

Tourism impacts of a Portuguese world heritage historic center: Residents' perspectives

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Objectives | The World Heritage List (WHL) is widely considered as a powerful tool for national tourism campaigns. Sites inscribed in the WHL by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) are commonly treated as catalysts in promoting the tourism industry, which in turn helps to promote economic growth and development. This work studies the historic center of the Portuguese city of Évora, designated as a world heritage site by the UNESCO in 1983. Specifically, it aims at analysing the tourism impacts of the UNESCO World Heritage classification on this Portuguese city. The research includes an analysis of the local communities' perspectives of tourism effects of the world heritage classification.

Methodology | Data was collected using a self-administered survey applied to convenience samples of local residents of Évora in the beginning of 2014. Based on the purpose of this study, a public secondary school is used for constructing the survey samples. Specifically, students of 11th and 12th years of schooling are asked to fulfill the questionnaire and to take it home to distribute among their family members. 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.

Main results and contributions | The data analysis consists of three stages. First, positive and negative impacts are ranked and the five most important and the five least important are highlighted. Second, the principal components factor

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analysis is employed separately to the positive and negative impacts in order to identify underlying dimensions associated with residents' perspectives on tourism effects of the world heritage classification. Finally, independent sample t-tests are used to investigate if there are any differences in the perceptions of those who live near or far from the historic center. It is expected that residents living 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 local residents' attitudes towards tourism are related. Generally, the residents who benefit from tourism are more likely to regard tourism impacts as positive changes.

Limitations | Although the sample is adequate for statistical analysis, a convenience sample is used. Consequently, there should be caution in generalising the results.

Conclusions | This study aims to measure residents' perceived positive and negative tourism impacts of the UNESCO world heritage classification on the Portuguese city of Évora. It is expected that the main results are consistent with previous empirical research. Hence, it is expected that local residents 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.