultural impacts can be evaluated from the perspective of the recipient destination's relations with visitors from around the world, as noted by Ahn & McKercher (2015), Goeldner & Ritchie (2008), Huang & Crotts (2019), Madeira et al. (2021), McKercher (2008) and Ng et al. (2007). Distance exerts a 'filtering effect', with long-distance travel potentially representing greater difficulties in assimilating the culture of host countries, the residents, the Other.

This cultural distance has been expressed by Hofstede since 1980 as six cultural dimensions: Power Distance; Uncertainty Avoidance; Individuality; Masculinity; Long-Term Orientation (in 1991); and Indulgence (in 2010) (Ahn & McKercher, 2015; Hofstede, 2011; Hofstede et al., 2010). Recognising the relevance of these dimensions, we intend to look at cultural distance as the extent to which the culture of the area where the tourists come from differs from the culture of the host region (McIntosh & Goeldner, 1990). However, we must also realise that cultural distance is appealing to some people and not appealing to others (Kastenholz, 2010).

The impacts associated with cultural distancing between local communities and visitors are identified in regions where the presence of tourists approaches or exceeds the capacity to accommodate them. It is significant to note that in environments where tourist urbanisation (Anton Clavé, 1998; Anton Clavé & Santos, 2015; Luchiar, 2000; Mullins, 1991; Purnomo, 2021) is gaining relevance, the processes of touristification integrate many of the situations of cultural distance in the context of tourism.

Touristification can therefore serve to develop the theme of cultural distance and the risks it entails. Regarding this, Reisinger & Turner (2002a, 2002b) point out that cultural risk occurs because tourists and residents tend not to know about each other's cultures. The perception of cultural differences may allow a cultural distance understanding concerning the Other. In fact, touristification (massive development, relatively spontaneous, an unplanned transformation of that space into a touristic product) can lead to cultural distancing and conflict. This form of urbanisation (which leads to the depopulation of residents because they are forced to leave, unable to bear the costs) implies urban regeneration at the economic, cultural, and environmental levels, and promotes cultural distancing from the standpoint of both the resident and the visitor.

The main aim of this article is to investigate the cultural distance between tourists, residents and service providers in a World Heritage destination and to identify possible challenges for territorial management. Few empirical research studies have been carried out in cities with World Heritage Sites, whether on the relationships between tour guides and visitors that reinforce the destination and/or on the mobility characteristics which can promote behavioural distancing from the tourist destination.

2. Literature review

2.1. Gentrification and touristification – A background of cultural distance

The increase in local accommodation, understood as a short-term rental, in the pre-COVID-19 period, significantly transformed many areas within cities, especially those with a greater tourist attraction, associated with heritage value, recreational activities, and leisure spaces. This trend has come to socioeconomically rehabilitate some urban areas (Carvalho et al., 2019) but also to create social, economic and symbolic problems and disadvantages for residents, given the increased burden on the locality (Álvarez-Herranz & Macedo-Ruiz, 2021), the pressure on commercial activities (Bertocchi & Ferri, 2021; Cócola-Gant, 2015; Hyra et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2020) and the increase in the price of permanent housing (Chamusca et al., 2019; Cócola-Gant & Gago, 2019; Gravari-Barbas & Jacquot, 2017; Ioannides et al., 2018; Novy & Colomb, 2017; Wachsmuth & Weisler, 2018).

These circumstances create situations in which local hospitality becomes filtered by stigmatising perceptions. With tourism strongly influencing urban cultural and economic restructuring strategies (Gotham, 2011), these may be responsible for creating a bad atmosphere between visitors and residents. This means that relationships in which distances and cultural and behavioural risks are over-estimated become possible (Crotts, 2004; Hofstede, 2011, 1989; Hofstede et al., 2010; Jover et al., 2018; Kastenholz, 2010; Liu et al., 2020; McKercher, 2008; Özdemir & Yolal, 2017; Reisinger &

Turner, 2002a, 2002b), thus increasing insecurity and deviant procedures in the relationships between those who are on the move and those who live in the visited territory.

Gentrified urban territories are the result of interventions and different actions in areas planned for permanent residences, shops and services of distinct territorial influence for a population with daily or occasional use (Cócola-Gant et al., 2020; Jover et al., 2018; Yeom & Mikelbank, 2019). The overlapping of different perceptions of space usage by specific local populations is augmented when visitors are incorporated into the equation, which provokes discordant behaviour and cultural distance between population groups with a presence in the same space.

Gentrification forms can be responsible for conflict situations (Jover & Díaz-Parra, 2020; Lees et al., 2008; Madeira et al., 2021; Ojedaa & Kieffer, 2020; Shmaryahu-Yeshurun & Ben-Porat, 2021; Yeom & Mikelbank, 2019), behavioural mismatches (Chan et al., 2016), functional changes (Bertocchi & Ferri, 2021; Chan et al., 2016; Cócola-Gant, 2015; Cócola-Gant et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2020), urban rehabilitation (Aalbers, 2015, 2018; Hackworth, 2002; Hackworth & Smith, 2002; Lees et al., 2008) and long-term residents' proactivity (Chan et al., 2016; Leite, 2015), of duplicities in everyday life (Siegler & Wachsmuth, 2020), of exclusions and obliterations in relations between residents and visitors (Chan et al., 2016; Lopes et al., 2019; Madeira et al., 2021). The complexity of the aspects involved increases the correlation with a multiplicity of concepts converging on the concept of touristification. Thus, the understanding of touristification (Bertocchi & Ferri, 2021; Carvalho et al., 2019; Gotham, 2005; Jover & Díaz-Parra, 2020; Jover et al., 2018; Ojedaa & Kieffer, 2020; Sequera & Nofre, 2018; Siegler & Wachsmuth, 2020) is consolidated in the tourist process that involves a massive, relatively spontaneous, unplanned development capable of transforming the (urban/geographical) space into a tourist product (Romero Renau, 2018), which is transformed into a predominantly consumption space (Urry, 1995). This consumption space is diverse, depending on the interaction between local governance, local groups, and visitors.

Global planning, with the protection and maintenance of the heritage, regeneration, and accessibility (Pickel-Chevalier, 2012) becomes pivotal in valuing the concept of touristification. The spaces integrated there correspond to neighbourhoods of cities that are internationally referenced tourist destinations (Bertocchi & Ferri, 2021). The subordination of the urban to tourism (Gralak, 2018) prompts the usual urban market and mobility dynamics to combine with new audiences, which promotes short-term consumption preferences (Carvalho et al., 2019) and cultural distance issues. These new temporalities and demands cause the re-functioning of urban space with the emergence of tourist-focused shops, because the existing commercial and social fabric are affected (Bertocchi & Ferri, 2021; Morales-Alonso & Núñez, 2022), and become almost exclusively oriented towards tourism and tourists (Siegler & Wachsmuth, 2020). In some circumstances, this triggers behavioural distancing, cultural distance and tourist/local population friendliness.

2.2. Cultural distance

When we look at how visitors and tourists relate to each other, to the tourist destination residents, and/or to the human resources that provide them with services, it is essential to understand that a significant diversity of motivations influences the behaviour of tourists, promoting multiple modes of relationship and interaction in the places they choose for their stay.

Hofstede's work, from 1980 until 2010, offers us, not without criticism, an interpretation of countries' cultural dimensions. It is about understanding "how a society handles inequality and unequal distribution of power among humans" (Power Distance versus Closeness), "how people like to live in a loosely-knit social structure and act on their own rule" (Individualism versus Collectivism), "how people cope with different social and emotional roles related with genders" (Masculinity versus Femininity), "how people handle ambiguity about the future while facing uncertainty" (Uncertainty Avoidance versus Acceptance), "how people deal with the present or future challenges using past value or experience" (Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation), and "how people are allowed to experience their basic desires linked with enjoying life and having fun" (Indulgence versus Restraint) (Qian et al., 2018, p. 272).

This dual cultural reading of Hofstede et al. (2010) dimensions has allowed continuous evaluation and reassessment. McIntosh & Goeldner (1990), McKercher (2002), McKercher & Chow (2001), and McKercher & Du Cros (2003) offer us an interpretation of the cultural tourist stressing the importance of cultural perception between the tourists' origin and the tourist destination, the reason for the existence of cultural distances. These arise as a result of multiple constructs such as tourist satisfaction (Carlos et al., 2019; Reimann et al., 2008), decision making (Correia et al., 2011a, 2011b), length of stay (Hateftabar, 2021; Jackman et al., 2020); uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 1989; Minkov & Hofstede, 2014; Money & Crotts, 2003; Qian et al., 2018), security (Preko & Gyepi-Garbrah, 2021), place attachment (Aleshinloye et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2020; Tasci et al., 2021), authenticity (Liu et al., 2020), cultural values (McKercher & Chow, 2001), religion (Hateftabar, 2021), rules of social behaviour (Crotts, 2004; Cunha et al., 2022; Manrai & Manrai, 2011), perceptions of service (Reimann et al., 2008; Reisinger & Turner, 2002a, 2002b; Weiermair & Fuchs, 2000), recreational demand (Lee et al., 2018; Qian et al., 2018), physical distance (Jackman et al., 2020), repeated visit, tourist spending (Qian et al., 2018), language (Carlos et al., 2019; Hateftabar, 2021; Jackman et al., 2020; West & Graham, 2004) engagement with the resident population (Aleshinloye et al., 2020). All these are determinants of the perception of integration, risk and uncertainty.

Cultural distance (Ahn & McKercher, 2015; Crotts, 2004; Hofstede, 2011; Hofstede et al., 2010; Huang & Crotts, 2019; Kandogan, 2012; Kastenholz, 2010; Kogut & Singh, 1988; Liu et al., 2021; Manrai & Manrai, 2011; McIntosh & Goeldner, 1990; McKercher, 2008; McKercher & Du Cros, 2003; Ng et al., 2007; Shenkar, 2001) is increasingly taken as a fundamental construct in the interpretation of the relations between tourist supply and demand and between hosts and guests.

3. Methodology

The case study (Benbasat et al., 1987; Eisenhardt, 1989) is a research tool that seeks to understand dynamics at specific junctures, oriented towards phenomenological description in singular studies. It integrates the complex characteristics of contemporaneity, valuing on-site research without handling information. It also results from the researcher's ability to integrate, and the snowball sampling has fulfilled this function. Gerring (2016) refers to it as a spatially and temporally delimited phenomenon that is qualitatively oriented but uses both quantitative and qualitative elements. However, it does not always need to include direct and detailed observations (Yin, 2009). Merriam (1998) states that the case study method does not claim to use specific data collection methods, because it is a methodology that seeks to focus mainly on describing and explaining a specific theme. These features were considered the most appropriate for addressing Cultural distance in the tourism destination of Coimbra.

Interviews were applied in 2022, from 15 February until 25 March to 20 interpreter-guides who usually collaborate with the University of Coimbra's tourism office, carrying out visits to the University of Coimbra – Alta and Sofia, UNESCO World Heritage site. Nevertheless, the group consisted of professionals who frequently visit the city and the University of Coimbra but who work at a national and international level. A snowball approach was used to get primary results through a semi-structured interview. As Kirchherr & Charles (2018, p. 1) note, it is "a sampling method in which one interviewee gives the researcher the name of at least one more potential interviewee. That interviewee, in turn, provides the name of at least one more potential interviewee, and soon, with the sample growing like a rolling snowball if more than one referral per interviewee is provided". Because the restrictions associated with COVID-19 were still very much present, the collection was made digitally. This way, it was possible to have more interpreter-guides and diversify their origin working place (Coimbra and Lisbon regions).

The interviews – Distance and Cultural Risks in Tourism – were organised with multiple questions asking for opinions and comments on the answers given to allow a qualitative assessment, combined with the quantitative data collected, because all interviewees have some similar questions. The inquiry aimed to determine the cultural distance and risks between tourists of different nationalities and the characteristics of the tourist destination, according to the opinion of the interpreter-guides. As part of one group to collect information on biographical elements and another on the profession, the following

were analysed: i) nationalities, ii) the behavioural distance of tourists about the tourist destination, iii) the perception of sympathy versus antipathy, iv) the greetings, the cultural norms, v) the knowledge of the destination shown by tourists; and vi) characterisation of the tourists was also requested from the interpreter-guides.

4. Discussion and results

In terms of the questionnaires, 57.9% of the respondents were women and 42.1% were men. The majority of interpreter-guides surveyed are aged over 47 years (63.2%). Regarding their professional activity, 68.4% have been doing it for more than 20 years, showing great experience in contacting tourists. As for the spatial distribution, 42.1% of the interpreter-guides live in the Coimbra region and 31.7% in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area. Concerning academic qualifications, 57.9% have a bachelor's degree and 42.1% a master's degree, demonstrating the importance of higher education in this profession. This feature is supported by the scientific area of training, as the respondents mostly have qualifications in tourism (47.4%), but also in the areas of modern languages (15.8%) and history (10.5%). In terms of knowledge and proficiency in other languages, in addition to the mother tongue, respondents most often have expertise in English and French. English is considered by 68.4% of respondents as the main language and 31.6% as a secondary non-mother tongue. French was considered by 52.6% of respondents as a secondary non-mother tongue and by 21.1% of respondents as their main language. Other non-native languages were considered by some respondents, notably German, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish. The interpreter-guides present different dynamics regarding the number of tourist groups they accompany annually. About 36.8% of respondents escort 80 or more groups annually, but a significant percentage accompany a smaller number of groups, perhaps 20 to 39 groups (26.3%) and less than 20 groups (15.8%). These groups of tourists are made up of 12 nationalities, with the North Americans being the most representative group (21.1%), followed by French (15.8%), Spanish (14%), and English nationals (14%). Australians, Brazilians, Canadians, and Japanese are also present in smaller numbers (Table 1a).

4.1. Factors of the visitors' integration in the tourism destination, from the perception of the interpreter-guides

It was possible to identify four main factors that diminish the risk of cultural distance between residents/interpreter-guides and tourists, these being, i) communication, ii) experience/learning, iii) hospitality, and iv) local history knowledge and good visit program organisation.

In the area of communication, speaking the visitors' mother tongue is a key point, closely linked to confidence in the interpreter-guides and their ability to transmit knowledge and communicate. The interviewees express these issues by saying "the difficulty in communicating in the language of the destination community may also influence the cultural distance, since they have no way of communicating with the locals, reserving themselves for brief contacts or only communications with other tourists, their countrymen"; accordingly, Hateftabar (2021) and Jackman et al. (2020) stress the significance of language. However, other interpreter-guides said that "the civilisational difference between different peoples can and should try to be mitigated by tourism professionals, namely interpreter-guides, by helping to interpret the whole heritage (not only monuments) of the country", which received superlative levels of satisfaction, as supported by Reimann et al. (2008) and Carlos et al. (2019).

In the same vein we have the genuineness of the relationship between discourse done and seen heritage, because no correspondence makes tourists uncomfortable and suspicious of mismatching as noted by Chan et al. (2016), McKercher & Chow (2001), and Özdemir & Yolal (2017). Indeed, it amplifies the risk of misunderstanding and exploitation of cultural distance, in keeping with the ideas of Crotts (2004) and Hofstede (2011, 1989). Also relating to communication, the multilingual capacity of the host community builds confidence in tourists and enables the development of cultural ties between residents and visitors, enhancing place attachment (Aleshinloye et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2020; Tasci et al., 2021).

When speaking about experience and learning, about issues related to authenticity referred by Liu et al. (2020), and cultural values stated by McKercher & Chow (2001), interpreter-guides point out the stimulation of pleasure and the supply of tailor-made services as main actions, in line with Lee et al. (2018) and Qian et al. (2018) who indicated recreational demand proposals. The balance between quick access and an enjoyable cultural leisure time (Carvalho et al., 2019), cultural sharing and integration through gastronomic experiences, custom services, and a historical local heritage culture permeated by the influences of other cultures (especially those related to tourists) are crucial factors in mitigating cultural distances. We can find these ideas in the following descriptions:

“Tourists like to feel that they have a special service and that they are not just another group of people in a crowd” and “Culture depends very much on country’s historical heritage. Its longevity or modernity can explain many of the existing traditions, and gastronomy reflects accumulated knowledge left by the many peoples who have lived here”.

Hospitality plays a central role too. The ability to highlight the main local cultural elements making a parallel with what is more familiar to tourists is crucial to reducing cultural distance. This idea could be anchored in Crotts (2004), Cunha et al. (2022), and Manrai & Manrai (2011), who stated that rules of social behaviour enable cultural differences to be smaller than those perceived before the trip began. This idea is further developed by a good welcome by the local people, by friendliness, warmth and practicality, by doing what is necessary so that tourists feel included, by providing a good service engaging in what Reimann et al. (2008), Reisinger & Turner (2002a, 2002b), and Weiermair & Fuchs (2000) highlight as perceptions of service. We can perceive this in the transcriptions:

“showing the culture, economy, history, gastronomy, etc. of our country and at the same time making a parallel with what is more familiar to them” and “it is the responsibility of those who welcome them (tourism professionals) to do what is necessary so that they, the tourists, feel integrated”.

That is why “local history knowledge and good visit program organisation” are also of enormous significance in the expansion or reduction of cultural distance and in the risk of misinterpretations of behaviours that occur in the same spatiotemporal context.

Integrating important references for both residents and interpreter-guides, it is important to pay special attention to the good organisation of the trip (“to integrate into a country you need to know the history, which explains the people who settled here and their way of interacting”), safety (“the feeling of personal safety is extremely important; a small pickpocket is enough to lock you up in your hotel, afraid of everything and everyone”), and to well-structured programs and diversity of places visited. Hotels and meals are fundamental to achieving a positive experience by reducing the risk of cultural conflicts, because “gastronomy is inseparable from the culture of a people and getting to know them includes gastronomic experiences; a varied gastronomy that can please people with different tastes is a very important characteristic for a successful trip”.

These goals are easier to prevent an excess of tourists, and to interpret any destination in favour of the client/tourist, linked with a perception of security (Preko & Gyepi-Garbrah, 2021) and confidence (Beerli-Palacio & Martín-Santana, 2018). This is why a good signposting of places and spaces is needed, as well as a coherent policy for the early warning of changes and adjustments made during the period of stay. All of this must be combined with measures for the preservation and cleanliness of heritage and public spaces, showing the involvement of public authorities and the people in the construction of an environment with enhanced quality of life (Lee et al., 2018).

After reading about what can be done to reduce risk and cultural distance, it is important to pay attention to the characteristics, intrinsic to tourists, that most influence cultural distancing with destination communities. Here, too, it was possible to define three types of characteristics linked to i) communication, ii) tourists, and iii) destination and local communities.

In the first case, communication and language issues (Hateftabar, 2021; Sun et al., 2023) are predominant in influencing the cultural distance, since tourists may not be able to communicate with the residents, limiting themselves to brief contact or only talking with other tourists. The more the language differs from that of the resident community, the more barriers can be raised. Meanwhile, cultural difference, responsible for the cultural distance between the different nationalities, is perceived as a civilisational characteristic that can hinder the hospitality of residents and the acceptance of

differences by tourists, since it is fundamental that the interpretation of the heritage(s) is a way of accessing and gaining inclusion into the country's culture (Reisinger & Turner, 2002a, 2002b).

Regarding the characteristics that most influence cultural distance when mentioning tourists, motivations must be always present because they guide most tourists' behaviours. Nevertheless, a lack of knowledge about the place and its cultural traditions (Beerli-Palacio & Martín-Santana, 2018) is very significant in the creation of cultural distance. This happens particularly when combined with tourists' lack of discipline, carelessness, and lack of information, somehow seemingly indicative of a certain superiority over the residents.

This perspective fits with other references that claim that some tourists manifest a national culture (nationalism) that prevents them from admiring and getting to know destination communities impartially. They support their analysis by comparing destination communities with their homeland (Tasci et al., 2021). These comparisons are sometimes made to highlight their country of origin at the expense of the destination community, thereby creating a cultural distance from the residents. This way of looking at the community creates stereotypes about residents who act as barriers to understanding the culture of the place.

In terms of the intrinsic characteristics of tourists, it is important to stress that those who are strongly connected to technologies and social networks end up distancing themselves more from local communities because they tend to seek information on the internet and end up not feeling the same need to interact with residents. In the last item, destinations/local communities, conflicts and sociocultural distancing are amplified by the lack of actions in support of tourism, to better welcome tourists, whether at the national level or in cities and other localities (Thyne et al., 2022), as the interpreter-guides say. Added to this are elements such as personal and cultural hygiene habits, specifying, for example, that food is sold in a market without any concern for the way it is packaged and handled, which alienates other cultures with different habits. It is also very important to understand tourists as a direct source of income. This perception can be extremely unpleasant for tourists to realise that the receiving country might only be interested in the revenue from their visit.

4.2. Tourist behaviour and cultural distance at the destination

The analysis of cultural distance was proposed to the interpreter-guides in four major areas that can promote behavioural distancing towards the tourist destination (Table 1a) personal characteristics of tourists; (Table 1b) socio-economic characteristics of tourists; (Table 1c) mobility characteristics of tourists, and (Table 1d) destination characteristics (Table 1e).

Tourist characteristics were proposed considering four (4) parameters: age, gender, nationality and religious belief (Table 1b). As gender was the parameter with the least weight in the perception of direct influence on tourists' behaviour in the distancing at tourist destinations and age and nationality were undefined parameters, religious belief (47.4%) was assumed to be the differentiating factor in creating the cultural distance between tourists and tourist destination, as perceived by the interpreter-guides.

As for the socioeconomic characteristics of tourists, three parameters were presented: cultural level/educational qualification, professional activity, and level of wealth/purchasing power (Table 1c). In general terms, the socio-economic characteristics of tourists were considered more important in the tourists' behaviour in the distancing at tourist destinations. However, it is the cultural level/educational qualification that appears to be the most important (57.9%) in creating cultural distance between tourists and tourist destinations.

The next area proposed as a promoter of behavioural distancing relative to the tourist destination was the mobility characteristics of tourists. The first trip to the destination, the large number of tourism trips made, and the geographical distance (between origin and destination) were identified as significant (Table 1d). The interpreter-guides clearly showed that tourists who did not previously know the places visited are more likely to value cultural distances from the tourist destination (68.4%), giving little importance to trips made (42.2%) and the geographical distance (47.3%). Nevertheless, the mobility characteristics of tourists are significant *vis-à-vis* the personal characteristics and socio-economic characteristics of tourists, in the tourists' behaviour. The last identifier is also what was to

Table 1. Interpreters-guides' opinions

| a. Nationalities that most interpreter-guides work with | | | | |
|---|---|---------------------------------|--|------------------|
| | 1st nationality | 2nd nationality | 3rd nationality | Total |
| North American | 26.3 | 26.3 | 10.5 | 21.1 |
| French | 21.1 | 21.1 | 5.3 | 15.8 |
| Spanish | 10.5 | 10.5 | 21.1 | 14.0 |
| English | 0.0 | 5.3 | 36.8 | 14.0 |
| Canadian | 10.5 | 10.5 | 0.0 | 7.0 |
| Portuguese | 10.5 | 10.5 | 0.0 | 7.0 |
| Brazilian | 5.3 | 5.3 | 5.3 | 5.3 |
| Australian | 0.0 | 0.0 | 15.8 | 5.3 |
| Japanese | 5.3 | 5.3 | 0.0 | 3.5 |
| Suisse | 0.0 | 5.3 | 5.3 | 3.5 |
| German | 5.3 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 1.8 |
| Italian | 5.3 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 1.8 |
| b. Personal characteristics of tourists that can promote behavioural distancing towards the tourist destination | | | | |
| | Age | Gender | Nationality | Religious belief |
| 5 (extremely important) | 5.3 | 0.0 | 10.5 | 0.0 |
| 4 | 36.8 | 10.5 | 21.1 | 47.4 |
| 3 | 10.5 | 21.1 | 31.6 | 15.8 |
| 2 | 36.8 | 26.3 | 21.1 | 31.6 |
| 1 (not at all important) | 10.5 | 42.1 | 15.8 | 5.3 |
| c. Socio-economic characteristics of tourists that can promote behavioural distancing towards the tourist destination. | | | | |
| | Cultural level/Educational qualifications | Professional activity | Level of wealth/purchase power | |
| 5 (extremely important) | 21.1 | 5.3 | 0.0 | |
| 4 | 36.8 | 31.6 | 42.1 | |
| 3 | 36.8 | 47.4 | 42.1 | |
| 2 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 5.3 | |
| 1 (not at all important) | 5.3 | 15.8 | 10.5 | |
| d. Mobility characteristics of tourists that can promote behavioural distancing towards the tourist destination | | | | |
| | 1st trip to the destination | Large No. of tourism trips made | Geographical distance (between origin and destination) | |
| 5 (extremely important) | 31.6 | 21.1 | 10.5 | |
| 4 | 36.8 | 21.1 | 36.8 | |
| 3 | 15.8 | 42.1 | 26.3 | |
| 2 | 10.5 | 5.3 | 21.1 | |
| 1 (not at all important) | 5.3 | 10.5 | 5.3 | |
| e. Destination characteristics that can promote behavioural distancing towards the tourist destination | | | | |
| | Sense of personal safety | Gastronomy practices | Linguistic similarity | |
| 5 (extremely important) | 73.7 | 36.8 | 31.6 | |
| 4 | 21.1 | 36.8 | 15.8 | |
| 3 | 0.0 | 21.1 | 36.8 | |
| 2 | 5.3 | 5.3 | 15.8 | |
| 1 (not at all important) | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | |
| f. Interpreter-guides' opinion of the most and least friendly tourists | | | | |
| | Friendlier tourists | Less friendly tourists | | |
| North Americans | 31.8 | 0.0 | | |
| Canadians | 13.6 | 0.0 | | |
| Spanish | 13.6 | 4.2 | | |
| Brazilians | 9.1 | 0.0 | | |
| Italians | 9.1 | 0.0 | | |
| Japanese | 9.1 | 0.0 | | |
| Australians | 4.5 | 0.0 | | |
| Swiss | 4.5 | 0.0 | | |
| Dutch | 4.5 | 0.0 | | |
| Israeli | 0.0 | 25.0 | | |
| Russians | 0.0 | 25.0 | | |
| Germans | 0.0 | 16.7 | | |
| English | 0.0 | 8.3 | | |
| Portuguese | 0.0 | 8.3 | | |
| Greeks | 0.0 | 4.2 | | |
| French | 0.0 | 4.2 | | |
| Czechs | 0.0 | 4.2 | | |

Source: Created by the authors from the Survey Distance and Cultural Risks in Tourism, applied in 2022, from 15 February until 25 March.

have more importance in tourists' decisions regarding the behavioural distance taken at the destination. Thus, the sense of personal safety is stated by 94.8% of the interpreter-guides as important or very important in promoting behavioural distancing towards the tourist destination. Similarly, but with slightly lower values, are the gastronomy practices (73.6%), which appear as the main parameters identified by the respondents (Table 1e).

Thus, in a joint analysis of all parameters, it is the sense of personal safety (94.8%) that has the greatest consensus. In second place are gastronomy practices (73.6%), followed by the first trip to the destination (68.4%), and the cultural level/educational qualification (57.9%).

To complement the way the interpreter-guides perceive tourists visiting the country, especially those who come to the Centro region and Coimbra, it was proposed that they identify the nationalities of friendlier tourists and less friendly tourists (Table 1f). There is a clear distinction; the friendliest are tourists from the United States and Canada. Regarding Spanish tourists, there is no great consensus among interpreter-guides; they are the only tourists for whom there is a positive opinion and some interpreter-guides express a less positive opinion. In terms of less favourable opinions, Israelis, Russians, and Germans are considered the least friendly tourists.

5. Final considerations

The cultural distance between tourists and visited communities explains different attitudes and behaviours in space and time, influencing the perception of each other, the authenticity of the tourist experience, the feeling of security, and the greater or lesser involvement with the place and the local community.

The study has the virtue of benefiting scientific knowledge with an approach to the cultural distance between visitors and residents from the perspective of interpreter-guides, having as a reference a place that has a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Empirical results show that it is very important that destination management organisations, involving different stakeholders, design strategies to mitigate cultural distance and adapt to the central areas of cities that can foster a rapprochement between visitors and the local community. This must address the four critical factors identified in empirical research so as to reduce cultural distance.

The structuring of the tourist offer must receive special attention. It must be organised in accordance with the cultural and heritage values of each market of origin, seeking to identify points of convergence and establish bridges, so that the identification with the visited place and with the local community is greater. Stories and storytelling help to contextualise, interpret, and inform, and it works well when stories are told in the first person. The experience is more emotional and the involvement with the local community is greater. In addition, visit programs must include references that meet the preferences of each market. Of equal importance is the structuring of visit programs that lead to a dispersion of tourist demand throughout the urban space, thus countering the trend of concentration in some specific tourist attractions.

Due to the importance ascribed to the feeling of personal security, it is crucial to increase surveillance in public spaces and on public transport so that the level of confidence of tourists increases. Local governance and urbanism must create inclusive spaces. The quality of public space, urban furniture, green spaces for public use and circulation spaces, keeping heritage sites clean and well preserved, the strategic implementation of directional and informative signage in several languages, and the humanisation and personalisation of the services provided to tourists, play a huge part in improving one of the four critical factors identified in empirical research to reduce cultural distance: hospitality. Information and communication technologies are becoming increasingly important in destinations as they facilitate and simplify the provision of services.

One of the limitations of this study is that it only considers interpreter-guides who visit a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In the future, it would be relevant to learn the viewpoint of other interpreter-guides by extending the study to other World Heritage Sites in Portugal to understand whether there are variations in terms of cultural distance depending on the place considered. It would be critical to increase the number of tourist destinations and create a diversity of interviewees, both Portuguese

and other nationalities, thus allowing us to understand if interpreter-guides of different nationalities present variations in the perception of the cultural distance of their audience.

Funding details

This research received support from the Centre of Studies in Geography and Spatial Planning (CEGOT), funded by national funds through the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) under the reference UIDB/04084/2020.

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