Touristic preferences of hostel guests during COVID-19 times: The case of Oporto

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Abstract
The hostel market urgently needs to reinvent itself and define strategies to increase its revenue, providing safety to its guests during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the trip’s planning, the results show that individuals attribute high levels of importance to cuisine, local wines and to meeting new people. The social networks of the different places to visit are the least utilized means to plan what to do during their stay in Oporto. Static street advertising and leaving the hostel to go outside are much more important to hostel customers. The most notable attractions are the Ribeira and the bridges over the river Douro.

KEYWORDS
advertisement during the stay, hostels, low-cost hospitality, tourism, trip planning

JEL CLASSIFICATION
L83; Z30; Z32

1 INTRODUCTION

In 2019, international tourism moved a billion and a half people around the world, generating the flow of US$ 1.462 trillion, which is approximately 10.4% of the gross world product (GWP). According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2020), one in every 10 jobs around the world is generated by the productive tourism’s chain, adding up to 300 million people. Inserted into this market is the category of hostels, defined by the website “Hostel Management” as “a hostel must provide budget-priced accommodation, including 1-night stays, must welcome individual travelers and must not charge them more than a member of a couple or group. A hostel must have a common room where guests can sit and chat, or eat communally” (Hostel Management, 2020).

Besides enriching one’s culture and history knowledge, traveling is crucial to keep the world connected, and young travelers are very important for both the travel and hostels industry. However, in late 2019 and early 2020, the world’s economy and tourism, in particular, were stunned by the COVID-19 pandemic. Portugal was forced to close all commerce except for supermarkets, pharmacies, filling stations, and takeaway restaurants. Portugal also decided to close its borders when it had registered a low number of imported cases, which was news in newspapers all over the world, because of the positive way of handling the pandemic situation, being considered as an example in fighting the pandemic (Santos, Oliveira, Ratten, Tavares, & Tavares, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic situation swiftly evolved from social isolation to lockdown measures, with serious consequences for populations and their economies (Ferreira, 2020). According to Wyse Travel Confederation (WYSETC, 2020), it is estimated that the social distancing caused by the pandemic reduces, on average, 52% of the hostels’ capacities and a decrease of 66% in the revenue of youth travel accommodation providers.

According to the world’s largest collaborative database about cities and countries (Numbeo, 2021), regarding climate, Portugal is considered the best in Europe and occupies the fifth place globally. Based on this database, the city of Oporto, in the North of Portugal, presents very high quality of life indicators, with a low cost of living and low values for the criminality indicator. All this, allied with its historical heritage, provides unique conditions for the growth of tourism.

In the city of Oporto, there has been a rise of hostels since the beginning of the XX century. According to the studies of Valls (2016), Brochado and Gameiro (2013), Martins, Rachão, and Costa (2018), and Tavares and Fraiz Brea (2017), hostel guests value the location in a safe area, with the easiness of public transportation and, preferably,
in the city’s oldest (historic) zone. These studies also show that, in a hostel, its design and atmosphere are essential aspects, and that hostel guests value the fact that this accommodation allows organizing trips independently and flexibly, besides allowing to have more informal activities and being a cheap accommodation with a kitchen available.

The current literature and official documentation about hostels in Portugal are still quite scarce, and it is very difficult to access data on this subject (Volante, 2011). The present study aims to understand the most important aspects of the planning and staying at hostel guests in the city of Oporto and ascertain if there are differences in the diverse analyzed aspects between men and women.

This article is structured into five parts. After this introduction, a literature review of this topic of research is presented. The investigation methodology is presented in the third part, namely the questionnaire’s treatment principles. The analysis and interpretation of the questionnaire’s results are shown in the fourth part. Finally, the fifth part concludes based on the results and draws some implications and suggestions for future work.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | Hostels’ characteristics

In 1907, a professor named Richard Schirmann realized it would be useful in the German city of Altena to have accommodations, which welcomed young travelers to stay the night and therefore initiated the first hostel project in his school. During the night, the classrooms’ tables and chairs were removed and were replaced by straw bags that served as beds. In the morning, everyone contributed to the cleaning and reorganization of that place, which was again utilized for teaching. A decade later, the German association of youth accommodations was founded by Schirmann, originating a hostel movement that rapidly was internationalized between 1930 and 1950 (Rodriguez, 2008).

As Gomes (2014) sees it, to be considered as a hostel, the lodging must provide short term stays and shared facilities (like a dorm) for individual travelers, although many hostels also provide private rooms. The word “dorm” is the referent to a room where travelers book individual beds independently in a room with other beds and guests, instead of booking a whole room, as it is usual in a hotel or inn.

For Tavares and Fraiz Brea (2017), the hostel concept is defined as a cozy and laid-back place, designed to take up with other people, cook some food, drink, sleep, and also to befriend other guests, paying less for good quality standards.

There are a few fundamental differences between hostels and hotels, although both offer accommodation and overnight stays. By definition, a hostel allows its guests to interact and socialize more with each other. It has common living areas (rooms, bathrooms, kitchen, others), besides the dorms mentioned above (Gameiro, 2013). Such an environment is more directed toward adventure, differentiating itself from traditional hotels, since hospitality and proximity are key aspects of the guests’ experience (Tavares & Brea, 2018). Veríssimo and Costa (2018) observe that, in 2018, the hostel industry was evaluated at US$ 5.2 billion in bed revenue, with a forecast to increase 7–8% year-over-year. This growth is mostly owing to the “Millennial” travelers. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2016) predicted to have, in 2020, around 300 million trips from international youth travelers, almost 60% more than in 2010. The so-called “boom” of Millennials in hostels represents 70% of this market’s total clients. 15% of Millennials have been in a hostel in the past 12 months and in 2015 their average spending was approximately €1.522 (WYSE, 2020).

Throughout the years, a tendency to diversify the hostel’s clientele has been verified, which was once composed almost exclusively of young backpackers (Milikuč, Krešič, Miličević, Šerić, & Ćurković, 2016). This diversification has been increasing the range of age groups, which imposes hostel entrepreneurs to search even further to offer better services and add value to their businesses to stay competitive (Hecht & Martin, 2006). About this eminent age diversification of hostel guests, it can be pointed out that, regarding motivations and values, backpacker tourism is increasingly approaching conventional tourism. In that sense, the differences between backpacker tourism and the other types of tourism have been diminishing over the last decades (O’Reilly, 2006).

The article of Martins et al. (2018) reveals that there is still no plan to develop and promote backpacker tourism in Portugal, unlike competing countries; consequently, its potential social and economic impact is unknown. In Portugal, before the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2018 hostels have welcomed 878 thousand guests, which provided 1.9 million overnight stays, and in 2019 these numbers increased since hostels welcomed 1.1 million guests, which was translated into 2.3 million overnight stays (Hecht and Martin, 2006; INE, 2019).

The main factors pointed out to contribute to the choice of a hostel are the cost–benefit ratio and location (Firth & Hing, 1999; Hecht & Martin, 2006; Hostelworld Group, 2016; Martins et al., 2018; Nash, Thyne, & Davies, 2006; Veríssimo & Costa, 2018). Regarding the preferences of the hostel guests, according to Tavares and Fraiz Brea (2020), were grouped into eight factors: the hostel’s general safety, the hostel’s cleaning, its basic furniture, the guests help services and design and atmosphere, location near positive externalities, the conviviality and entertainment of guests, and the hostel’s objective physical safety. The work of Hecht and Martin (2016) points out that women give more importance to the aspects of cleaning, the staff’s attention and agreeableness, and safety.

2.2 | Touristic characteristics of the city of Oporto

Oporto is a coastal city located in the Northwest of Portugal. More precisely, it is located on the slopes of the Douro river next to its mouth, and it is the second-largest city of Portugal, besides being one who named the country (Portugallive, 2020). Pereira, Silva, and Seabra (2018) wrote that Oporto was one of the oldest metropolitan zones in Europe. It is recognized by its architectural style, by the Douro river and riverside area. The bridges that connect Oporto to Vila Nova de Gaia (the other Douro margin) cooperate toward the city’s impacting landscape.
Oporto's historical center is classified, since 1996, as a UNESCO heritage site, and it is seen as a lively city, also known for investigation, innovation, entrepreneurship (Hostelworld Group, 2017), cuisine, Port wine (Dias, 2011; Hostelworld Group, 2017), kindness, hospitality, and low cost (Dias, 2011).

The city seduces tourists not only by its traditional wines and cuisine but also by its beautiful landscapes. Such a variety of accumulated attractions, including history, authenticity, and cosmopolitan contemporanea, turn Oporto into a unique and well-succeeded destination (Coutinho, 2012). There is a wide range of monuments, historical references, and cultural centers options to receive touristic tours from hostel guests in this city. Coutinho (2012) refers to 95 classified monuments (of which 39 are open for the public), integrated into several touristic and cultural tours, and 19 national monuments. Moreover, on a cultural and leisure level, Oporto has more than 30 open to public museums/museological nuclei, 28 churches, 14 Port wine cellars, 12 markets and fairs, and more than a tenth of internationally public museums/museological nuclei, 28 churches, 14 Port wine cellars, 12 markets and fairs, and more than a tenth of internationally attractive annual events. The city has over 60 works of contemporary architecture and several locations of touristic interest.

Sampaio (2017) refers that in the city of Porto there is currently an effort to safeguard the heritage which comprises the dynamics related to its potential, transposing the idea of preservation to that of conserving the cultural significance attributes.

In 2012, 2014, and 2017, the city of Oporto was elected as the best touristic destination in Europe, by European Best Destinations. In 2017, that vote involved over 420 thousand people from 174 countries, of which 135 thousand voted for Oporto, in a list with 20 competitors (Gomes, 2014). According to INE (2019), the Northern region, in 2019, captured the second most significant share of overnight stays in hostels (23.3%). The German market was the primary market (12.2% of the total non-resident overnight stays), followed by the Brazilian (10.2%), French (10.0%) and Spanish (9.4%) markets.

Regarding the Portuguese market and the city of Oporto, there are no registers of an official organization that accounts for statistics about hostels and their volume of customers and establishments (Brochado & Gameiro, 2013).

Given the latent growth of the touristic activity in the Northern region over the last decades, the Oporto's market has adapted by having many accommodations with collective overnight stays, such as hostels. Volante (2011) reveals that in 2008 the Portuguese Association of Hostels was created to fill the existing legal gap when the first establishments of this type began to function in Portugal. There was a need for a legal programme to defend these entrepreneurs, given the recurrent fines imposed on establishments.

### 2.3 | Characteristics of hostel guests

The factors on which the choices of a touristic destination are based are still objects of investigation. It is essential to understand the factors determining the touristic choice and their influence on touristic options' general motives (Song & Li, 2008). It is also essential to understand the factors determining the touristic choice of hostel guests.

The majority of hostel guests travels alone, although they seek social connections and affirm that they travel to collect memories by experiencing the local culture and knowing other travelers (Hostelworld Group, 2020, Veríssimo & Costa, 2018). This way, they explore new cultures and befriend new people (Hecht & Martin, 2006). According to their mood and preference, this type of guests defines the touristic points and attractions to visit, deciding individually, which are the staying periods in each location and the means of transport to use. Besides that, they wish to visit and know the place beyond what is common and popular and learn as much culture as possible in each place they visited (Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995). Millennials prioritize longer trips when they invest their money, knowing the world as much as possible, preferring social interactions, and new friendships and experiences (Veríssimo & Costa, 2018).

As such, individuals who usually spend the night in hostel beds are essentially looking for sleeping comfort and informal relaxation, creating the opportunity to interact with other guests (Leonardi et al., 2020).

Another interesting aspect points out that the exchange of values between guests occurs because of cultural and touristic interests and the objective of having a good atmosphere in common areas, a trademark of hostels. Although it is between young people from different countries, cultures and socioeconomic conditions, cordial integration also occurs by sharing areas such as the kitchen, bathrooms, and bedrooms (Thomazi & Baptista, 2016). Tavares and Brea (2018) indicate that women value stimulating activities with guests more than men.

According to Mikulić et al. (2016), the main reasons hostel clients travel are looking for new experiences, knowing the culture and history of their destinations, the nightlife and entertainment, the destination's low cost and to attend festivals, concerts, theater plays and films. These authors analyze two scientific approaches to the concept of “destination’s attractiveness”: a cognitive and an effective approach. The cognitive approach is focused on the physical characteristics of the touristic attractions. On the other hand, the effective approach is focused on the tourist's mind and the own perception about the potential of the destination to fulfill the necessities. The term “effective” is used because this approach aims to analyze intangible characteristics of the location, being the destination's attractiveness seen as an imaginary construction, only existent in the minds of the tourists, whether potential or effective ones. Regardless of the adopted approach, studying the “destination’s attractiveness” concept is nowadays accepted as one of the most determining factors of the sector’s competitiveness. Online consumer reviews (OCRs) and the so-called electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) represent the primary source of information from which young backpackers choose their hostels (Martins et al., 2018).

In this digital era, a lot of information about the cities and places to visit can be obtained online (Hostelworld, 2020; Mochileiros, 2020; Portaloalities, 2020; Hostelgreeks, 2020). These websites allow finding the profile of young tourists, the most critical aspects in their trips, the places of greater interest in diverse parts and cities of the world, namely, in Oporto. This town presents typical and picturesque aspects, such as the Port wine cellars, the francesinha (typical dish), the romantic gardens and an unpaired nightlife.

The quality of the information given to tourists is important, and attributes like leisure and entertainment may increase the perception
of the destination’s attractiveness (Mikulić et al., 2016). In 2015, it was registered that 71% of the independent travel-related reservations were made online, like 36% of the tour packages (Schuckert, Liu, & Law, 2015). Five years later, it is possible to infer that percentage has only increased.

For Martins et al. (2018), OCRs and E-WOM are related by their speed by always being updated and available, mirroring customer experience satisfaction. It is demonstrated that they grant priceless references to help potential customers, turning into the digital age's word of mouth.

Dias (2011) observes that the tourist/visitor of the city of Oporto generally has a degree. Cultural tourism is the main purpose of the visit, monuments, museums, historical places, and Port wine cellars. The author still refers that, for 75% of the visitors, the stay is shorter than a week (45% for 1–2 days, and 30% for 4–6 days), and that the Internet is the biggest source of information for these tourists. Tavares and Brea (2018) have also checked that the duration of the stay in a hostel, in general, is inferior to a week (46.6% stay for one to two nights and 46.7% stay for three to seven nights), whereas only 6.7% of the individuals stay for more than seven nights.

3 | METHODOLOGY

Considering the investigation’s objectives, the population under study are the hostel guests in the city of Oporto. In the data collection, the non-probability quota sampling method was used to balance women and men. This option of collecting the data revealed the adequate one considering the current COVID-19 pandemic. The sample is composed of 116 hostel guests in the city of Oporto.

3.1 | Data collection instruments

The utilized data collection instrument in this investigation is a questionnaire survey composed of four parts. The first part characterizes the hostel guests’ sociodemographic profile in the city of Oporto (age, nationality, gender, and education level). The second part characterizes the stay of hostel guests in Oporto (time of the stay in the city, age, nationality, gender, and education level). The second part characterizes the hostel guests’ sociodemographic profile in the city of Oporto (age, nationality, gender, and education level). The second part characterizes the stay of hostel guests in Oporto (time of the stay in the city, age, nationality, gender, and education level).

| TABLE 1 Descriptive analysis of the planning of the trip to the city of Oporto |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                 | General         | Male (n = 58)   | Female (n = 58) | Test            |
|                 | M    | SD   | M    | SD   | M    | SD   | t    | p     |
| Local cuisine   | 4.32 | 0.79 | 4.21 | 0.79 | 4.43 | 0.78 | −1.543 | .126 |
| Local wines     | 4.22 | 0.93 | 4.07 | 1.01 | 4.38 | 0.83 | −1.808 | .073 |
| Meeting people  | 4.19 | 1.03 | 4.10 | 1.00 | 4.28 | 1.06 | −0.901 | .369 |
| Famous touristic points | 3.94 | 1.07 | 3.79 | 1.24 | 4.09 | 0.86 | −1.478 | .143 |
| Nightlife       | 3.91 | 1.26 | 3.78 | 1.29 | 4.05 | 1.23 | −1.179 | .241 |
| History/culture | 3.87 | 0.96 | 3.66 | 1.07 | 4.09 | 0.78 | −2.482 | .015 |
| Monuments       | 3.10 | 1.37 | 2.83 | 1.33 | 3.38 | 1.36 | −2.211 | .029 |
| Romantic walks  | 2.74 | 1.31 | 2.57 | 1.22 | 2.91 | 1.38 | −1.428 | .156 |

Source: Own elaboration.

is the trip’s main destination the budget they intend to spend in Oporto). This part also holds an open question, in which respondents must indicate which is the first word or idea that comes to the mind of the populations from different countries when one talks about the city of Oporto. The third part analyses the degree of importance of different aspects, related to the planning and to the stay in Oporto (trip’s planning, planning of what to do during the stay, locations that offer touristic advertising, and touristic attractions).

The last part evaluates the importance of posting photos on social media, the importance of being informed in hostels about indoor touristic places to visit during rainy days, and assessing the possibility of the respondents living or making exchanges in the city Oporto.

In total, 32 aspects related to the planning and the stay in the Oporto city were analyzed. To assess the degree of importance of the aspects related to the trip’s planning (see items in Table 1), to the planning of what to do during the stay (see items in Table 2) and to the offer of touristic advertising (see items in Table 3), a 5-point Likert scale was used (1—not important at all, to 5—extremely important).

To evaluate the impact of the attractions in the city of Oporto (Table 4), a 5-point Likert scale was also used (1—not memorable, to 5—extremely memorable). The choice of the items in Tables 1–4 was based on the authors Coutinho (2012), Dias (2011), Hecht and Martin (2006), Leonardi et al. (2020), Loker-Murphy and Pearce (1995), Martins et al. (2018), Mikulic et al. (2016), Pereira et al. (2018), Schuckert et al. (2015), and Veríssimo and Costa (2018), and also on different websites (Hostelworld, 2020; Mochileiros, 2020; PortalOporto, 2020; Hostelgreeks, 2020).

To assess the reliability of the 24 items utilized to evaluate the degree of importance of different aspects related to the planning and the stay in the city of Oporto, the Cronbach’s alpha was calculated, and a value of 0.868 was obtained, which according to Pestana and Gageiro (2014) is labeled as having good internal consistency.

3.2 | Procedures

The questionnaire, which was initially in Portuguese, was translated into different languages (English, Spanish, Italian, and French). These were applied during September, October, and November 2020 in...
the city of Oporto, and at some Vila Nova de Gaia points, especially in areas frequented by tourists and hostel guests. More accurately, the questionnaires were applied in person at the following places: Selina Hostel, Pilot Design Hostel, Porto Spot Hostel, Hill n’Chill Hostel (Gaia), Virtudes Garden, Morro Garden (Gaia), Cordoaria Garden, Adega Sports Bar, Lisbon Square (Base), Costa Coffee, Clerigos Tower, Ribeira, Porto Cruz Space (Gaia), Lello Bookstore, and Bar 77.

The respondents were approached and informed about the study’s objectives, to cooperate and to fill the questionnaire and respond autonomously. They were also informed that the given answers were anonymous and confidential.

The questionnaires were filled out individually. It should be noted that when respondents were filling out the questionnaire, they were given the freedom to respond according to the health safety measures in force during this period.

After collecting the data, all questionnaires were analyzed by building a database, using the IBM SPSS Statistics 26 software. Five questionnaires were removed, for not being filled out. To analyze the answers of the 116 hostel guests in the city of Oporto, descriptive statistics were utilized to characterize hostel guests’ profile and understand, which are the most critical aspects in the planning and stay in the city of Oporto.

The statistical inference technique was also used to compare averages between groups; more precisely, the Student’s \( t \) test for independent samples was used (Marôco, 2018). To calculate the size of the effect of the differences between the groups’ averages, Cohen’s \( \eta^2 \) squared was used, which according to Pallant (2013), are classified as follows: 0.01 (small effect), 0.06 (moderate effect), and 0.14 (large effect).

### TABLE 2  Descriptive analysis of the planning of what to do during the stay in the city of Oporto

|                                      | General | Male (n = 58) | Female (n = 58) | Test |
|--------------------------------------|---------|---------------|-----------------|------|
|                                      | \( M \)  | \( SD \)      | \( M \)  | \( SD \)      | \( M \)  | \( SD \)      | \( t \) | \( p \) |
| Social media profiles of restaurants/bars/stores/touristic attractions | 3.87    | 1.00          | 3.69  | 1.17          | 4.05    | 0.76          | −1.974| .051         |
| Social media of friends              | 3.79    | 0.96          | 3.67  | 1.07          | 3.91    | 0.82          | −1.365| .175         |
| Tourism apps/websites                | 3.66    | 1.21          | 3.59  | 1.27          | 3.74    | 1.15          | −0.690| .492         |
| Advertising inside the hostel        | 3.45    | 0.99          | 3.69  | 0.92          | 3.21    | 1.00          | 2.697 | .008         |
| Digital influencers                 | 3.16    | 1.32          | 2.93  | 1.37          | 3.38    | 1.24          | −1.844| .068         |
| Physical promotors on the streets    | 2.65    | 1.10          | 2.62  | 1.11          | 2.67    | 1.10          | −0.253| .801         |

Source: Own elaboration.

### TABLE 3  Descriptive analysis of the places that offer touristic advertising in the city of Oporto

|                                      | General | Male (n = 58) | Female (n = 58) | Test |
|--------------------------------------|---------|---------------|-----------------|------|
|                                      | \( M \)  | \( SD \)      | \( M \)  | \( SD \)      | \( M \)  | \( SD \)      | \( t \) | \( p \) |
| Static street advertising            | 3.80    | 1.01          | 3.76  | 1.05          | 3.84    | 0.99          | −0.456| .649         |
| Leaving the hostel to the street     | 3.77    | 1.03          | 3.79  | 1.02          | 3.74    | 1.04          | 0.271 | .787         |
| During the walks, but through the internet (touristic apps or websites) | 3.67    | 1.13          | 3.55  | 1.20          | 3.79    | 1.04          | −1.157| .250         |
| Before arriving to the city          | 3.37    | 1.05          | 3.34  | 1.09          | 3.40    | 1.02          | −0.264| .792         |
| During the check-in at the hostel    | 3.35    | 1.02          | 3.34  | 1.00          | 3.36    | 1.05          | −0.090| .928         |

Source: Own elaboration.

### TABLE 4  Descriptive analysis of the touristic attractions in the city of Oporto

|                                      | General | Male (n = 58) | Female (n = 58) | Test |
|--------------------------------------|---------|---------------|-----------------|------|
|                                      | \( M \)  | \( SD \)      | \( M \)  | \( SD \)      | \( M \)  | \( SD \)      | \( t \) | \( p \) |
| Ribeira                               | 4.63    | 0.61          | 4.52  | 0.71          | 4.74    | 0.48          | −1.998| .048         |
| Bridges over the Douro river          | 4.36    | 0.82          | 4.19  | 0.87          | 4.53    | 0.73          | −2.315| .022         |
| Port wine                             | 4.22    | 1.05          | 4.14  | 1.12          | 4.29    | 0.99          | −0.792| .430         |
| Clérigos Tower                        | 3.67    | 1.15          | 3.59  | 1.19          | 3.76    | 1.11          | −0.808| .421         |
| Francesinha                           | 3.28    | 1.44          | 3.48  | 1.34          | 3.09    | 1.53          | 1.487 | .140         |

Source: Own elaboration.
4 | RESULTS

4.1 | Characterization of hostel guests in the city of Oporto

The sample comprises 116 hostel guests in the city of Oporto, being 58 of each gender. Regarding the age groups of the respondents, these are distributed in the following manner: 22.4% (n = 26) are between 18 and 20 years old, 46.6% (n = 54) are between 21 and 30 years old, 22.4% (n = 26) are between 31 and 40 years old, and 8.6% (n = 10) are over 41 years old.

As far as education level is concerned, 38.8% (n = 45) have completed higher education, 25.9% (n = 30) have a post-graduation, 28.4% (n = 33) have not completed higher education yet, and 6.9% (n = 8) have primary education. Regarding the respondents’ nationalities, only 3.4% (n = 4) are Portuguese. The remaining 96.6% (n = 112) are foreigners, coming from 17 countries: Brazil (25), Germany (16), Spain (16), Italy (13), France (13), England (6), The Netherlands (6), Argentina (3), Belgium (3), Poland (3), Ireland (2), Canada (2), Angola (1), Greece (1), São Tomé and Príncipe (1) and Switzerland (1). This data follows INE (2019), in which the main markets are tourism from Germany, Brazil, Spain, and France.

About the duration of the stay in Oporto, 30.2% (n = 35) intend to stay overnight from 0 to 3 nights, 31.0% (n = 36) intend to stay overnight from 4 to 7 nights, and 38.8% (n = 45) declare to spend more than eight nights in Oporto. Unlike the studies of Dias (2011) and Tavares and Brea (2018), individuals tend to stay for more than a week (38.8%) at the hostel, which may be due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Regarding the number of destinations that respondents have visited or intend to visit beyond the city of Oporto, the majority (56%, n = 65) chose zero to three destinations. The option of three to five destinations obtained 12.1%, whereas a percentage of 31.9% (n = 37) affirmed to have visited more than five destinations. The majority of the respondents consider the city of Oporto is the leading destination of this trip (75.9%, n = 88).

About the percentage of the trip’s budget that respondents intend to spend or have already spent in the city of Oporto, it is seen that a big part of them claims to spend more than half of the budget in this city (44%, n = 51). There is also 22.4% (n = 26) who claim to spend 25% to 50% of the budget, 24.1% (n = 28) spend from 11% to 24%, and only 9.5% (n = 11) invested up to 10% of the budget in the city of Oporto. Therefore, it is verified that most of the respondents intend to spend more than 25% of their budget in Oporto, which is an excellent sign for local commerce. This characterization of the profile of hostel guests is in accordance with the one obtained from the tourist/visitor of Oporto in the study of Dias (2011).

The words or ideas that come to mind to people of the different countries of origin of hostel guests when the city of Oporto is mentioned are wine, history, Port wine, Douro, food, surfing, and freedom. The presence of the word “freedom” may portray the search of young travelers for a safe place, where they may circulate and meet other people during the pandemic and lockdown all over Europe and the world. It is also worth mentioning that “Erasmus,” and other words related with Sun and sea tourism also characterize the city of Oporto.

4.2 | Planning of the trip to the city of Oporto

Table 1 presents, by decreasing order of importance, different aspects related to the planning of the trip to the city of Oporto. In general, it is observed that respondents consider local cuisine (M = 4.32, SD = 0.79), local wines (M = 4.22, SD = 0.93), and meeting people (M = 4.19, SD = 1.03) are highly important. These facts are in accordance with the study of Veríssimo and Costa (2018). They indicate that most of this public affirms to travel to experience the local culture, trying new cuisines and sharing these moments with other travelers. The romantic walks (M = 2.74, SD = 1.31) indicate which respondents give less importance when they plan the trip.

Regarding the comparison of the different aspects related to the planning of the trip to the city of Oporto, between men and women, there are statistically significant differences (p < .05) on items related to the history/culture (eta squared = 0.05) and monuments (eta squared = 0.04), and the magnitude of the mean differences, according to Pallant (2013), presents a small effect size. It should be noted that women give greater levels of importance to items related to the planning of the trip to the city of Oporto (Table 1).

4.3 | Planning of what to do during the stay in the city of Oporto

Table 2 shows, in decreasing order of importance, different aspects of planning what to do in Oporto. It is seen that respondents consider searching social media profiles of restaurants/bars/stores/attractions (M = 3.87, SD = 1.00), exploring their friends’ social media (M = 3.79, SD = 0.96) and examining tourism apps/websites (M = 3.66, SD = 1.21) are highly important. Physical promotors on the street (M = 2.65, SD = 1.10) are the aspect to which respondents give less importance when planning what to do in Oporto. Thus, the guests prefer to freely access social media of their friends or the services they intend to consume over websites, apps and digital influencers specializing in tourism. These results indicate an already known latent influence of social media on the behavior of hostel guests.

Regarding the comparison of the aspects related to the planning of what to do during the stay in the city of Oporto between men and women, there were only verified statistically significant differences on the item about advertising inside the hostel (p < 0.01, eta squared = 0.06), with the magnitude of the mean differences being labeled as moderate effect size (Pallant, 2013). Men are the ones who give more importance to advertising inside the hostel, the only statistically significant item. In all other items related to the planning of what to do during the stay in the city of Oporto, it must be highlighted. However, statistically significant differences were not verified; women give more significant levels of importance (Table 2).
4.4 | Places that offer touristic advertising in the city of Oporto

Observing Table 3 allows analyzing the importance respondents give to places that offer touristic advertising during their stay in the city of Oporto (the different places are ordered in decreasing order of importance). The respondents give greater importance to static street advertising ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 1.01$) and to the hostel’s exit to the street ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 1.03$). Advertising during the hostel’s check-in is not very important to the respondents ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 1.02$). Rejecting advertisements during the check-in may be because guests are often tired because of the trip.

In the study of the importance of places that offer touristic advertising in Oporto, there were no statistically significant differences between men and women ($p > .05$). However, in terms of the sample, men give more importance to advertisements when they leave the hostel to go to the street. In the remaining places of the touristic offer, women give more significant levels of importance (Table 3).

4.5 | Touristic attractions in the city of Oporto

Table 4 allows observing, in decreasing order of importance, the touristic attractions in the city of Oporto. Generally speaking, all touristic attractions are striking for the respondents, being the Ribeira ($M = 4.63$, $SD = 0.61$) the bridges over the Douro river ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 0.82$) and Port wine ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 1.05$) the favorite attractions. The francesinha ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 1.44$) is the attraction that respondents consider to be the least striking one.

Regarding the comparison of the importance of touristic attractions in the city of Oporto between men and women, statistically significant differences were only verified in the attractions (eta squared = 0.03, $p < .05$) and bridges over the Douro river (eta squared = 0.04, $p < .05$) since women considered these areas as more attractive. It should be highlighted that Ribeira, and the bridges over the river are relatively close, that is the Ribeira is the strip of land that is next to the riverbed. Also, note that the mean differences between these two differences are small effect size (Pallant, 2013). In terms of the sample, women also consider the attractions of Port wine and the Clérigos Tower are more attractive, although men consider francesinha as attractive more than women (Table 4).

Regarding the importance that respondents recognize to posting photos or stories on social media obtaining a high number of likes and are praised by friends: 47.5% of the respondents consider it as highly important (27.6% “extremely important” and 18.1% “very important”), whereas 36.2% of the respondents do not seem to care about it (22.4% “not so important” and 13.8% “not important at all”).

Most of the respondents consider that, on a rainy day, it would be very important to be informed by the hostels about indoor and covered places that they could visit (45.7% “extremely important,” and 30.2% “very important”). This aspect is vital as, on rainy days, local commerce activities can be defined. It may be beneficial for tourists and increase local commerce revenues, which has been quite damaged during this pandemic.

Finally, about the possibility of living or making an exchange in Oporto, most of the respondents consider this possibility as very likely (50.0% “extremely likely” and 19.0% “very likely”). This tendency opens a space of opportunity for universities or degrees to offer that kind of experience, being the hostel market an important niche to seduce such a clientele.

5 | CONCLUSION

This work intended to investigate the most important aspects of the planning and the stay of hostel guests in the city of Oporto and ascertain differences between men and women in various analyzed aspects.

As far as the profile of the 116 inquired guests in the city of Oporto is concerned, it was concluded that the age of the majority is less than 30 years old and that the main tourism markets are Germany, Brazil, Spain, and France. The duration of the stays in the pandemic time has increased compared to previously mentioned in the literature (38.8% declared to stay for eight or more nights). The great majority of the respondents consider the city of Oporto is the leading destination of their trip and are willing to spend more than 25% of their budget in this city.

Wine, in particular Port wine, history, Douro, food, surfing, freedom, Erasmus, and some activities linked with Sun and sea tourism characterize the city of Oporto. When tourists plan their trip there, they consider that the local cuisine, local wines, and meeting other people are the most important aspects. Regarding history/culture and monuments, statistically significant differences were found by showing that women give higher importance to those aspects.

Planning what to do in the city of Oporto, searching social media profiles of restaurants/bars/stores/attractions, searching their friends’ social media, and searching in tourism apps/websites are the most important guests’ actions. Statistically significant differences were only verified on the item related to advertising inside the hostel, as men give a higher level of importance to them than women do.

In terms of places that offer touristic advertising during the trip to the city of Oporto, the respondents give more importance to static street advertising when they leave the hostel to go outside. Regarding these points, statistically significant differences between men and women were not found. However, men give a higher level of importance to advertising when they leave the hostel to go outside. Women give importance to the remaining places of touristic offer.

Generally speaking, all touristic attractions are striking for the respondents, being the Ribeira, the bridges over the Douro river, and Port wine the guests’ favorite attractions. Statistically significant differences were found in the two most striking attractions for guests: the Ribeira, and the bridges over the Douro river, being women the ones to consider these areas are the most attractive ones.

Guests consider it essential to post photos on social media to be praised by friends and obtain many “likes.” The city of Oporto may profit from its beautiful landscapes to attract new clientele. It would be sufficient to adopt a simple public policy that indicates visitors the
best spots for photos, stories and videos, making the city even more attractive to foreigners and potential new tourists.

Most of the respondents consider that, on rainy days, it would be highly important to be informed in hostels about indoor places they could visit. This information could enable them to define activities that involve the local commerce in a way that it is beneficial both for tourists and for the local commerce, whose revenue has been heavily impacted during the COVID-19 pandemic.

About the possibility of living or making an exchange in Oporto, most of the respondents reckon this possibility is very likely, which opens a space for universities or degrees that offer that kind of experience to advertise themselves, being the hostel market an important niche to seduce such a clientele.

5.1 | Implications

According to the literature review, it should be noted that the touristic market had, over the last years, a very steep growth until the moment when because of the COVID-19 pandemic several measures were imposed to protect society and avoid the health service rupture. In this context, the number of tourists began to decrease. Of course, the emotion of being in a place one only knows because of books or webpages will hardly translate into words, photos or videos, and no technology will be able to recreate that emotion/sensation.

Social distancing has been a huge challenge for tourism and in particular for hostels. Fear has installed itself, and hostel managers were forced to advise residents and employees to limit the contacts between each other to maintain social distancing, close common areas, wear a mask, and promote a frequent hands hygiene.

This market urgently needs to reinvent itself and define strategies to increase its revenue, providing safety to its guests. Hostels must maintain hygiene and safety conditions imposed by authorities, to have a proven certification that the risk of COVID-19 transmission is reduced, still considering that sympathy and coziness are crucial elements to make people feel welcomed.

In terms of touristic activities and local commerce, promoting the cuisine and Port wine should attract investments. Social media should be maintained updated with the location and forthcoming activities and sales because respondents use social media.

Static street advertising and the hostel’s exit to the street should remain updated to inform the tourists/guests and increase their stay duration. Implementing a set of touristic routes to visit is very important. However, to avoid big gatherings of people at this stage, different routes should be organized, which start and end at different places to ensure visitors’ health.

5.2 | Limitations and prospects for further research

The COVID-19 pandemic crisis has limited the sample’s size, which was expected to be more significant in a different context. The data gathering process became complicated to operationalize due to the access to hostels and, consequently, personal contact with guests. In future work, it would be interesting to study how hostel clients plan their trips and how they live their touristic experience in other places and touristic destinations. The importance and impact of the different positive externalities on touristic locations’ attractiveness should be further investigated.

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