ASSESSING THE TOURIST IMAGE OF SANTA VITÓRIA DO PALMAR (BRAZIL) FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE RESIDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This paper identifies factors that compose the tourist image of Santa Vitória do Palmar - Brazil - as seen by its local residents. as a form of identity manifestation. The research can be classified as exploratory. descriptive and empirical. based mostly on a quantitative approach. A non-probability convenience sample of 93 respondents was collected in the city itself. in October 2015. Exploratory Factor Analysis helped identify factors that constitute the tourist image of Santa Vitória do Palmar. The factors analyzed were: Historical places and services offered by the city; Entertainment options; Tourist attractions; Hospitality and local culture learning; Sanitation and commerce; Reputation of the city.

Keywords: Tourism. Destination image. Dwellers. Santa Vitória do Palmar/RS. Brazil.

INTRODUCTION

Destination image has been the focus of many studies in the tourism literature. due to the increasing investments in destination positioning (Stylos *et al*. 2016). The importance of tourist destination image is recognized worldwide. as it affects the individual's perception and influences tourist behavior (Echtner & Ritchie. 1991; Gallarza. Saura & García. 2002; Pereiras. Anjos & Añaña. 2014).

Baloglu and McCleary (1999) argue that the dimensions of destination image involve cognitive. affective and conative elements. Through the interaction between the cognitive and the affective components. the conative element is generated.

Peña. Jamilena and Molina (2012) describe how these components are structured to form a tourist destination image. According to the authors. the cognitive component corresponds to resources or attractions offered by the destination; the affective component represents the individual's feelings towards the destination; lastly. the conative component is related to behavior. since it is the action component.

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This research focuses on Santa Vitória do Palmar. a city in the state of Rio Grande do Sul - Brazil. Home to nearly 35.000 people. the city is located in the southernmost part of the Rio Grande do Sul state. in the South of Brazil. 20 km from Chuí. also in Rio Grande do Sul. Adding to its urban and rural areas. the city also has three beaches: Balneário Hermenegildo. Barra do Chuí. and Balneário Alvorada (IBGE. 2010).

Based on this context. the general objective of this work was to identify factors that compose the tourist destination image projected by Santa Vitória do Palmar according to its residents. as a form of identify manifestation. This topic was chosen due to the lack of studies that identify the internal arrangement of tourist image destination components. especially as seen by residents. since the image of a given location is normally linked to its identity.

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This study provides a theoretical and empirical contribution to the issue by addressing the internal arrangement of tourist image destination components (Baloglu & Mccleary. 1999; Peña. Jamilea & Molina. 2012), as it identifies factors that compose the tourist image of Santa Vitória do Palmar from the perspective of local residents. The findings may help destination managers understand the residents' viewpoint in this respect, which could be used in the development of marketing and communication strategies related to tourist destination image.

Due to the lack of studies assessing the tourist image of Santa Vitória do Palmar, the authors of this work adapted the measurement scale proposed by Pereira (2013), which assessed cognitive components of tourist destination image for the city of Porto Belo - Santa Catarina state, Brazil - from the tourists' perspective. The intention was to verify the applicability of the scale on residents, and at places where tourism is not yet consolidated.

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This is an exploratory, descriptive and empirical investigation, based mostly on a quantitative approach. A non-probability convenience sample of 93 residents was collected in October 2015; during the sampling, the respondents were asked to assess the cognitive image dimensions of Santa Vitória do Palmar.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Destination image

Tourist image has been considered one of the main variables in tourism segmentation, given its "great importance for an individual's preference, motivation and behavior related to tourist products and destinations, since it causes an 'impulse' effect that results in different demand prognostics" (Cooper et al., 2001, p. 88).

According to Kotler et al. (2006), an image is "the set of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has towards an object. A person's attitudes and actions in relation to an object are

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highly determined by the image of this object". Consequently, one can conclude that images are a product of marketing.

Images are directly related to the observer's interpretation. In order for images to be considered as true attributes, similarities between the observer and the images, culture and values of a particular place must be taken into account. Thus, care is needed to ensure that the image does not develop into the construction of false attributes (Buosi & Silva, 2013).

Gândara (2008) argues that when creating a destination image, listing any elements that identify the destination in question is of utmost importance, since these will be the most relevant tools in the construction of the image. As stated by Solha (1999), images are idealized according to life experiences - in other words, they are tools that report experiences or bring comfort of some sort.

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Thus, one must be attentive to contradictions. Oftentimes, what public administration promotes as the image of a certain place does not quite represent the identity of that very location, causing residents to feel as though they do not belong there (Pérez-Nebra, 2010). For Pérez-Nebra (2010), designing the tourist image of a given location requires caution, to ensure that the image does not evade its basic principles, as this would result in a negative image.

As far as tourist destinations are concerned, images provide tourists with a glimpse of the destination that they intend to visit – assuming they have not been there before. If the tourist has already visited the place, its image will evoke memories that could lead him/her to return there. Pérez-Nebra also points out that marketing planning and strategies are necessary for guiding municipalities and diagnosing the image and identity of a location, as seen by the local community, with the goal of handling all these variables when promoting the place.

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Kotler (1994) states that, in order for an image to be effective, it must follow a couple of criteria: it must be valid, i.e. it should be close to reality; it must have credibility; it must be simple, without causing confusion with too much information; it must be attractive; and it must be differentiated.

Baloglu and McClearly (1999) point out that the construction of an image is a dynamic process that is subject to constant change and influences. In the opinion of these authors, it is important to perform empirical investigation focusing on how the image is actually formed, especially when there is no prior experience involving the destination. As to the structuring of image dimensions, the same authors express that an image is a bidimensional construct, organized according to the affective and cognitive components, and that the global image of a destination is formed based on the assessment of the cognitive and affective images of the location.

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Tasci and Gartner (2007) emphasize the importance of identifying determinants that define, modify and shape the image of a tourist destination. After conducting a thorough literature review on destination image and its underlying concepts, these authors concluded that destination image is a fundamental aspect for tourism development, due its impact on tourist supply and demand.

Recent studies have identified the dimensions involved in the construction of the destination image (Peña, Jamilena & Molina, 2012; Pereira, 2013) and investigated the direct and indirect effects of the components of destination image on tourists' behavior intentions (Stylos et al., 2016).

Peña, Jamilena and Molina (2012) identified and validated five dimensions for measuring the cognitive image of rural tourist destinations: Features of the rural tourist destination; Features of service offerings; Cultural offerings; Outdoor activities; Local products; and Gastronomy. Through an exploratory and confirmatory study with tourists who had spent their vacation in Andalusia, Spain, the authors concluded that the group of dimensions

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identified for measuring the cognitive image of rural tourist destinations was valid, since it presented reliability and credibility during tests.

Pereira (2013) identified the factors that compose the cognitive image of the tourist destination of Porto Belo, in the state of Santa Catarina, Brazil. The research was developed through an exploratory, descriptive and mainly quantitative study, with a non-probability convenience sample composed of 312 tourists who were visiting Porto Belo in the summer of 2013.

The findings indicated that the cognitive image of Porto Belo is composed of six factors: Historical places and access to local culture; Natural landscapes; Getaway activities - leisure and adventure -; Mobility and information; Accommodation and entertainment; and Restaurants. The data analysis showed that the instrument for assessing this tourist destination image was reliable and internally consistent, as verified through the Cronbach's Alpha test. The conclusions showed that the identification of factors that constitute cognitive images is of foremost relevance in the production of useful scientific research, for both public and private destination managers.

Stylos et al. (2016) carried out an exploratory/confirmatory study to determine the influence of components of destination image on the behavior of Russian tourists who visit Greece. The cognitive image found by the researchers encompassed four factors: Attractive conditions; Essential conditions; Attractive activities; Natural environment. The authors concluded that this cognitive image represents a solid analysis of options for tourism product offerings, from the visitors' point of view. Moreover, the authors strongly advise destination managers to consider these components when planning positioning strategies. Within this context, it is clear that destination image is crucial in tourism development, as it helps differentiate competing destinations. Consequently, understanding the image of a certain destination, and its influence, may become a challenge for place branding, as explained below.

Place branding

According to Solha (1999), tourism has also been using destination image as a notable marketing instrument. For this purpose, several kinds of communication channels are used, aiming at reaching individuals in as many different ways as possible.

The objective of marketing is, above all, to deal with clients. Understanding, creating, communicating, and giving the clients good value for money and satisfaction - this is the essence of modern marketing practice and way of thinking (Kotler & Armstrong, 2007).

Kotler et al. (2006) states that marketing is very important when it comes to traveling and tourism, as it represents the main management influence that can be applied to global market behavior. The authors emphasize that place branding includes several activities, such as "designing a strong and attractive positioning strategy and image, establishing attractive incentives for individuals to buy and use goods and services, providing efficient products and services, and promoting the location's values and image" (Kotler et al., 2006, p. 43).

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Kotler and Armstrong (2007) state that marketing is essential for the success of any organization. When pointing out that the main objective of marketing is to deal with clients, they mention two goals: to attract new clients, by promising better value for money; and to retain current clients, by meeting their needs. The authors also highlight the importance of designing strategic marketing plans so that cities and countries can evolve, and display as much quality as the competition.

For Passarelli and Costa (2010), images are one of the marketing tools used to reach and win over an observer or customer, by presenting the qualities and advantages of a certain product, teaching about the product, or transmitting information that meets their needs.

Kotler et al. (2006) highlight four basic approaches in the development of a destination: the development of community services; urban planning and restoration; economic development; and strategic market planning. According to the same authors, when

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developing place branding, several important choices must be made through four comprehensive marketing strategies. These involve: image; attractions; infrastructure; people.

Kotler et al. (2006, p. 47) also bring significant data to the discussion: "5-10% of publicity space in newspapers and magazines is dedicated to the marketing of communities, cities, regions, states, and countries". Destinations are competing against each other more and more in order to attract tourists, investment and businesses.

Place branding is a continuous process that involves all citizens, and place branding strategies embody a process through which participants are the driving force. In other words, participants think about their place branding strategy in global terms, but develop it locally (Kotler et al., 2006).

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Attracting more visitors should not be the sole place branding strategy is used. Place branding should use marketing as a mechanism to facilitate the development of objectives and provide a basis for tourism supply, assuring that the destination's strategies will be fulfilled (Pimentel, Pinho & Vieira, 2006). The task of many vendors is to make a specific location pleasant for both its residents and tourists, and this task is often is carried out through marketing (Kotler et al., 2006).

A study conducted by Pike and Mason (2011) compared how a given destination positions itself in the market regarding the brand identity proposed by the Destination Marketing Organization - DMO. Findings indicated conformity between real market perceptions and brand identity as intended by the DMO. Relationships among brand relevance, brand association, and brand resonance were observed. The study extends the scientific knowledge in this area by addressing the competitiveness of the destination, through positioning theory.

There are many ways in which a certain place can improve its living conditions, investments, and numbers of visitors. These involve the character, resources, service provision, and entertainment/leisure aspects of the place. Therefore, not only do successful places require an infrastructure project, but they also call for efficient public services. In other words, a series of factors contributes to the proper fulfillment and exploration of place branding (Kotler et al., 2006).

METHOD

This research is of exploratory, descriptive and empirical nature and was based mostly on a quantitative approach. In order to achieve the objectives, a literature review and research with residents were adopted as methodological procedures. Descriptive statistical analysis was used to characterize the sample, while Exploratory Factor Analysis helped reduce a large number of variables to a smaller number of factors, in order to allow better interpretation of the internal arrangement of the image components.

The target population was composed of individuals who had been living in Santa Vitória do Palmar for at least one year. The non-probability convenience sample consisted of ninety-three respondents.

The data collection tool included: sociodemographic questions to identify the profile of the residents; a five-point semantic differential scale to assess the general image of Santa Vitória do Palmar; and assessment of the cognitive image through a five-point Likert-type destination image measurement scale, which had previously been tested by Pereira (2013) for the tourist destination of Porto Belo. In the present study, the same measurement scale was tested, this time for Santa Vitória do Palmar, in the perceptions of its residents.

The study carried out by Pereira (2013) was chosen as a basis, as it presents a scale for measuring cognitive image, with 39 variables that have already been tested in a coastal tourist destination. Data were collected from 10/01/2015 to 10/03/2015 and on 10/05/2015, in the central zone of Santa Vitória do Palmar, more specifically on the city's central street -

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Barão do Rio Branco - and surrounding streets, such as João de Oliveira Rodrigues St. and Conde de Porto Alegre St.

RESULTS

The sample was predominantly female – 52.7% - with subjects' ages ranging from 36 to 45 years (26.9%), followed by 26 to 35 years of age – 22.6%. In relation to level of education, most of the subjects had completed high school - 33.3% - or had incomplete high school education - 25.8%. 33.3% of respondents were working in private companies, whereas 20.4% were self-employed. Most of the subjects had been born in Santa Vitória do Palmar - 78.5%. 24.7% of respondents had been living in the city for 41-50 years, followed by those who had been living there for 21-30 years.

As to tourism development in the city, 48.4% of the individuals were strongly in favor of it, while 33.3% were favorable, though not strongly. It is worth noting that 12.9% of the subjects were partially favorable to tourism development, and only 5.4% were neither in favor nor against it. None of the respondents stated that they were against this theme. This indicates that respondents were agreeable to tourism development, which paves the way for organizing tourism in the city.

In order to assess the general image of Santa Vitória do Palmar, a five-level semantic differential scale was used. The respondents were asked to rank the image of the city from "not attractive" to "very attractive". The general image of the city, in the dwellers' opinion, was quite positive, with an average score of 3.98 classifying the destination as attractive. This adds to the previous issue related to tourism development: if the residents are very much in favor of tourism development in their city, it is because they consider it to be suitable for this sort of activity, and probably have a positive general image of that destination.

To outline the image factors, Exploratory Factor Analysis - EFA - was used. The goal was to verify whether the attributes of the destination's image proposed by Pereira (2013) suit the destination's reality and target demographic. EFA is an interdependency technique usually

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employed in this kind of research, which examines a set of interdependent relationships, seeking to condense and summarize the data (Malhotra, 2006).

For the development of the EFA, Principal Component Analysis was used to extract factors. In this method, total data variance is considered when the main concern is to determine the least number of factors that involve the most data variance (Malhotra, 2006).

The orthogonal rotation method was also used, in which "axes are kept on a straight angle" (Malhotra, 2006, p. 555). In order to verify the significance of the findings and the adequacy of the sample, the KMO - Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin - test was applied. The test presented a 0.705 value, which indicates that the Factor Analysis is appropriate (MALHOTRA, 2006). Eighteen variables had to be excluded, since they presented cross-loadings. Thus, the final structure contained six factors.

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A total of six factors composing the tourist image of Santa Vitória do Palmar was identified. These were named according to their variables: Factor 1: Historical sites and services offered; Factor 2: Entertainment options; Factor 3: Tourist attractions; Factor 4: Hospitality and local culture learning; Factor 5: Sanitation and commerce; Factor 6: Reputation of the city. The explained variance was 61.91%; according to Malhotra (2006), a good explanation margin is obtained from 60% on. Table 1 shows the factorial structure found.

Table 1. Factors that make up the image of Santa Vitória do Palmar.

Variáveis de cada fator	Carga fatorial	% de Variância explicada do fator
Fator 1: Lugares históricos e serviços ofertados		21,56
Museus no destino	0,82	
Uma variedade de lugares históricos	0,80	
Variada arquitetura e patrimônio	0,76	
Opções de feiras, exposições e artesanato	0,67	
Serviço de transporte local eficiente	0,64	
Serviços de informação no destino	0,60	
Facilidade para mochileiros	0,58	
Fator 2: Opções de entretenimento		13,79
Fáceis opções de lazer e recreação	0,80	
Fáceis opções de entretenimento e vida noturna	0,78	
Opções de atividades esportivas nas praias	0,67	
Fator 3: Atrativos turísticos		8,41
Facilidade para comprar produtos manufaturados	0,78	
Opções para fazer uma viagem econômica	0,66	
Facilidade para pescaria	0,61	
Belas Paisagens	0,49	
Fator 4: Hotelaria e transmissão da cultura local		6,95
Infraestrutura nos hotéis e pousadas	0,70	
Opções de como aprender sobre a cultura local	0,57	
Fator 5: Higiene e comércio		5,74
Opções de estabelecimentos comerciais	0,69	
Um lugar limpo	-0,64	
Fator 6: Fama do município		5,46
Um ambiente com fama ruim de segurança pública	0,80	
Uma população hospitaleira/receptiva	-0,61	

Source: authors, 2015.

When analyzing the explained variance by each factor, it was verified that variables constituting the "Historical places and services offered" factor were the ones largely responsible for the tourist image of Santa Vitória de Palmar, with explained variance of 21.56%, according to respondents. It was also noted that "Access to leisure options", "Access to entertainment and nightlife options" and "Access to beach sporting activities" appeared

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as the second factors, with most influence on the image of the city - the "Entertainment options" factor, for instance, presented explained variance of 13.79%.

It is worth emphasizing that because the sample is small, evaluation of internal consistency of the factors, through the Cronbach's Alpha test as recommended by Hair Jr. et al. (2005), was not possible.

To complement the analysis, factor averages were calculated, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Factors means

Fatores	Média
Higiene e comércio	4,30
Atrativos turísticos	4,02
Lugares históricos e serviços ofertados	3,78
Hotelaria e transmissão da cultura local	3,61
Opções de entretenimento	3,60
Fama do município	2,99

Source: authors, 2015.

The "Sanitation and commerce" factor holds the highest average - 4.30 -, indicating that residents approve of the city's sanitation aspect, which is a positive thing for the development of tourism activity. The factor "Tourist attractions" had the second highest average - 4.02 -, suggesting that the city's landscapes, as well as advantages offered by a countryside town, are determining attributes in the image of the city. "Reputation of the city" presents the lowest average – 2.99, revealing that in the residents' opinion, public safety should be improved, and so should population hospitality, since the perspective of residents may be very similar to that of visitors.

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The findings confirmed the results of Pereira's study (2013), for there were similarities between factors. Factors that mention historical sites and access to local culture, as well as mobility and information, corresponded to the variables found in Factor 1 - Historical sites and services offered. The factor that mentions accommodation and entertainment parallels Factor 2 - Entertainment options. Factors related to natural landscapes, as well as mobility and information, were similar to Factor 3 - Tourist attractions. Factors that concern accommodation and entertainment, as well as historical sites and access to local culture, resemble variables of factor 4 - Hospitality and local culture learning. As a result, it can be concluded that the factors detected in this research are in alignment with those found by Pereira (2013), showing that the scale for measuring a destination's cognitive image may indeed be assessed through the resident's perspectives.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

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This investigation contributes both theoretically and empirically to the discussion on the internal arrangement of destination image components, as it identifies factors that constitute the tourist image of Santa Vitória do Palmar as seen by its inhabitants, while also verifying the applicability of the measurement scale proposed by Pereira (2013).

The methodological procedures enabled the objective to be achieved. The Exploratory Factor Analysis helped identify factors that compose the tourist image of Santa Vitória do Palmar, namely: Historical sites and the services offered; Entertainment options; Tourist attractions; Hospitality and learning about the local culture; Sanitation and commerce; and Reputation of the city. The 93 questionnaires given to the residents of the city enabled the identification of sociodemographic features of respondents and the assessment of factors that constitute the destination's cognitive image.

The results corroborated those of Pereira (2013), who also identified six factors that constitute the cognitive tourist image. Despite this, the variables assumed a new internal arrangement in the Exploratory Factor Analysis, generating factors with different names, but

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similar to the measurement variables. It can be affirmed, then that the scale for measuring a destination's cognitive image may be assessed from the perspective of the residents.

This research presents a few limitations, since it used a small, non-probability sample, which precluded the Cronbach's Alpha test. Nevertheless, this work is not intended to exhaust the subject. On the contrary, the authors encourage further studies to assess the tourist image of other coastal destinations, as well as the tourist image of Santa Vitória do Palmar from the tourists' perspective. thus, it would be possible to compare the results of this research in order to overcome any shortfalls in the city's tourism offer. In addition, it was possible to identify the sociodemographic characteristics of respondents, and assess factors that constitute the cognitive image of the destination.

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