



Too Much of a Good Thing: The impact of Over-Tourism on a Small Village

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Dissertation written under the supervision of Professor Helena
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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of requirements for the MSc in
Strategic Management, at the Universidade Católica Portuguesa, January 2020

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Abstract:

In the last few years, tourism has become a very big industry in the world. With more and more people being able to travel, destinations are attracting more tourists. Over-tourism is not a new concept, some authors have already studied the consequences of over-tourism in touristic destinations. But the symptoms only started to be felt in recent years.

This dissertation aims to study the impact of over-tourism on a small village from the perception of tourists. The objective is to identify the experiences and perceptions of tourists regarding Sintra and to understand how over-tourism affects them.

Through analysing web-based reviews of tourists, 7 major themes were found; “palace”, “Sintra”, “time”, “beautiful”, “park”, “entrance”, and “rooms”. The themes were divided into three groups, monuments, location and over-tourism. Each group describing a part of the experience in Sintra, concluding that over-tourism does influence the tourist experience. Most positive reviews talked about how beautiful the town is and how it is worth to visit the monuments. However, most negative reviews were connected to over-tourism, especially the theme “time”, describing long queues and over-crowded monuments and transports and how that ruins the experience. Therefore, there is evidence that over-tourism is influencing tourists’ perceptions of Sintra.

The goal of this dissertation is to help countries, local communities and tourism managers to understand the problem of over-tourism and create a more sustainable strategy for tourism in the future. The research contributes to the literature by analysing a small village classified as world heritage.

Key Words: Tourism, Over-tourism, Sustainable tourism, Sintra

Resumo:

Nos últimos anos, a indústria do turismo cresceu exponencialmente. O número de indivíduos que viajam é maior e consequentemente os destinos atraem mais turistas.

Esta dissertação tem como objetivo principal estudar o impacto do excesso de turismo numa pequena vila com base nas percepções dos turistas. O objetivo secundário tem por base as experiências e percepções dos turistas em relação à Vila de Sintra e pretende clarificar a influência do excesso de turismo nesta localidade.

Através da análise de avaliações de turistas na web, foram identificados 7 temas principais; o “Palácio” na Vila de “Sintra”, o “Tempo” despendido, os “Bonito(s)” monumentos e “Parque(s)”, visitas exteriores às fachadas descritas como “Entrada(s)” e visitas interiores dos monumentos descritas como “Quartos” dos Palácios. Os temas foram classificados em três grupos; Monumentos, Localização e Excesso de Turismo. Cada grupo descreve uma parte da experiência em Sintra, concluindo que o excesso de turismo influencia a experiência turística. As avaliações positivas classificam a Vila de bonita e consideram os monumentos indispensáveis. As críticas negativas estão relacionadas ao turismo excessivo, especialmente ao tema “tempo”, descrevendo filas longas e monumentos e transportes superlotados.

O objetivo desta dissertação é ajudar países, comunidades e operadores a entender o problema do excesso de turismo e a criar estratégias sustentáveis que preservem os destinos. O excesso de turismo tem sido estudado em cidades com elevado número de visitantes sendo que esta investigação contribui para a literatura no setor do turismo com a análise de uma pequena Vila classificada como património mundial.

Palavras-chave: Turismo, Excesso de turismo, Turismo Sustentável, Sintra

Acknowledgments

This dissertation marks the end of my master's degree at Católica-Lisbon School of Business and Economics which allowed me to learn and to grow both academically and personally. None of this would be possible without the support of my family, especially my parents and my sister. I also want to thank all my professors at Católica for all the knowledge and tools they provided me. And to my friends that supported me at the most difficult times and helped whenever I needed.

Finally, I want to thank my thesis advisor, Helena Rodrigues, for guiding me and encouraging me whenever I needed.

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1. Introduction

All over the world, an increasingly amount of people is deciding to spend their incomes on travelling. The middle class is growing every year at an all-time peak of 140 million people joining annually (Kharas, 2017) and the tourism industry is growing with them. It would be expected that since the number of households with enough income to spend on touristic activities is rising, that a greater amount of destinations would benefit from it. The problem is everyone is going to the same places. It's estimated that of the more than 1.3 billion world travelers, an outraging 46% of visitors go to the same 100 destinations (EuroMonitor International, 2017 as cited in Powell & McGroarty, 2019).

When destinations reach their carrying capacity, it threatens the wellbeing of all parties involved. Environmental, social and cultural damages are almost inevitable, which in turn can affect the destinations brand image, tourist's experiences and change future travel intentions (Insch, 2019).

A change in the way destinations communicate and attract tourists is imperative. Marketeers need to change their mindset from quantity to quality. For a long time, the goal was to attract the highest number of tourists but in the long run, this strategy is leading to the breaking point of many destinations. However, some destinations are already making the shift to a more qualitative approach. Not striving for the biggest number of tourists but for the right ones and diversifying the products offered to tourists. This is a way to disperse the crowds and to alleviate the pressure put on natural and cultural resources (Powell & McGroarty, 2019). This shift should be applied to all industries associated with the tourism market, from the hospitality industry, to transportation and even entertainment (Hassan, 2000).

An urgent change of mindset is needed, not only in consumers that need to consider their impact when they travel, but also of destination managers that need to understand that for a destination to be sustainable, they need to use a more holistic approach (Zimmermann, 2018). This implies that all the industries taking part in a tourism destination need to think about the future and in all the parties involved.

There is a misconception about sustainable tourism. Usually, business managers focus only on environmental issues forgetting about the cultural and social aspects of sustainability (Melissen, Cavagnaro, Damen, & Düweke, 2016). But social and cultural dimensions are an important part

of sustainable development of destinations. For instance, residents are not only the stakeholders that have more to lose when tourism negatively impacts destinations because, according to Mathew & Sreejesh residents' perceptions on the impacts of responsible tourism can not only affect their perceived quality of life, but are also their perceptions are crucial to the success of the destination (Marzo-Navarro, Pedraja-Iglesias, & Vinzón, 2015).

Previous research has investigated some consequences of over-tourism on big European cities, specifically urban centers like Venice (Seraphin, Sheeran, & Pilato, 2018), so this report is going to use as an example a more regional town, Sintra, that is located in Portugal, building on the work of Insch which states that "less emphasis has been on countries with smaller population bases where tourism is the leading export industry". Also, as mentioned before, there is some research focused on residents, such as Marzo-Navarro et al. (2015) who studies indicators of sustainable development associated with rural tourism from the resident's perspective or Choi & Sirakaya (2005) who developed a sustainable tourism attitude scale to measure attitudes of residents towards sustainable tourism. However, this paper is going to focus on the perspective of tourists and how over-tourism affects their experience and their perception of the destination.

The main research question of this study is:

What is the impact of over-tourism on a small village from the perception of tourists?

The research has two main objectives:

- First, identify what are the experiences and perceptions of tourists regarding Sintra through a content-based analysis of web-based reviews.
- Secondly, to understand how over-tourism affected the tourist's experiences and perceptions of Sintra by comparing positive and negative reviews.

To answer the research question, Sintra will be used as an example. Sintra is a village located in Lisbon, Portugal with around 377 835 residents, considered one of the most sustainable destinations in the world by Green Destinations and was also the winner of "The Golden City Gate – Tourism Multimedia Award" an international tourism competition. Despite being a sustainable destination, over-tourism is threatening to deteriorate the well-being of tourists and visitors of the village. Sintra has been able to remain a sustainable destination despite the masses of tourists arriving every day especially in the high season; July, August and September

(Turismo de Portugal, 2018). Therefore, Sintra was the center of the analysis since it is a reference for a sustainable destination affected by over-tourism.

Hence, the following part of the report focus on considering the impacts of over-tourism on tourism destinations and destinations sustainability with special attention to the case of Sintra, and what are the consequences regarding tourist's experiences and perceptions of the destination. It starts with a review of the literature already developed regarding over-tourism and sustainability in tourism destinations and also provides a view on destination management and strategies to overcome this problem. It follows with the analysis of web-based reviews using a software called Leximancer with the objective of understanding the influence of over-tourism on tourists, building of the information already provided in the literature review. Finally, findings from the analysis of the reviews will be related with the literature for a greater understanding of the impacts of over-tourism on a small village like Sintra.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Over-tourism

2.1.1 Definition and impacts

Tourism is one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world, over the last few years there has been an increasingly amount of tourists and new travel destinations, with 1.1 billion tourists travelling internationally in the first 9 months of 2019 (World Tourism Organization, 2019). Although tourism has a lot of economic benefits, this growing trend has created a major issue in the travel industry. The problem lies on the fact that all these tourists want to visit the same destinations, creating overcrowding cities that are not prepared to manage these many tourists (Powell & McGroarty, 2019).

Over-tourism is a current issue that needs to be tackled by each tourism destination. Its consequences are varied, not only constitutes an environmental and cultural threat to destinations but it also affects the quality of life of residents as well as the tourist's experience (Insch, 2019). A definition of over-tourism based on the subjective evaluation of travelers and locals that frequent the place says over-tourism “describes destinations where hosts or guests, locals or visitors, feel that there are too many visitors and that the quality of life in the area or the quality of the experience has deteriorated unacceptably” (“Responsible Tourism Partnership,” 2018, p. 1). However, it is not considered only as a subjective phenomenon. It is

also described as “the inability of the destination to effectively handle a certain level of tourism activity within a given time, suggesting that each destination has a social and environmental carrying capacity” (Insch, 2019, p. 1). The carrying capacity refers to the point where a destination cannot take any additional visitors without damaging its environment, the quality of life of residents or the experiences of tourist, therefore, from this point onwards, the destination can no longer grow sustainably (Insch, 2019). Carrying capacity is also defined as “the maximum limit to tourism development” (Van Der Borg, Costa, & Gotti, 1996, p. 309). When crossing this limit, the consequences of over-tourism start to be felt and a different strategy to tourism management is required.

However, over-tourism does not always mean over-crowding. The limit for tourism development of a destination does not need to be very high. Although overcrowding is a definite thread to destinations, even remote islands or parks, that do not receive very high numbers of visitors, can be affected. When it comes to fragile ecosystems, negative effects can come even if the place only has a few visitors. In particular, natural resources and wildlife can be damaged or injured not only by overuse or misuse but also by the increase of pollution on the location. A few good examples are some islands in Thailand and the Philippines where landscapes were being affected and coral reefs endangered so the management closed the site to tourists. Other methods of alleviating the harm caused to these ecosystems is limiting access during the peak season or limiting the number of tourists allowed per day (Powell & McGroarty, 2019).

Nonetheless, over-tourism is most common and most severe in big European cities like Barcelona, Venice and Dubrovnik (Powell & McGroarty, 2019). Moreover, it is not a surprise that international tourists are the ones who contribute more to this trend since international arrivals have grown the most in the last years, from 25 million in 1950 to 1.4 billion in 2018 with 50.78% of them going to Europe (Roser, 2019).

The consequences of over-tourism vary across locations and are different between cities and villages or more natural sites. In big cities like Venice, one of the parties that is most affected by the harmful effects of over-tourism are the residents, who should be considered as an integral part of the destination since they are not only consumers but also, they have different types of connections with the destinations (Cross, 2001). Anti-tourist sentiment has been rising dramatically in these cities and residents have been protesting and calling for a more sustainable management strategy of tourist inflow (Coldwell, 2017). This is due to the fact that, according to Mathew & Sreejesh (2017), responsible tourism practices and destinations sustainability

affects the resident's quality of life. Since the residents are on the most important stakeholders in a destination, tourism development should always consider the effects it has on residents quality of life; only actions that cause positive or at least neutral effects should be allowed (Marzo-Navarro et al., 2015).

On the other side, tourists themselves are also affected by the phenomenon. Over-tourism can affect the tourist experience and the ability of the destination to attract new or returning customers because when a tourist experiences over-tourism, it might affect their assessment of the location, leading to negative word of mouth and promotion of the destination (Insch, 2019).

2.1.2 Reasons and solutions for over-tourism

In September 2018, the middle class reached a global tipping point, "as of this month, just over 50 percent of the world's population, or some 3.8 billion people, live in households with enough discretionary expenditure to be considered middle class or rich" (Kharas & Hamel, 2018, p. 1). Historically, this is the first time that the world's population is not mainly poor or at risk of poverty. There are several implications of a bigger middle class but the one that is relevant for this study is the increased spending on travel activities (Kharas & Hamel, 2018).

The rising number of travelers is not a big problem by itself. The problem is the uneven distribution of these travelers. As mentioned before in the study, a big percentage of world travelers go to the same 100 destinations, or even worse according to the CEO of the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), Gloria Guevara "The top 20 country destinations will add more arrivals by 2020 than the rest of the world combined" (Powell & McGroarty, 2019, p. 23).

However, the rise in the number of people with enough income to spend on travel is not the only factor contributing to over-tourism. Most destination's marketing efforts are focused on attracting more tourists rather than focusing on attracting the right ones. A strategy committed to increasing numbers of tourists is not a sustainable strategy. A large number of destinations is realizing that and as so, is becoming more "selective about the tourists they attract, focusing more on the value of tourism rather than the number of visitors" (Dichter & Gloria, 2017, p. 32).

In addition, governments are too concentrated on the economic contribution of tourism, focusing on how much income tourists can bring to the country. Consequently, tourism policy usually revolves around increasing revenues from visitors, especially international overnight

tourists (Joppe, 2018). Again, this strategy is not sustainable since most destinations are not prepared to receive that many tourists, some examples are lack of investment in infrastructure or on ensuring the residents quality of life. More focus on higher value visitors can help solve the problem as well as spread visitors throughout regions and seasons. Spreading involves diversifying the tourism offer which in turn, relieves the pressure put on natural and cultural resources of destinations. One way of doing this, is to market less known areas or lesser known activities and at different times of the year (Powell & McGroarty, 2019). The other solution would be to focus on high value tourists by developing a strategy to attract these types of visitors. High value tourists are the ones who contribute to the economy while respecting the destination (Dichter & Gloria, 2017).

According to Koens, Postma, & Papp the consequences of overcrowding can be even bigger for villages and rural towns since they are less prepared to host a big number of tourists. While cities already have some appropriate infrastructure and already host a large population base, they are more prepared to deal with a rising number of visitors than other types of destinations, for example a small village like Sintra. These authors also point out that besides the increasing number of tourists, there exist other factors contributing to over-tourism like visitor's inappropriate behavior, the worn-out of public and private spaces like shopping centers, the increasing pressure on local environment with the overuse of natural resources like water, and the rise of low-cost transportation companies and platform economies.

2.2 Tourism

2.2.1 Tourism in Portugal

Portugal was elected by the World Travel Awards as the world's Leading Destination in 2017, 2018 and in 2019 (World Travel Awards, 2019). Although it is a small European country with not much more than 10 million residents, Portugal has a large touristic offer that caters to all types of travelers combining culture and nature with sun and sea.

Tourism is the main export sector of the Portuguese economy. Revenue from international tourism grew to 16.6 billion euros in 2018 (Turismo de Portugal, 2018) and the number of international arrivals was estimated to be 22.8 million, representing an increase of 7.5% comparing to the previous year (INE, 2019). The majority of international tourists that come to Portugal are from Europe, with Spain being the country with more arrivals (25.4% of arrivals

from non-residents), followed by the United Kingdom (15.5%), France (13.3%), and Germany (8.6%) (INE, 2019).

The main motivations for travelling to Portugal seem to be “Sun and Sea”, “City Breaks”, “Nature” and “Culture”. In the Lisbon region, the most sought council is Lisboa, but Cascais and Sintra also stand out. Cascais is known for having a different touristic offer from Lisbon, more related to the “Sun and Sea” due to its privileged location near the sea, with beaches appealing to all kinds of people, from surfers to families. On the contrary, although it is also close to the sea, Sintra is notorious for its cultural offer (Roland Berger Strategy Consultants, 2014).

2.2.2 Sintra as a destination

Sintra is a village located in the district of Lisbon with around 377 835 residents, the second most populous municipality in Portugal (“Sintra,” 2013). Found in the hills of Serra de Sintra, it is a mix of natural and cultural attractions, where you will find palaces, mansions, and even the ruins of an ancient castle. The monuments and the views are also joined by its traditional gastronomy and wines. Considered to be the best day trip from Lisbon, Sintra has a wide touristic offer known to be a must in anyone’s Portugal holiday plans.

Classified as world heritage in 1995 by UNESCO, Sintra has amazing natural views, that englobe not only the green of the mountains but also the blue of the ocean and the golden sand found in the nearby beaches. In 2019, Sintra won the “The Golden City Gate – Tourism Multimedia Award” in a tourism fair in Berlin and was also considered one of the most sustainable destinations in the world by Green Destinations (“Sintra distinguida na Feira de Turismo de Berlim,” 2019). The nomination as world heritage resulted in the creation of Parques de Sintra-Monte da Lua, S.A. (PSML), an organization with the objective of safeguarding and enhancing Sintra’s Cultural Landscape. With no lucrative ends, all the money raised from ticket sales, shops, coffee shops, and event space rental is used towards recovering and maintaining the patrimony (Parques de Sintra, 2019b).



Figure 1 – Parks and Palaces of Sintra – Map

Source: Parques de Sintra, 2019a

The PSML received 1 688465 visitors in the first semester of 2019 in all the 8 spaces it runs, representing an increase of 8.29% from the same period in 2018. Among these spaces are the Park and National Palace of Pena (982 324 visitors), Castelo dos Mouros (274 029 visitors), and Palacio Nacional de Sintra (235 269), which constitute the three monuments most visited monuments run by the corporation (Parques de Sintra, 2019a).

“The Palacio Nacional da Pena is one of the finest tourist attractions in Portugal and exemplifies the 19th century Romanticism style of architecture. The palace is a hedonistic mix of vividly painted terraces, decorative battlements and mythological statues, all of which stand at stark contrast to the lush greens of the Parque de Pena forest” (Sintra Portugal Guide, 2019, p. 1). The Park and National Palace of Pena are located in the hills of Serra de Sintra and is the most sought out monument in Sintra. The growth of 13.80% from the first semester of 2018 to the same period in 2019 is due to an increase in tourism as well as a bigger investment in cultural and entertainment activities made by PSML (Parques de Sintra, 2019a). It was classified as a National Monument in 1910 and in 2013 joined the network of European Royal Residences

(Parques de Sintra - Monte da Lua, 2015a). Finally, in 2007 it became one of the Seven Wonders of Portugal (Visit Sintra, 2019).

Castelo dos Mouros is found on one of the peaks of Serra de Sintra. The castle was built in the 10th century after the Muslims conquered the Iberian Peninsula. Nowadays, one can see the ruins of the ancient castle while appreciating some outstanding views of the rest of the region. Some archaeological work is being carried out through several zones of the castle with the objective of better understanding its history “and it has been possible to identify a medieval Christian cemetery, silos and foundations of Muslim dwellings, as well as objects and artifacts from the Bronze Age, the Iron Age and from the Neolithic” (Parques de Sintra - Monte da Lua, 2015, p. 1). It was the second most visited monument in Sintra in the first semester of 2019, growing 3.16% from the same period in 2018 (Parques de Sintra, 2019a).

National Palace of Sintra is a unique monument, which can be found in the historic center of the village. It has a high historic, architectural and artistic value, making it an imperative stop on any tourist’s itinerary. Over the years it required very low maintenance, which means it retained its original essence and features (Parques de Sintra - Monte da Lua, 2015c). Regarding the number of visits, they decreased 6.89% comparing with the first semester of 2018 due to new restrictions on road traffic in the historic center (Parques de Sintra, 2019a). The goal of this measure is to increase road safety and improve the mobility conditions of pedestrians, which in turn will create a better environment not only for tourists but also for the residents (“Sintra,” 2013). This is a step towards more sustainable tourism, which will be addressed in the next chapter, in the sense that improves the tourists experience while taking into account the quality of life of residents.

Quinta da Regaleira is located at the end of the historic center of Sintra. It is a romantic mansion with beautiful surrounding gardens built at the end of the Portuguese monarchy, from 1904 to 1910 (“Quinta da regaleira,” 2016). Unlike the other monuments, Quinta da Regaleira is managed by Cultursintra Foundation, a public foundation of private law with the goal of promoting culture in Sintra and trying to increase the access to culture to all interested parties (“Fundação Cultursintra,” 2016). In 2018, Quinta da Regaleira received 1.046.007 visitors, an historical value since it surpassed 1 million visitors for the first time ever. The goal of the foundation is to continue to promote cultural initiatives in Regaleira and in both Quinta da Ribafria and Casa Francisco da costa, two spaces it started running in 2018 (Fundação Cultursintra FP, 2018).

2.3 Sustainable tourism

“Sustainability involves reconciling economic interests with natural resources and local cultures so that these resources and cultures can be preserved in benefit to future generations.” (Marzo-Navarro et al., 2015, p. 587)

For a long time, businesses performed their activities without considering the environmental consequences of their actions, thus considering resources to be unlimited. Economic growth was solemnly derived from mass production and mass consumption (Marzo-Navarro et al., 2015). Nowadays, it is known that if businesses, and also consumers, continue operating like this, resources like oil, gas and minerals will become scarce resulting in numerous side effects, for example climate change, which by itself has several negative consequences like sea levels rising, loss of biodiversity, the thinning of the ozone layer and health problems for populations (Melissen et al., 2016). Sustainability is now a recurrent concept when it comes to business activities and tourism is no exception. Sustainable tourism is a strategy that aims to contribute to local development through not only economic principles but also ecological and sociocultural (Richard W. Butler, 1999). According to Alvarez-Sousa (2018), “Tourism sustainability means exercising control over a destination’s carrying capacity” (Alvarez-Sousa, 2018, p. 2).

When talking about sustainable tourism, a concept that often comes up is sustainable development of the destination. Sustainable development involves considering the environment, the economy and the sociocultural aspect of a destination (Melissen et al., 2016). This suggests that businesses need to address more than the environmental impacts in order to be sustainable (Melissen et al., 2016). It also means attending to the needs of current and future generations. However, the environment’s capability to meet the needs of populations is limited and sustainable development accounts for those limits (Keeble, 1988).

The World Tourism Organization says that in order to achieve sustainability in tourism all the parties involved need to think beyond their own plans and consider not only the local resident’s interests but also how their actions impact the cultural heritage and the natural environment of the destination.

However, there are also economic incentives for sustainable development. Part of the attraction of destinations, or even the whole attraction of some, is its cultural heritage and/or the natural resources it offers. So in the long run, preserving the natural spaces and cultural heritage is essential for the survival of the destination and therefore, businesses and other parties have the necessary economic incentives to develop sustainably (Hassan, 2000). Furthermore,

sustainability is a trend among several consumer segments that are emerging in the tourism market. Traveler's needs are becoming more diversified and together with pressures from the environment, some niche or specialty tourism has appeared, ecotourism or heritage tourism are two strong examples (Hassan, 2000).

Another type of tourism that can have a positive effect on destination's sustainability is wellness tourism. Wellness travelers often seek more remote places and are more aware of their impacts on nature and society. Consequently, wellness tourism can draw tourists to less known locations, helping to reduce the effects of over-tourism, and thus increasing the sustainability of the destination (Powell & McGroarty, 2019). Wellness tourism is not only an example of spreading, but also these types of tourists are high value tourists, which are two of the solutions mentioned above to fight over-tourism.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Context

The research problem of the underlying study investigates how over-tourism impacts a small village in the perception of tourists with focus on Sintra. The data used was collected from reviews posted on TripAdvisor. All the reviews were from international tourists that had visited one of 4 monuments in Sintra; Park and National Palace of Pena, Castelo dos Mouros, Quinta da Regaleira, and Palacio Nacional de Sintra. The time frame corresponds to almost 4 years of reviews, from 2016 to 2019. The reviews were mostly in English, but some had to be translated.

TripAdvisor is the world's largest travel platform helping nearly 460 million travelers per month in 49 markets and 28 languages ("About TripAdvisor," 2019) by providing information and opinions about tourism related contents. It generated 230 million user reviews and opinions in 2018 with over 8 million listings covered (S. Lock, 2019). The listings include restaurants, hotels, vacation rentals and attractions.

To answer the research problem this research performed a content-based analysis of tourist's experiences. First, the data was collected from TripAdvisor consisting of 600 reviews of international tourists from the 4 different monuments. After collecting the relevant reviews, the data was analyzed using Leximancer software.

In order to collect the opinions about Sintra, the 4 monuments with the most reviews were chosen to be the center of the analysis. The reason the monuments with most reviews were

chosen, was to make sure enough recent reviews of each monument were available in just one platform. In TripAdvisor these are classified as the top attractions, Park and National Palace of Pena had 17.782 reviews, Castelo dos Mouros had 6.310 reviews, Quinta da Regaleira had 12.885, and Palacio Nacional de Sintra had the least amount of reviews with 4.894. Also, the monuments with most reviews corresponded to the three most visited monuments managed by the PSML and by the most visited monument managed by Cultursintra. This was important since the objective of the study is to analyze over-tourism.

3.2 Leximancer

The method used in the study is a conceptual analysis of text data using a software called Leximancer 4.0 (Smith, 2003), which analyzed the tourists reviews of monuments in Sintra. Leximancer is a lexical software that maps conceptual information from large text collections in an unsupervised manner (Smith & Humphreys, 2006) by grouping concepts into themes according to the relationship between them (Stepchenkova & Morrison, 2006). The goal of the software is to find the global context and establish concept significance while avoiding “fixation on particular anecdotal evidence, which may be atypical or erroneous” (Smith & Humphreys, 2006, p. 262). More specifically, Leximancer works by generating a word cooccurrence matrix with several concepts that are then grouped together into themes in accordance to the amount of times they occur in block of text (Smith, 2003).

To perform the analysis, there were collected 600 reviews, from which 300 were classified as Excellent and Very Good and the other 300 as Poor and Terrible. Also, each 300 reviews were equally split between monuments, with 75 reviews from each one. All the reviews that were not in English were translated before the analysis. Later, the reviews were arranged in an excel file that was imported into the software. All similar words were grouped to simplify the analysis. Finally, the software generated a concept map with the major themes and concepts (see Figure 2). Since the study uses a qualitative approach, it is harder to define a good sample size. Therefore, in a second stage, two more analysis were performed, with only 300 comments each. The objective was to prove that increasing the sample size was not going to change the results dramatically. The results of the two analysis were similar to the first one, with no significant changes, so the sample size was maintained, and the analysis continued.

4. Results

The results of the analysis show 7 themes associated with the reviews of tourists, represented in the concept map generated by Leximancer (see Figure 2). The concept map consists of different themes, displayed as the colored spheres, where each one contains several concepts, presented as small grey dots. The most important themes found by Leximancer that conjointly represent the tourist's experiences are "palace" (672 hits), "Sintra" (645 hits), "time" (552 hits), "beautiful" (409 hits), "park" (188 hits), "entrance" (139 hits), and "rooms" (68 hits).

In Figure 2 it can be observed that Excellent and Very Good reviews are closely related with two major themes, "Sintra" and "beautiful", and have some relation with "palace" and "rooms". On the other side, Poor and Terrible reviews are mainly connected with the theme "time" while they also have some relation with the theme "entrance" and "parks".

The theme with more concepts connected to it is "Sintra". The results say that tourists going to Sintra go for the views, the castle, the walls and to walk in the gardens. They go by train and one upside is that Sintra is close to Lisbon. But the most important theme is "palace", since it has the most hits (672 hits). The concept "palace" by itself is also the most mentioned concept (575 times). Tourists say the palace is a place worth seeing and also worth visiting. The concept "visit" is connected with the theme "rooms", which means the rooms are very related to the castle and when tourists refer to the castle, most times they also refer to the rooms. The concept Portugal is related to the theme "rooms", since these reveal a lot of the Portugal history.

The second concept most mentioned after "palace" is "time" with 286 hits. It is also the third most important theme with 552 hits. Tourists are saying they spend too much time in queues, buying tickets, in the bus, and that there are too much people. The concept "time" is also connected with the theme "entrance". The entrance is associated with "Regaleira", meaning most times, when tourists mention the entrance, they are talking about the entrance of Quinta da Regaleira which they consider to be full. "Parks" is very related with the theme "time" and to "palace", meaning tourists spend a lot of time in the parks. The theme "beautiful" is also mentioned a lot (409 hits), referring to the town and also to the words early and day.

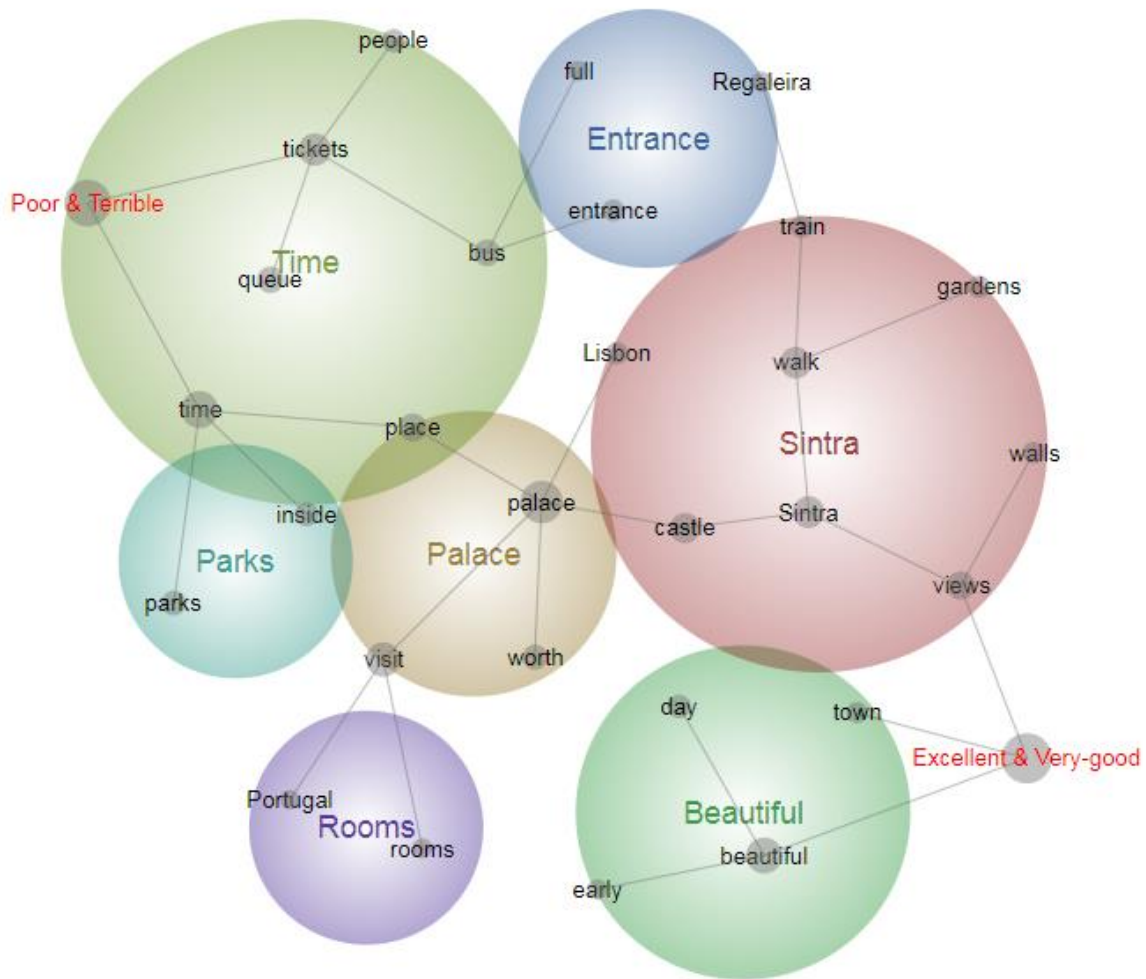


Figure 2 – Concept Map generated by Leximancer representing tourists’ reviews of Sintra

5. Discussion

As mentioned in the previous section, in order to identify the experiences and perceptions of tourists regarding Sintra through web-based reviews, a concept map was generated, and the most common themes and concepts identified representing the collected reviews (see Figure 2). To achieve the second objective of understanding how over-tourism affects the tourist’s experiences and perceptions of Sintra, the “Excellent and Very Good” and “Poor and Terrible” reviews were compared.

The seven major themes identified can be divided into three groups, each describing a crucial part of the tourist experience in Sintra: themes related with the monuments, with the location and with over-tourism. The analysis will be divided into two parts: first the compilation of phrases from the collected reviews that better describe and exemplify the results obtained and

secondly, an analysis of each theme using the literature to support the findings. Finally, the discussion will end with a more in-depth analysis of both “Excellent and Very Good” and “Poor and Terrible” reviews.

5.1 Monuments

Firstly, the themes related with the monuments were analyzed. In the concept map, it can be observed that the themes more associated with monuments are “palace”, “parks” and “rooms”. Since the three themes describe the monuments, both inside and outside, they will be analyzed together in order to better describe tourist’s perception of the monuments in Sintra.

Palace (672 hits); Concepts: palace, visit, place, worth

Excellent and Very Good:

“Excellent Palace. This is well worth a visit if you are anywhere near.”

“A Must See Destination. If you go to Sintra you must see the Pena Palace.”

“Beautiful palace. You need to spend some time here to see everything. The palace itself is very unique and beautiful to see but the grounds are very extensive and take a while to explore and walk around. I had two and half hours here but needed more time.”

Poor and Terrible:

“It is worth to visit the park and the castle outside. However don’t lose the time to enter”

“Skip the palace walk in the grounds instead. The palace was okay but we waited in line for over an hour”

“The palace is horribly overcrowded - most of the time you just wait to enter the palace and then the rooms.”

Park (188 hits); Concepts: inside, parks

Excellent and Very Good:

“We got tickets only for the outside and we were glad we didn’t pay for the inside”

“Pena Palace and the beautiful park give you beautiful views of Sintra and surrounding area”

Poor and Terrible:

“We entered to the park without any issue. The problem started later when we wanted to go inside of the palace.”

“Mass tourism destroying a nice place. Nice park though.”

Rooms (68 hits); Concepts: Portugal, rooms

Excellent and Very Good:

“Still able to wander around the rooms and terraces. They have it furnished beautifully so that you can still get a feel of the palace.”

“A must visit in Portugal.”

Poor and Terrible:

“Frankly there are some nice rooms and nice decorations but it's really not amazing and far too little for the price.”

“Portugal is full of typical villages much more attractive.”

The most relevant theme found in the concept map is “Palace” since it was mentioned the most. This indicates that the biggest focus of the collected reviews is on the actual monuments. Also, when visiting the Palace, tourists visit the parks and the rooms inside. Therefore, these three themes are linked and can be analysed together. Most tourists agree that it is worth to visit the outside of the palace including the parks. However, they disagree on the rooms. For some, the rooms are “Well worth a visit”, where for others the rooms are not interesting and are too crowded and overpriced.

In 2019 the monuments managed by Parques de Sintra have received 129 229 more tourists than in 2018. This is due to the increase of tourism but also to the promotional efforts placed by the organization to increase cultural and entertainment activities and therefore, increase the number of tourists going to the monuments (Parques de Sintra, 2019a). The Cultursintra foundation also focused on increasing the number of tourists, reaching 1.046.007 visitors in Quinta da Regaleira in 2018, an all-time record (Fundação Cultursintra FP, 2018).

5.2 Location

In the concept map the themes “Sintra” and “beautiful” are both related and describe the location. Consequently, the two themes were analyzed together in order to get a better understanding of tourist’s perceptions on the location.

Sintra (645 hits); Concepts: Sintra, castle, views, walls, gardens, train, Lisbon, walk

Excellent and Very Good:

“Sintra is a small village approximately 20-30 minutes by train outside the city center of Lisbon. Although quite touristy most of the year Sintra will make you feel like you were dropped inside a fairy tale book with plenty of enchantment to go around.”

Poor and Terrible:

“The palace itself is very pretty just as quirky and colorful as all the pictures. The experience and the amount of work it takes to get to the castle however is a nightmare. We came on a day trip from Cascais and the place was packed with Lisbon tourists. (...) The traffic was awful there’s minimal parking and just arriving in Sintra took over 30 minutes”

Beautiful (409 hits); Concepts: beautiful, early, day, town

Excellent and Very Good:

“Worth visiting but go Early. This palace is beautiful as are the gardens.”

“Make it a day trip or at least a half day. Sintra is not that far from Lisbon maybe 30 min drive. And suddenly you are in a beautiful old Portuguese town with a castle perched at the top of the mountain.”

Poor and Terrible:

“We went to visit the famous city of Sintra and frankly I was disappointed. The city is beautiful. There's no doubt. But everything is very badly managed.”

“Sintra” was the second most frequently mentioned theme. “Excellent and Very Good” reviews agree that the village is worth visiting, mainly due to the views, the castle, the gardens and they also highlight how close Sintra is to Lisbon. On the other side, the “Poor and Terrible” reviews disagree on the accessibility of the village, saying it is too difficult to get there and it takes too much time.

The literature on travel motivation says that one of the main motivations for traveling is cultural, meaning tourists look for new geographical areas to explore (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2003 as cited in Park & Yoon, 2009). Some authors divide motivations into push and pull factors. Jang & Wu found that common push factors are “knowledge-seeking, relaxation, and family togetherness” while common pull factors can be “natural and historic environments, cost, facilities, safety, and accessibility”. The natural and historic environment can be considered one of the pull factors of Sintra, since reviews talk about the beautiful views and the historical center. However, accessibility should be improved since it can also be considered a comparative advantage attribute of a destination, critical for its sustainable development (Butler, 1980 as cited in Hassan, 2000).

5.3 Over-tourism

Finally, “time” and entrance” are the themes most related with the “Poor and Terrible” reviews and are also closely similar to each other since they both have concepts that can be associated with over-tourism. So, these two themes were analyzed together in order to understand tourist’s perceptions on over-tourism.

Time (552 hits); Concepts: queue, tickets, bus, people, time, place

Excellent and Very Good:

“Amazing but Crowded. We visited in mid-October to avoid the heat and crowds. We avoided the heat but not the crowds! We took the first bus out of town on a Saturday and we still had to wait 20 minutes to enter (we already bought tickets online) and then 30 minutes to get into the Palace. It was crowded when we first got in but then people spread out a bit. Make sure you take the walk along the palace walls. It’s still worth going because it is so unique!”

Poor and Terrible:

“I will only remember the long time queueing under a burning sun. Queues were never ending just when seemed that we were there there will be yet another queue.”

“But sadly there is no attempt to manage the hordes of people who come here resulting in long waits both to buy tickets and to get in.”

Entrance (139 hits); Concepts: Regaleira, entrance, full

Excellent and Very Good:

“We went in November which is not exactly high season but the place was packed. We waited more than one hour to get through the entrance”

Poor and Terrible:

“2.5 hours to get to the entrance and then another 45 mins in a queue to see the inside of the palace.”

“the well is full of tourists”

The third most mentioned theme is “time”. A large percentage of reviews mention the amount of people visiting Sintra resulting in long queues and crowded spaces. This is in line with the literature since one of the signs of over-tourism is overcrowding, which in turn can impact the environment, the local residents, the culture and the tourist experience (Powell & McGroarty, 2019).

Tourists also mention the amount of time spent in queues to buy tickets or to enter the monuments. The reviews studied often mention the poor management of the popular sites, with ticket machines not working, lack of staff, inexistency of indications on how to move around, and a poor and inefficient ticket system. One tourist review actually stated:

“Unbelievably poor ticketing system. 4 ticket machines all closed for maintenance and only 2 out of six ticket booths open!”

Destination management is crucial to tourism development. The need for a sustainable tourism strategy that does not focus solemnly on attracting more tourists grows even bigger with the threat of over-tourism. To decrease the impacts of over-tourism there should be an investment on infrastructure (Insch, 2019).

In addition to the difficulties of getting to Sintra, tourists also mention the transportation around the village, especially the bus that takes people from the town center to the different monuments farther up the mountain. Even the “Excellent and Very Good” reviews mention the bus, for example one review said “There are buses but queues can be long”. The “Poor and Terrible” reviews also mention the bus saying “it was a madhouse to get tickets for any bus leading up to the palace”.

The alternative would be going by car, but the congestion and the lack of parking only make it worse. Indeed, there is one review saying that “A ban for private cars would be great so that taxis, uber and busses can go there faster and more efficiently”. In 2018 a new measure was put in place that restricts circulation on the historic center with one-way streets (“Sintra,” 2013). This measure starts addressing the traffic problem but only on the center of the city and it does not address the lack of parking. Van Der Borg et al. states that one common negative effect of cities with a lot of tourists is congestion and parking problems that develop on the historic centers. Again, investment on infrastructure is needed to decrease congestion and in turn, decrease the negative effects of over-tourism.

5.4 Comparison of reviews

5.4.1 “Excellent and Very Good” Reviews

The reviews classified as excellent and good are most related with the themes of “Sintra” and “Palace” and are also somewhat related with “Palace” and “Rooms”. This set of reviews mainly describes tourists’ experiences in Sintra as worth it and the monuments as being “magnificent”

and “extraordinary”. Culturally, Sintra is satisfying most visitors, not only with the monuments but also with “Spectacular views” and a “beautiful old Portuguese town”.

Still a lot of the reviews mention that “queues can be long” and that “the place was packed”. Despite these comments, all these tourists rated Sintra with 4 to 5 stars meaning that over-tourism did not ruin their perception of Sintra. One review described the experience in Sintra like this:

“We arrived about an hour after it opened and it was packed. The line to go inside the palace was at least 30-45 minutes long. Its worth the wait though because the inside is really interesting to look at.”

Because travel experience is subjective (Ritchie, 1993), tourists can form different impressions depending on a sequence of stages that are connected and begin when the tourist decides to go on a trip and finish when they return home (Kong & Chang, 2016).

5.4.2 “Poor and Terrible” Reviews

The theme that is clearly associated with “Poor and Terrible” reviews is “time”, while “entrance” and “parks” also have some connection. Most tourists who made reviews with 1 or 2 stars was due to the time spent on queues, buying tickets and on the bus. These tourists also considered the places to have too much people. Hence, these factors actually impacted the tourist’s experiences and at the moment of writing the review their perception of Sintra was worsened, leading them to assign a poor rating to their trip.

These results are further proof that over-tourism can have a negative impact on tourist experiences and perceptions of a destination. In New Zealand, over-tourism has led to resident dissatisfaction and resistance to tourism which in turn “affect a destination's brand image, tarnishing the tourist experience and influencing the destination's ability to attract tourists in the future” (Insch, 2019).

6. Conclusion

Over-tourism is affecting destinations all over the world, affecting not only the environment, the culture and the population living in the destinations but also the tourists visiting (Insch, 2019). With international arrivals continuing to increase, it is important to study the effects of over-tourism and find effective solutions to properly manage the destinations and decrease the negative impacts of tourism.

The main goal of this dissertation was to analyze the impact of over-tourism on a small village from the perception of tourists, using Sintra as the center of the analysis. The existing literature on tourism, over-tourism and sustainable tourism was analyzed plus, the location and monuments in study were framed. After analyzing the existing literature, a conceptual analysis of text data was conducted, using a software called Leximancer.

The first objective was to identify what are the experiences and perceptions of tourists regarding Sintra through a content-based analysis of web-based reviews. The results obtained helped identifying the experiences and perceptions of tourists through a concept map. In the concept map the 7 most important themes found in the tourists' reviews were identified and then sorted into three groups; location, monuments and over-tourism. Afterwards, in order to understand how over-tourism affects the tourist's experiences and perceptions of Sintra the positive and negative reviews were compared. Positive reviews describe the town of Sintra as being beautiful and the monuments as worth visiting, although there is some mention of over-tourism, it is not enough to affect the rating given by tourists. Some negative aspects were mentioned, like crowded spaces and some difficulties in accessibility. The analysis of the negative reviews shows that over-tourism does have some impact on tourists' experiences in Sintra by increasing waiting time in queues and overcrowding monuments and transportation, which in turn negatively affects the perceptions of the destination. To maintain the sustainability of Sintra and ensure the future of the destination, it is important to address the problems mentioned.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

The study of over-tourism on big urban European cities, such as Venice, Barcelona and Amsterdam, has been done by several authors. However, this study is focusing on Sintra, a small village that although it has been less studied than the big European cities, it has some of the symptoms of a destination affected by over-tourism. As seen in the literature, the number of visitors has been growing, which according to Koens et al. (2018) can be even worse for small villages than for big cities, due to lack of preparation and infrastructure to host large numbers of tourists. Hence, this studying is filling a gap in the literature by analyzing a small village classified as world heritage by UNESCO instead of a big city.

Marzo-Navarro et al. (2015) studies indicators of sustainable development associated with rural tourism from the resident's perspective and Choi & Sirakaya (2005) developed a sustainable tourism attitude scale to measure attitudes of residents towards sustainable tourism. Both

authors are focused on the perspective of residents, as is most of the existing research on this topic. Accordingly, this dissertation contributes to the study of tourist's perceptions.

6.2 Practical Implications

These results provide insights into the tourist's experiences and reveal the main problems felt by visitors, which in turn reveal some solutions that could be applied not only to Sintra, but to other destinations too. The management of Sintra can look at these insights and develop a more sustainable tourism strategy, improving not only the tourist's experiences but also the long-term longevity of the destination. The more tangible solutions would be to first improve the ticket system, with more staff on site, by fixing the broken machines and by directing more tourists to buy online. Also, similar to other important monuments in Europe, another way to improve the ticket system would be to sell timed tickets. This would limit the number of people going in at the same time and decrease the waiting time spent in queues.

Secondly, there is a clear need for improvement on transportation. A solution to this problem could be to have more buses available and to have even more traffic restrictions to diminish the number of cars and improve the public transport circulation. Other solutions could be to provide more parking spaces and to better supervise where cars can park, since too many cars parked on the roads can delay the public transport circulation.

Finally, a more long-term strategy would be to disperse travelers to different monuments. There are other monuments and activities in Sintra that can be marketed to tourists in order to disperse the crowds. This can be done not only in Sintra, but it can also be applied to the entire country, by directing tourists coming to Portugal to other less known destinations. This strategy has been used in Dubrovnik, Croatia to disperse the flows of tourist coming to the city into other parts of the country. Slovakia is also using a dispersing strategy to develop tourism outside the main tourism centers (Powell & McGroarty, 2019).

6.3 Limitations

The present study used the software Leximancer to perform a content-based analysis on web-based reviews to analyze tourists' experiences and perceptions of Sintra. The findings of this study are limited to the context of Sintra and therefore, the conclusions can only be applied to this village. In what concerns the sample, the study used a limited number of reviews. However, because the study uses qualitative data, from a certain point, increasing the sample would not change the results dramatically. To make sure the sample size was right, three analysis were

performed, two with less reviews. Moreover, the research does not account for seasonality. An additional analysis should be done accounting for seasonality, to figure out what are the seasons most affected by over-tourism or if the problem is consistent throughout the year.

6.4 Future Research

The present study gives insights into destination management and the relation between over-tourism and tourists. The research assumes that the reviews collected reflect the overall experience of tourists. However, it would be important to better understand to what extent reviews actually reflect the tourist's experiences and how they affect the future travel intentions.

The practical implications of the study are directed to managers and governments trying to develop a more sustainable strategy for destinations. To that extent, it is not enough to consider over-tourism, other factors that impact destinations sustainability, tourism related or not, should be considered. Therefore, future work should investigate this further, in order to help achieve a more sustainable development of destinations and in turn, improve both tourist's experiences and residents' lives.

This study can help the management of Sintra to adjust its development strategy. However, further research should be done on different villages inside or outside Portugal to better understand the impacts of over-tourism. Regarding the methodology, the study contributes to the qualitative research using a software of data analysis. Nonetheless, there is space for further research with other software or using other methods.

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