

# Chapter 1

## Cultural Tourism and the Tourist Experience in the Digital Era

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter aims to reveal the growing importance of cultural tourism, reflected in the cultural heritage of cities and its concrete tourist experience in a digital age society. One of the stipulated goals was to understand the existing relationship between tourist and cultural appropriation with the mediation of the digital. The chapter focuses on a city located in the central region of Portugal and followed a quantitative and qualitative analysis methodology. The digital era has been fostering a fundamental capital in the promotion of the existing resources in cities to attract visitors and to reveal the tourist experiences developed in the visited tourist destinations. The main conclusion is the interactions that take place between heritage, tourist experience and ICT implying connections that tourists spontaneously comment through online resources. When making their comments they end up demarcating their tourist experience classifying it according to their expectations in relation to the heritage resources they visit.*

### INTRODUCTION

In cultural tourism and in the tourist experience that occurs in tourist destinations chosen by tourists, there is a set of factors that vary according to specific characteristics of that destination. These factors include cultural heritage (tangible and intangible) and natural heritage. Integrating culture are also

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architectural heritage, arts, gastronomy, sports, education, pilgrimages, handicrafts, storytelling, and city life (UNWTO, 2004). In cultural tourism and the tourist experience there are factors that convey the social reality of a given community, this being constituted by heritage. The cultural heritage of a region or community is composed of a set of tangible and intangible manifestations which are intrinsic to it. It comprises knowledge, beliefs, art, laws, habits, and other abilities acquired by man as a member of a society. It encompasses all the tangible and intangible achievements produced by humanity, from artefacts to beliefs (UNWTO, 2004).

The development of cultural tourism and the experiences associated with them has been having a significant impact and according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2009), there are elements that justify it. On the demand side, there is the growing interest in culture; the desire for direct and immediate experiences; the extension of forms of mobility which creates greater access to other cultures; ageing populations in developed countries; growing levels of cultural capital, resulting from the increasing level of education and growing appreciation of intangible culture. On the supply side: the emergence of new regions with a distinct identity; the aspirations to project a differentiating external image; the growing offer of culture and tourism thanks to new information and communication technologies; the development of cultural tourism to stimulate employment and investment and as a growing and quality market.

Cultural tourism explores the uniqueness of a destination, based on the enhancement and preservation of heritage, and can be presented in two formats: tangible (examples: museums, monuments, historic sites, archaeological spaces, military spaces, etc.) and intangible (examples: traditions, festivals, rituals, music, etc.). It focuses on the movement of people seeking essentially cultural motivations. Cultural tourism provides entertainment, self-knowledge, and general culture, allowing it to satisfy the needs of tourists looking for new and unique experiences.

Tourists make their choices according to the experiences that the territory offers them or the existing cultural resources for cultural enjoyment (Roque, 2015). In this sense, cultural tourism products must be elaborated to lead for the fulfilment of tourist experiences, developing a tourism service that includes an emotional connection with the existing cultural resources (Sukanthasirikul & Trongpanich, 2016).

Portugal, due to its historical, gastronomic, literary, and artistic heritage is considered a destination of excellence and historical and cultural authenticity of national and international scope, supported by the sites classified as World Heritage Sites and by the diversified existing material and immaterial historical and cultural heritage. Within the scope of the tourism system, the nature of tourism activity turns out to be a complex set of interrelationships that evolve dynamically. Human behavior, the use of resources, the interaction between people and the relations of man with the environment are fundamental elements of the tourism system (Neves, 2012). The tourist experience in tourist destinations is fundamental to the attractiveness and development of cultural tourism. The experience is understood as a reality as a product or service, so it is not an indifferent construct (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Tourism experiences encompass a set of memorable activities that comprise emotions and senses (Mitchell, et al 2000). Emotion and emotional experience can lead to personal change (Tarssanen & Kylänen, 2007).

Here, too, comes the importance of the authenticity of the place where the experiences take place, as the development of experiences is molded according to each community (Weyermuller et al., 2015). Cultural tourism and tourism experiences in the “digital age” have a strong impact on decision-making (Katsoni, 2015), and it is pertinent in this study to link these two themes.

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