

# 11 Storytelling tourist experiences in the websites of world heritage historical centers

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## The objectives of this chapter are to:

- To relate the concepts of world heritage sites, tourist experience and storytelling;
- To identify the dimensions of the pre-tourist storytelling experiences in world heritage historical centers in Portugal, based on the information provided in their official websites;
- To discuss the findings with world heritage historical centers management entities.

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**Keywords:** Storytelling; tourist experience; Portuguese heritage historic centers

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## Introduction

Heritage tourism has been pointed out as one of the earliest forms of tourism (Timothy, 2011). It is defined as a wide category that includes eco-tourism and cultural tourism, focusing on conserving natural and cultural heritage, and with a market segment that includes visits to historic sites (Pedersen, 2002). In heritage tourism, consumers seek heritage experiences (Richards, 1996). Heritage products and experiences are designed and promoted with the main purpose of satisfying contemporary consumption (Su et al., 2018).

Tourism is a process that encourages people to learn (Maitland, 2010), especially through the awareness raising and sensory experiences achieved by a storytelling tourist experience. In fact, tourism industry is the activity of selling experiences (Kim, 2010), and stories are important elements of the tourists' experiences (Moscardo, 2009). Current travel experiences are all about consuming and producing narratives (Noy, 2004), and narratives in tourism are important factors in the process of contemplating, experiencing, remembering and spreading travel and tourism experiences (Tivers & Rakic, 2012).

Storytelling has the power to familiarize people with what is being told (Lee & Shin, 2014), and strengthens the connections between tourists and places. Consequently, it contributes to give greater value to the product (Mora & Livat, 2013). Also, in tourism, storytelling has the power to transform the past into the present (Chronis, 2012), which is particularly important when it involves the World Heritage Sites that are unique and exceptional testimonies of culture and history. Storytelling has the power to influence millions of people. A great storytelling leads to influence and power (Lund et al., 2017). Therefore, stories about the place can give a tourism destination a unique competitive advantage and simultaneously provide a more meaningful tourist experience (Mossberg, 2008).

Tourists engage in storytelling even before they arrive at their destinations. In the planning phase of their trip they look for information about the destinations they want to visit. When a story that involves a certain destination affects its visitors, it makes tourists feel that these stories are authentic information. They will then, rapidly and deeply, process the information and build a certain kind of bond with that place, memorize its most relevant points of interest and will try their best to visit it (Overend, 2012). Within this context, the present study aims to analyse the pre-tourist storytelling experiences in different World Heritage Historical Centers in Portugal, based on the information promoted in their official websites.

To achieve this, the chapter is organized in four sections and respective final conclusions. First, we present a literature review on the concepts of storytelling, tourism experience and World Heritage Sites, with a brief description of the study's settings (Évora, Guimarães and Oporto' Historic Centers). Next, we present an overview of the methodological approach used. The third section is devoted to the results and their discussions. The final section draws the implications of the study, its limitations and point out orientations for future research.

## Literature review

### Heritage sites

Heritage tourism is not new. In fact, it is one of the most ancient forms of tourism (Timothy, 2011). But the number of tourists at heritage sites is still growing worldwide (Gilmore et al., 2007) largely because of the UNESCO classification awarded to some tourist sites. The UNESCO certification of tourist destinations, especially as World Heritage Sites, is sought after since it grants the place a universal recognition and is an important attractiveness factor for tourists (Li, Wu & Cai, 2008; Lanford, 2009). In fact, the UNESCO certification makes the site much more visible, in terms of national and international tourism, and acts as a significant incentive to make it more attractive and to increase the amount of money invested in its preservation (Drost, 1996; Arezki et al., 2009). Additionally, this prestige, achieved through international recognition, increases the opportunities for promotion and quality standards of those sites (Leask, 2006).

The literature on World Heritage Sites focuses on three main issues: (1) the connections between the stakeholders' power and the UNESCO classification process (Smith, 2006); (2) the effect the UNESCO heritage certification has on the site, and on its development and preservation (Wang, 2007; Winter, 2007); and (3) the reasons why the UNESCO classification is granted and how the advantages and disadvantages of this classification are perceived by the stakeholders (e.g. Ashworth & van der Aa, 2006; Hazen 2008; Li et al., 2008).

From a consumer behavior perspective, the issues of satisfaction and motivation regarding heritage tourism and the comparison between heritage tourist places and other tourist sites are also addressed in literature (Chandler, 2004; Chandler & Costello, 2002; Huh & Uysal, 2003; Kerstetter et al., 2001; Poria et al, 2004, 2006; Ryans & Higgins, 2006).

The tourist's perception of World Heritage Sites is conceptualized based on studies conducted within the sphere of human geography and

the geography of heritage, that consider that the perception of a place affects visitation patterns as well as site experiences (Poria et al., 2011). According to Strauss and Lord (2001), "History is a popular theme for recreational travel" (2001, p.199) which emphasizes that history is part of the tourism experience desired by the heritage tourists.

## **Tourist experiences**

Experiences have always been the core of the entertainment activity (Loureiro, 2014), and are more and more requested by tourists who are looking for appealing, unique and memorable leisure and tourism activities. Consumption experiences are multidimensional and include hedonic dimensions, such as feelings, fantasies, and fun (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Much of the literature on consumption experiences has studied hedonic purposes that occur during and after the consumption of, for example, heritage products (Brakus et al., 2009).

Following the Theory of Information Processing (Bettman et al., 1986; Gabbott & Hogg, 1994) that considers the consumer's behaviour decision process as a series of rational steps (Chen, 1997), the tourist experience can also be regarded as having three main stages (Seabra et al., 2014, p. i) the pre-experience when tourists prepare and plan the trip; ii) the tourist experience itself, the moment when tourists are at their destination and purchase the products that are part of their trip; and iii) the post-experience phase when tourists return home and evaluate the trip. Within the concept of consumption experience, the product experience can be direct, when there is a physical contact between the consumer and the product (Hoch & Ha, 1986), or indirect, when a certain product is presented virtually or in advertisement (Hoch & Ha, 1986; Kempf & Smith, 1998). One way or another, it must stimulate the multisensory connections for consumers to Feel, learn, be and do (Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011).

According to Schmitt (1999), tourist experiences can be classified into five categories: (1) Act; (2) Feel; (3) Relate; (4) Sense; (5) Think. The 'Act' dimension is about creating physical experiences aimed at the physical development of the consumer and showing him alternative ways of doing something, by experiencing alternative lifestyles and interactions. The 'Feel' dimension is related to the creation of Feelings and emotions, such as joy, happiness and pride. The 'Relate' dimension encompasses aspects of the remaining dimensions and is essentially related to the social and cultural identity of the 'I'. The 'Sense' dimension refers to the use of our Senses in order to create sensory experiences that will help