Research Article

A Study on the Tourist Experiences in the Peneda-Gerês National Park: Impact on Satisfaction, Loyalty and Recommendations

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Abstract

This study aims to validate the multidimensional concept of a tourist destination by correlating the tourist's relationship with the lived experience. It is intended to evaluate the experience lived in the Peneda-Gerês National Park through five tourist sensorial dimensions: i. perception; ii. feeling of place (identification); iii. destination image; iv. equity and v. loyalty to destination. For this purpose, an online survey was carried out with a sample population of 265 non-residents in the Peneda-Gerês National Park territory. A multivariate analysis was performed to the collected data; it made it possible to validate the experience lived in the Peneda-Gerês National Park through the 5 sensory factors considered in the research. Results prove that some demographic variables have an important impact on the toruists' experience and, consequently, in the image of the Peneda-Gerês National Park., This work allowed validating the importance of the five sensory factors in terms of building the image of a tourist destination, as well as identifying, through the tourist's experience, which are the most relevant aspects that allow systematizing a set of endogenous factors associated with an interesting tourist destination for future visits and/or suggestions for other visitors.

Keywords: perception; identification; image; loyalty.

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Introduction

The Peneda Gerês National Park is the only park in the country, located in the north of Portugal, with a biodiversity and an ecosystem little changed by man. It has approximately 70 thousand hectares of land, covering the municipalities of Melgaço, Arcos de Valdevez, Ponte da Barca, Terras de Bouro and Montalegre and located in the mountains of Peneda, Soajo, Amarela and Gerês. Currently, considering the increasing rivalry between the different tourist destinations, the marketing of tourist destinations has taken on a key role in making it possible to find answers to the challenges posed by different tourism promoters and to allow differentiating the experience lived by the tourists. It is also intended to stimulate and project a region, support local communities in the preservation of territories and people, thus contributing to the competitiveness and sustainability of different regions in an increasingly globalized world. This research article aims to understand and interpret tourists' perceptions, regarding five sensory dimensions: the natural, environmental and architectural conditions of the Peneda Gerês National Park; the emotional connection and consequent identification with the place (feeling of belonging); the identity and brand image of the destination; the quality and equity of the brand and the satisfaction and intention to revisit the tourist destination (loyalty). An online questionnaire was done on Google Docs and distributed by e-mail and on social networks, using a convenience sample. This work is structured as follows: i. introduction, ii. literature review, iii. methodology, iv. data analysis, v. conclusions, vi. research limitations and vii. proposals for future studies providing complementary analyzes on this topic.

Literature Review

The visitors' perception about the physical, environmental and heritage conditions of a destination is one of the fundamental aspects that allows to create a positive image of the region and, consequently, leads to the dynamization and visibility of that place. Regarding the cognitive dimensions of the destination image, according to Wang and Hsu (2010), the cognitive image of a certain place is the result of beliefs and knowledge evidenced by the attributes of the destination swhile the affective image emerges from the feelings of tourists in relation to the tourist destination at the time of its global evaluation. The perception of the impact of tourism in a given region is, in turn, a factor that influences the attitude of residents, affecting the sustainable development of tourism in that region (Eusébio & Rodrigues, 2014; Bronzini, Ciani & Montaruli, 2019) and specifically its economic growth, diversification, demographic stabilization and population retention (Ibanescu, Stoleriu, Munteanu & Iatu, 2018). In fact, local residents' support seems to be highly important if a certain tourism industry and region aims to be successful and sustainable in the long-term (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004; Obradovic & Stajonovic, 2021). It is generally accepted that a tourist region or place of destination must gather a set of attractive factors or differentiating aspects that can attract, promote the intention to return and the positive recommendation (word of mouth) of its visitors; this, in turn, depends on local entities' capacity to understand residents' attitudes toward sustainable tourism and, consequently, prioritize management strategies that respect the needs and rights of local community (Obradovic & Stajonovic, 2021) and, at the same time, improve the service quality offered to visitants (e.g., Dileep-Kumar, Govindarajo & Khen, 2020).

Since the visitor is usually looking for something that contributes to a pleasant and interesting experience, consequently justifying the choice of that specific place, it is important to understand which key factors should be considered when offering a tourist location. In this study, we based ourselves on Marques et al. research (2015) and we considered 9 factors (in line with previous studies done by Crompton, 1979). According to the authors, we can divide them in seven push factors and two pull factors. As push factors, they considered: (1) avoid choosing environments associated with routine, (2) seek to choose new environments based on self-evaluation, (3) choose places that allow to relax (4) look for places related to prestige, (5) visit places that allow returning to origins, (6) kinship reinforcement and (7) areas that facilitate social interaction. Regarding the pull factors, these authors refer to: (1) novelty and (2) training/learning possibilities. In other words, the image of a territory is built through: (i) perceptions, (ii) actions, (iii) communication, (iv) habits, (v) customs and (vi) lived

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experiences vs consequent mental image (Gómez, 2018); knowing that images represent a fundamental element in the tourist decision-making process (Beerli & Martin, 2004), a tourist destination must offer a simplified presentation of the spaces being promoted, in order to attract tourist flows and positively affect cognitive, affective and conative image (Benach, 2016).

As we visit a Region, we evaluate its specificities, the preservation and beauty of its natural and/or built heritage, its people, traditions and customs; this allows us to develop a sense of place, (D'Orey, & Abreu, 2019). The concept of 'sense of place' dates back to the 1970s, in the area of human geography, deeply addressed by Yi-Fu Tuan (1974, 1977 and 1979).. For the author, "place" results from a symbiotic relationship between space and meanings for individuals. It is as if we were dealing with a dialectic in which the human experience in physical spaces is reproduced in the basic components of the living world (Tuan ,1977). In other words, the human being understands his environment through the experiences he has when he/she is in and interacts within a specific place. In this sense, connections and emotions are built between visitors and that place (D'Orey, 2014); this is the result of specific symbols, emotions and values that are associated and expressed by people when thinking about certain places (Kaltenborn, 1997). From an anthropological and sociological perspective, the connection between people and a particular place is made through cultural beliefs and practices, as well as through emotional and cognitive experiences (Cross, 2011). Thus, when a visitor wants to get authentic and natural experiences, through direct contact with traditions, uses and customs, he/she seeks to visit a territory and/or place of destination where this is more easily found, as it is the case of a National Park like the Peneda-Gerês.

We can characterize the identity of a destination place as something that differentiates it from its peers, being, in practice, a set of factors, traits or aspects that characterize it in its authenticity and differentiation from another competing place. According to Proshansky (1978), place identity involves the dimensions of the individual as a "unique" being with an own personal identity that interfere in the definition of his identity in relation to the physical environment: a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, beliefs, preferences, feelings, values, goals, behavioral tendencies and skills, end up to be very relevant in the way he/she feels identified with the environment. The tourist destination's image of a place comes from the mental incorporation of its name, symbol, product or service, communication, action, attitude and behavior of local residents and consequent perceptions by its audience (D'Orey, 2014). In other words, it is the result of tourism products' offer, that can include urban, seaside, rural, ecotourism wine, culinary, health, medical, religious and/or business tourism (meetings, conferences, special events), among others (Camilleri, 2018).

In this context, it should be noted that expressions such as "destination branding", "destination image" and "brand image" (Santana, L. et al., 2020) have become evident in studies carried out on tourism (Galí, Camprubí & Donaire, 2017). They are considered essential for measuring the competitiveness of a place (García, Gómez, & Molina, 2012) and the differentiation of a destination (Hallmann, Zehrer, & Müller, 2015). In this sense, Martín, Herrero, & Salmones (2019) stated that in the area of tourism, image of destination (i.e., brand image) is defined as the set of impressions, beliefs, ideas, expectations and feelings accumulated towards a tourist destination over time (Kim & Richardson, 2003). This approach to destination image, which includes both cognitive and affective associations, has been supported by recent studies (e.g., Han & Hwang, 2016; Lim & Weaver, 2014; Lin, Morais, Kerstetter, & Hou, 2007; Papadimitriou, Kaplanidou, & Apostolopoulou, 2015; Smith, Li, Pan, Witte, & Doherty, 2015; Yacout & Hefny, 2015). The challenge is and will be to build a strong, positive and unique image of a destination place (Brea & Cardoso, 2011); bearing this in mind, tourist destinations should have the adequate amenities and facilities, offering different products and services to satisfy a wide array of tourists (Camilleri, 2018; Kanwel, Lingquian, Asif, Hwang, Hussain & Jameel, 2019).

The equity or value of a brand, whether of a company, a place and/or a tourist destination, is verified through the perception, experience, preference and recommendation of its products and services (Martins et al, 2021). If the tourist destination chosen by the individual makes him want to come back and recommended it to others, due to positive experiences, he is

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communicating about that place and evaluating it in a positive way (Baptista, Santos, & Figueira, 2022; Camilleri, 2018, Martins et al, 2021). When positively recommended by visitors, who refer to their experience and emotions, a specific and positive image of the visited place is developed (Fortuna, 2012). From this perspective, those who visit the Peneda Gerês National Park seek to find a mountain territory, with habitats, vegetation and distinct and diverse flora, typical of a rural region in northern Portugal. They also expect to see a well-preserved forest, with a natural and respectful human occupation and with architectural style capable of providing a unique and relevant experience for those who visit it (while respecting the local environment). Positive word of mouth about a tourist destination ensures quality and a unique experience, reduces any perceived or imagined risk and allows the construction of a unique value proposition (Framke, 2002; Prentice, Wang & Loureiro,2019; Blain, Levy & Ritchie, 2005; Costa & Azevedo, 2015;). And people involved through word of mouth are mainly influenced by the overall image of the destination component (Camilleri, 2018; Widayati, Ali, Permana & Nugroho, 2020). This phenomenon is explained by the fact that an "experience" is built on the basis of perceptions and attitudes towards the service provided, thus influencing the purchase and loyalty of a visitor (Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithml, 1988a; Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman, 1996). According to the studies developed by Valle, Silva, Mendes, & Guerreiro (2006), loyalty to the destination is the result of tourists' satisfaction perception, that can be evaluated by the overall satisfaction, by the attributes of that satisfaction and by their expectations about the destination. It can be said that tourists with higher levels of satisfaction and who felt that their expectations were exceeded tare those who not only return, but also recommend the tourist destination that they visited. Therefore, the contemplation of a tourist destination will build an emotional connection with the followers and, in this sense, stories and experiences will be built that stay in the memory of the visitors, being shared with friends and acquaintances, in a personal (word of mouth) and digital way (social networks). The results of a previous study done by Martins et al (2021), based on a sample of tourists who visited the Peneda-Gerês National Park, concluded that there is a positive and significant association between the destination brand experience and satisfaction and, consequently,

with the intention to return (loyalty) and to recommend it as a good tourist destination. This positive word of mouth turns out to be an opportunity to promote a visit to a certain place of destination, both for all those who do not yet know it and also to promote a revisiting to others that already know the place (Pãozinho, R., 2022; Kakirala & Singh, 2020; Camilleri, 2018). It seems to be unquestionable that the image of a tourist destination place varies according to the type of experience lived, which, in turn, translates into a positive presential (word of mouth) and online evaluation (Electronic Word of Mouth -eWOM). Friendliness of local people is also important and seems to impact on the intention to revisit the place. It is possible to say that these are fundamental components to promote a true intention to revisit and the desire to recommend, promote curiosity on others, leading to the intention to get to know that tourist destination (e.g., Camilleri, 2018; Sangpikul, 2018; Widayati et al., 2020; Martins et al, 2021).

Methodology

With the objective of evaluating the degree of consumer satisfaction and consequent evaluation of the experience lived in the last visit to the Peneda Geres Natural Park, a descriptive study was developed, adopting the online questionnaire method (Pestana & Gageiro, 2014; Malhotra, 2019). Specifically, the objectives were: (i) to know the visitor's perceptions about the physical, environmental and heritage conditions of the Park; (ii) to assess the emotional connection and feeling towards the place; (iii) to analyze the identity and brand image of the destination; (iv) to assess the quality and equity of the brand; and (v) to assess the satisfaction and intention to revisit/come back (loyalty). The questionnaire was done according to the literature review performed on the seven push factors already studied by previous authors (Bott, 2000; Boo et al., 2009; Pike et al., 2010; Emari, H. et al., 2011, D'Orey, 2015 and Martins el al, 2021): (1) Physical and Cultural settings, (2) Affective individuals, (3) Brand loyalty, (4) Brand quality, (5) Brand equity, (6) Satisfaction, and (7) Loyalty. The questionnaire was done on "google forms"; it had 35 questions, as the result of a pre-test with a sample of 15 individuals/visitors (Pestana & Gageiro, 2014; Malhotra, 2019). After validating the survey, it was made available online (social media and by e-mail), and the study took place between September 2020 and March 2021. It is

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a non-probabilistic convenience sample (Malhotra, 2019), with a total of 265 participants – non-inhabitant people at Peneda-Gerês National Park. A 5-point Likert scale was used (Malhotra, 2019), varying from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree).

Data Analysis

From the 265 questionnaires, 242 were validated (90,8%), a total considered as a reasonable number to perform treatment and statistical analysis. Almost all participants were Portuguese (99,2%) and only two of them were

foreign visitors (0,8%). Table 1 summarizes the main characteristics of the sample. Participants are mostly male (63,6%); only 88 women answered the questionnaire (36,5%). Wanting also to be able to understand the target in a generational approach, we divided the sample in four age groups: 56 and above, with 24 answers; 41 to 55 years of age, with 148 participants (61,2%); 26 to 40 years had 52 participants (21,5%), and 16 to 25 years of age had only 18 participants (7,4%).

Table 1: Sample

		F	%
Gender	Male	154	63,6
	Female	88	36,5
Age Groups	16 – 25 years	18	7,4
	26 – 40 years	52	21,5
	41 – 45 years	148	61,2
	56 and above	24	9,9
Education Degree	Intermediate/secondary	53	21,9
	Bachelor	88	36,4
	Master	73	30,2
	Doctorate	28	11,6

Concerning the education degree, the majority of participants have an academic degree (36,4% are graduated; 30,2% have a Master degree; 11,6% are PhD) and only 21,9% have the secondary school level.

This study reveals a good internal consistency, with a Cronbach Alpha of .904 (Pestana & Gageiro, 2014). Table 2 shows that all items get a positive evaluation, with values that are superior to the arithmetic average (M > 2,5). It should be noted that the highest "scores" were obtained in the items "This place has unique locations that must be visited" (M=4.85; SD=.421), with 86.8% of respondents fully agreeing with this statement. Likewise, 83.9% strongly agreed that "This place is very pleasant" (M=4.83; SD=.421) and 75.6% strongly agreed that "Visiting this National Park was a pleasant experience" (M =4.73; SD=.497). In line with this evidence, 81% fully agreed that

they consider to come back ("I believe I will visit this place again"; M=4.77; SD=.546). Thus, it can be concluded that the degree of satisfaction with the chosen destination ("Place") - Natural Park Peneda Gerês - and the intentions to return are high.

In contrast, data revealed that the opportunity to visit museums was low, with 43.4% disagreeing with the statement: "During my stay I visited (or had the opportunity to visit) several museums" (M=2.67; SD=1.222). Likewise, price is not a determining factor in choosing this tourist destination, nor in the duration of the visit. Thus, 43.4% of the respondents disagreed that "The price of the stay was the main criterion of choice" (M=2.83; SD=1;210), and also, 24.9% disagreed that "I limited my stay to Peneda-Gerês due to the price of the tourist offer" (M=3.23; SD=1.149).

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Table 2. Frequencies

Items	Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	Undecided 3	Agree 4	Strongly agree 5	M	SD
	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)		
I had pleasant moments during my stay at the Peneda-Gerês National Park		2	9 (3,7)	55 (22,7)	176 (72,7)	**4,68**	,587
Visiting this National Park was a pleasant experience			6 (2,5)	53 (21,9)	183 (75,6)	**4,73**	,497
I am very pleased with this National Park		2 (0.8)	19 (7.9)	75 (31)	146 (60.3)	4,52	,674
I am pleased with the quality of the tourist services provided		14 (5.8)	63 (26)	100 (41,3)	65 (26,9)	3,90	,870
I was pleased with the way I was welcomed in this place	1 (0,4)	6 (2,5)	37 (15,3)	93 (38,4)	105 (43,4)	4,22	,826
I feel that these holidays were relaxing		1 (0.4)	13 (5,4)	79 (32,6)	148 (61,2)	4,56	,612
I felt safe during my visit to this place		2 (0.8)	19 (7.9)	55 (22,7)	166 (68,6)	4,58	,712
This place is very pleasant			5 (2,1)	34 (14)	203 (83,9)	**4,83**	,421
The people residing here are kind and hospitable	1 (0,4)		11 (4,5)	76 (31,4)	154 (63,6)	4,58	,624
This place provides quality experiences		7 (2,9)	54 (22,3)	97 (40,1)	84 (34,7)	4,07	,831
This place has unique locations that must be visited		1 (0,4)	3 (1,2)	28 (11,6)	210 (86,8)	**4,85**	,421
I consider that this place is rich in cultural heritage (history / tradition / gastronomy)	1 (0,4)	2 (0,8)	17 (7)	73 (30,2)	149 (61,6)	4,52	,705
This place reflects the kind of person I am		8 (3,3)	36 (14,9)	92 (38)	106 (43,8)	4,22	,825
I feel that this place is part of the person I am		10 (4,1)	40 (16,5)	85 (35,1)	107 (44,2)	4,20	,863
I believe I will visit this place again		2 (0,8)	8 (3,3)	35 (14,5)	196 (81)	**4,77**	,546
I believe this place is the perfect holiday destination	2 (0,8)	8 (3,3)	42 (17,4)	84 (34,7)	106 (43,8)	4,17	,891
I limited my stay to Peneda- Gerês due to the price of the tourist offer	21 (8,8)	39 (16,1)	79 (32,6)	69 (28,5)	34 (14)	**3,23**	1,149
The price of the stay was the main criterion of choice	36 (14,9)	64 (26,4)	71 (29,3)	46 (19)	25 (10,3)	**2,83**	1,210
I consider the management of Peneda-Gerês to be well organized	3 (1,2)	16 (6,6)	69 (28,5)	98 (40,5)	56 (23,1)	3,78	,921
During my stay I visited (or had the opportunity to visit) several museums	54 (22,3)	51 (21,1)	76 (31,4)	42 (17,4)	19 (7,9)	**2,67**	1,222
During my stay I visited (or had the opportunity to visit) historical places	12 (5)	30 (12,4)	67 (27,7)	71 (29,3)	62 (25,6)	3,59	1,149
Please rate your overall satisfaction regarding tourism development in National Park Peneda Gerês		7 (2,9)	51 (21,1)	115 (47,5)	66 (27,3)	4,00	,784

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Factor analysis using the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) method allowed the identification of four factors that explain 64.1% of the variance (table 3). Kaiser's criteria (eigenvalues greater than 1) and the "scree plot" create credible solution criteria for choosing the number of factors to retain. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin is high (KMO=0.899), with the Bartlett test

having a significance level of p=0.000, allowing the continuation of the factor analysis. The commonalities, the proportion of the variance of each variable explained by the principal components, show a strong relationship with the retained factors, all being values greater than 50%.

Table 3: Factorial Analysis – Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial eigenvalues			Extract sums of squared loads	
	Total	% of variance	% cumulative	Total	% of variance
1	8,332	39,676	39,676	8,332	39,676
2	2,432	11,583	51,259	2,432	11,583
3	1,575	7,500	58,759	1,575	7,500
4	1,122	5,342	64,101	1,122	5,342
5	,878	4,181	68,282		
6	,842	4,008	72,289		
7	,760	3,620	75,909		
8	,611	2,908	78,818		
9	,561	2,674	81,491		
10	,526	2,506	83,997		
11	,478	2,277	86,274		
12	,454	2,164	88,438		
13	,426	2,030	90,467		
14	,368	1,753	92,220		
15	,323	1,536	93,756		
16	,289	1,375	95,131		
17	,266	1,266	96,397		
18	,248	1,181	97,579		
19	,208	,991	98,570		
20	,166	,791	99,361		
21	,134	,639	100,000		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) sampling adequacy				,899	
			Aprox. chi-square	2902,277	
Bartlett's sphericity test			df	231	
			Sig.	,000	

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

Given the existence of 4 factors, a varimax rotation was performed, obtaining the following alignment of the factors that are now designated

in table 4: Component 1: Affective individual/experience (combining items from both dimensions); Component 2: Brand quality; Component 3: Cultural settings; Component 4: Brand Equity.

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Table 4: Rotating Component Matrix[a]

	Components			
	Affetive individual/ experience	**Brand quality**	**Cultural settings**	**Brand equity**
Visiting this National Park was a pleasant experience	,794			
I believe I will visit this place again	,778			
I had pleasant moments during my stay at the Peneda-Gerês National Park	,725			
This place reflects the kind of person I am	,705			
I feel that this place is part of the person I am	,693			
This place has unique locations that must be visited	,692			
I am very pleased with this National Park	,667			
This place is very pleasant	,653			
I feel that these holidays were relaxing	,643			
I believe this place is the perfect holiday destination	,584			
I am pleased with the quality of the tourist services provided		,844		
This place provides quality experiences		,779		
I was pleased with the way I was welcomed in this place		,775		
I consider the management of Peneda-Gerês to be well organized		,709		
The people residing here are kind and hospitable		,603		
I felt safe during my visit to this place		,439		
During my stay I visited (or had the opportunity to visit) historical places			,787	
During my stay I visited (or had the opportunity to visit) several museums			,681	
I consider that this place is rich in cultural heritage (history / tradition / gastronomy)			,634	
I limited my stay to Peneda- Gerês due to the price of the tourist offer				,826
The price of the stay was the main criterion of choice				,713

Extraction Method: Principal Component analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.a a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

From the seven dimensions that are part of the scale (four from the ACP analysis and two isolated - satisfaction and loyalty), 15 positive correlations resulted, of which twelve are significant (Table 5):

Table 5. Correlations between variables

	M	SD	AIE	BQ	CS	BE	SAT	LOY
Affective individual/experience (AIE)	3,81	,889	-	,517**	,324**	,221	,417**	,500**
Brand Qualiy (BQ)	3,52	,916		-	,343**	,321**	,535**	,339**
Cultural Settings (CS)	2,62	1,193			-	,440**	,191**	,046
Brand Equity (BE)	2,64	1,173				-	,249**	,099
Satisfaction (SAT)	4,00	,781					-	,359**
Loyalty (LOY)	4,76	,546						-

**. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 extremities)

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We can conclude that satisfaction is positive and highly correlated with the other dimensions, the most expressive being "Brand Quality" (r=.535), "Affective Individual/experience" (r=.417) and loyalty (r=.359).

The dimension "Affective Individual/experience" is positively and significantly correlated with "Brand Quality" (r=.517), with "Loyalty" (r=.500), "Satisfaction" (r=.417) and "Cultural Settings" (r =,324). In turn, the "Brand Quality" dimension is positively and significantly correlated with "Affective Individual/experience" (r =.517), satisfaction (r =.535), loyalty (r =.339) and "brand equity" (r =.321). "Cultural settings" is positively and significantly related to all dimensions with the exception of loyalty (positive but not significant correlation). In fact, loyalty presents positive and significant correlations with "Affective Individual/experience" (r =.500), "Brand Equity" (r =.339), "Satisfaction" (r =.359). Correlations with "Cultural settings" and "Brand Equity" are positive, although weak, but not significant. These data may reflect the limited offer in terms of museums and historical heritage, as it is a natural reserve/park where the landscape offer is more relevant. Thus, issues related to price (cost), more evident in the "Brand Equity" dimension, do not seem to reflect the intention to revisit the Peneda-Gerês National Park (Loyalty).

Conclusions

This research made it possible to know the degree of visitors' satisfaction and to evaluate the experience lived in the Peneda-Gerês National Park. Specifically, visitors positively evaluate the overall experience and the natural and environmental conditions of the park. In other words, those who visit try to find a mountainous territory, with distinct and diverse habitats, vegetation and flora, typical of a rural region in the north of Portugal. As expected, heritage issues (buildings, museums, equipment, etc.) were not valued, as the valued experience (and mostly offered in the region) is the contact with nature. Nevertheless, the experience is positive, with respondents expressing their intention to revisit the place (loyalty).

The Peneda-Gerês National Park reveals a good "Brand awareness"; recognized characteristics (focusing on the nature and the environment) motivate and attract visitors and allow a positive assessment of the quality of the tourist offer (Brand quality) and the development of a positive and favorable image (Brand Image). Tourists favor the contact with nature and the local landscape resources; respondents do not value the offer in terms of museums and architectural/historical heritage, as already mentioned. Also, issues related to price (cost), more evident in the "Brand Equity" dimension, do not seem to be reflected in the intentions of revisiting (loyalty) the Peneda-Gerês National Park.

The research results are in line with previous studies identified in the literature (Bott, 2000; Boo et al., 2009; Pike et al., 2010; Emari, H. et al., 2011, d'Orey, 2015, Martins el al, 2021;), since the data show that the experience of visiting the natural park has a positive impact on tourist satisfaction and, consequently, on the intention to return and to recommend.

With regard to the limitations of the study and the recommendations for future studies, it is worth noting that the research took place in a pandemic situation, which made it extremely difficult to obtain answers, especially at the level of foreign tourists. On the other hand, the data obtained were limited to non-resident participants; this and the size of the sample do not allow extrapolating the conclusions to the entire Portuguese population or obtaining the perspective of the local residents. Landscape, facilities, access and local inhabitants seem to be important variables that need to be properly managed. The continuity of this study involves the reformulation of the questions in order to allow more conclusive answers about the experience related to the place of destination and to include the residents' perspective on the offer itself and how to further improve the experience, highlighting the offer of services. It would be equally important to carry out this study, again, in the post-pandemic period, to assess the perception of residents and non-residents, to obtain insights from foreign tourists (including their weight in relation to the total of tourists visiting the region) and, eventually, make a comparative study with other national and international Natural Parks.

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