

# How does **gender** affect **visiting a World Heritage Site**? The case study of Guimarães

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To date few studies have been undertaken in Portugal dealing with the attitudes, motivations, and profile of tourists who visit World Heritage Sites. Also, few studies have dealt with destination image (e.g., Agapito, Mendes & Valle, 2010; Lopes, 2011). As far as it is known, none have approached the issue of gender differences in the choice of a Portuguese heritage destination.

Since cultural tourism destinations need to differentiate themselves from each other, appropriate market segmentation must be based on a deep understanding of the customers' motivations and preferences. Keeping in mind results from empirical literature (e.g., Silberberg, 1995; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Richards, 2004; Pérez, 2009; Sheng, Shen, & Chen, 2008), gender seems to be a possible approach to market segmentation, whether for Guimarães or for other cultural tourism destinations around the world.

Located in the north-western region of Portugal, Guimarães is a city of strong symbolic and cultural significance, and the nomination of its historical centre as a World Heritage Site in 2001 enhanced its tourism potential. This study analyses the possible relation between gender and attitudes and motivations towards a World Heritage Site, such as Guimarães. Additionally, the empirical approach used in the study tries to capture differences in the perceived attributes of the city. Commonalities and distinctions within and between groups of tourists, by focusing on the specific characteristic of gender, were analysed.

The study addressed two main questions: first, whether males and females have similar or different preferences in choosing the city as their destination; and, second, whether there are gender differences in the perception of the attributes of Guimarães. A better understanding of the gendered nature of the destination is a valuable cue for shaping products and services according to visitors' preferences.

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Based on the objectives for this research, a survey among visitors to Guimarães was conducted during three different periods over a year's duration in 2010 and 2011, bearing in mind the seasonality of the visitation rates. It should also be noticed that the city's tourism potential is not equally distributed as, in a municipality of 69 parishes, only eight have at least two tourist facilities, and they are mostly located in the historic centre of Guimarães. Therefore, the study population was composed by visitors to all locations within the city that were considered as attractive for tourists.

A questionnaire was applied to a sample of those visitors in the two tourism offices of the city. One of these is offices is located inside the World Heritage area, and the other in the city's historical centre. The questionnaire was self-administered, although each tourist was asked to complete it in the presence of the tourism office employees, who would answer any questions or doubts while they were completing the questionnaire.

The questionnaire integrated ten structured questions with dichotomous and multiple-choice formats, requiring only a short time to complete. It was divided into two parts: one directly related to the research subject (motivations of tourists), and the other with demographic indicators that allow the definition of the respondents' demographic profile (e.g. gender, age, marital status, education). From the 300 completed questionnaires, 276 were validated and submitted for statistical analysis. The remaining 24 had incomplete answers and were not considered.

Since there were too many variables (21) to measure tourists' perceived image of Guimarães, Meng and Uysal's (2008) and SooCheong and Liping's (2002) processes for data reduction of destination attributes were partially adapted; thus, transforming the original set of variables into four composite factors. To create the composite factors, information about several variables was combined into one composite variable, considering and adapting the results of the factor analysis of the aforementioned authors. Independent sample t-tests were used to examine gender differences regarding perceived factors and individual attributes.

From the survey results, the most important distinguishing factors in the visitors' profile were gender (female: 63%) and education (university degree: 55.2%). These results follow the analysis of Silberberg (1995), who found a predominance of females and more highly educated individuals travelling to such places. Regarding age, respondents under 45 years old prevailed in this study, contrary to what is generally common in cultural tourists. However, it seems useful to consider the claim of Richards (2006 and 2007, cited by Pérez, 2009) that the segment of tourists between 20 and 29 years old has been increasing lately.

Results suggest that both men and women were aware of the main criterion which were on the basis of the city's recommendation as World Heritage Site, and conscious that this destination is a Heritage Site that also offers the opportunity to tour and explore the surrounding region, which has shown to have a significant positive effect on male tourists' choice of Guimarães. Regarding the perceived attributes of the city, results indicate minor gender differences with one exception: women expressed more apprehension than men regarding the perceived security of the destination. This finding is consistent with other previous gender research stating that women are more concerned about security (Mieczkowski, 1990; McGehee, Loker-Murphy & Uysal, 1996; Meng & Uysal, 2008). Due to the impact that this issue may have in the image of the destination, it urges special attention of local authorities whether when it this is a perceived 'problem' or a real one.

With regard to limitations, the study was not able to clearly differentiate tourists from other types of visitors. In addition, only visitors who directly contacted the tourist information offices were asked to participate in the survey. Therefore, many potential sources of selection bias could be present and the non-probability nature of the sampling procedure limits any definitive or conclusive statements about the results. However, the main limitation of this study is that it is solely a quantitative study. The narratives, preferences, and behaviours of male and female tourists as previously envisaged were not present in the survey. This gap would help to understand further differences using an approach broken down by gender. Furthermore, open questions were not included to allow participants to clarify the reasons behind their various answers.

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