

# Cultural proximity as a determinant of destination image? The case of rural tourists in North Portugal

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## Structure of Presentation

- **Conceptual background:**
  - destination image
  - cultural proximity
  - self-congruity theory
  - *novelty seeking* and *psycho-graphic traveler type*
- **Study: North Portugal as a rural tourist destination**
- **Results:**
  - impact of cultural proximity on destination image
  - moderating effect of psycho-graphic traveler type
- **Conclusions, Limitations, Recommendations**

## Destination Image

- **Image:** *individually constructed, strategically projected and socially shared*, being a result of *complex, selective perception and learning* and *resulting itself in image-biased behavior* (Sirgy, 1983; Lilli, 1983; Park *et al*, 1986 ; Durgee & Stuart, 1987; Gartner, 1989; Hu & Ritchie, 1993; Fesenmaier & McKay, 1996; Young, 1999 )
- especially relevant for products with a **high level of perceived risk**, **particular personal importance**, and **lack of inspection qualities**;
- **destinations** as the main provider of a rather **complex global tourism product** providing an idealized **experience** (Middleton, 1988);
- **Destination image** relevant for future travel behavior (Crompton, 1979; Baloglu, 1996; Phelps, 1986);
- permitting the **imagination of destination qualities**, the development of **expectations** and the prolonging of the enjoyable tourism experience or **“vicarious consumption”** (MacInnis & Price, 1987)

## Cultural Proximity

- The belonging to a specific culture or nationality group may induce **culturally distinct ways of perceiving reality** (Berry, 1979)
  - exposition to **country-specific discourse** (destination image projection)
  - culturally shaped **motivational differences**
- **tourism** experience based on **cross-cultural interaction**, which may be **facilitated by “cultural proximity”**
- Richardson & Crompton (1988): tendency **“the culturally closer, the better destination image”**
  - due to familiarity, identification and involvement with the destination?
  - **Product-self-congruity** (Sirgy, 1982; Malhotra, 1982)

## Product-self-congruity Destination-self-congruity

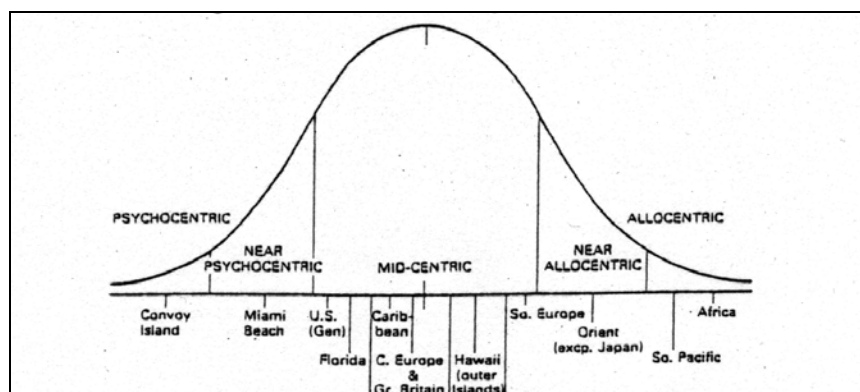
- consumers tend to **prefer/ purchase products that are consistent with their real and ideal self-concepts**, and in case of conspicuous consumption, are consistent with their **social and ideal social self-image** (Sirgy, 1982; Hong & Zinkhan, 1995)
- Empirical evidence for the relationship between self-product-image congruity and **brand preference**, especially in the case of ideal self-concepts (Sirgy, 1983; Hong & Zinkhan, 1995, Graeff, 1996)
- Actual self-concepts more related to **purchase intention** (Sirgy & Su, 2000).
- **Applicable to tourism/ destinations?** Evidence: Chon, 1992; Sirgy & Su, 2000; Litvin & Go, 2002; Kastenholz, 2004; Beerli *et.al*, 2007
- **How operationalize?** comparison between personality traits of self and other tourists or between self and perceived “overall personality of destination”? Direct overall comparison or scale-wise (e.g. Malhotra, 1982)?

## Novelty Seeking and Psycho-graphic traveler type

**Novelty seeking as a mayor motive of tourist consumption**  
(Schmidhauser, 1989; Fridgen, 1991)

Cohen (1972): *balance familiarity- novelty*

Plog (1974): *Psychocentrics- Midcentrics- Allocentrics*



## Hypotheses

“**Cultural proximity**” affects destination images, revealing culturally distinct ways of perceiving the destination.

The relationship the “**culturally closer, the higher destination-self-congruity feelings**” is expected.

A general tendency “**the culturally closer, the better the destination’s image**” (correspondingly “*the more distant, the worse*”) is suggested, as a result of identification with the destination or “*destination-self-congruity*”.

**The psycho-graphic traveler type** should moderate this relationship, in the following way:

- The tendency “**the culturally closer, the better destination image**” should be particularly strong for **psycho-centrics**.
- For **allo-centrics** an inverse tendency “**the more distant the better destination image**” (correspondingly “*the closer, the worse*”) should exist.

## The Study: North Portugal as a Rural Tourist Destination

- **Cluster-Sample at diverse attraction sites in three rural sub-regions and at Oporto Airport: summer 1998- summer 1999 ---> N= 2280**

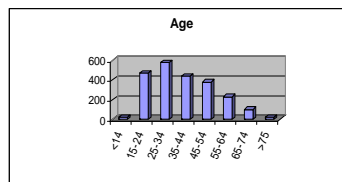


- **88% personal administration**  
**12% via intermediaries**
- **balance between:**  
**sub-regions**  
**high- low season**  
**Portuguese- foreign tourists**

### sample profile :

**50% higher education**  
**balance male-female**

**40 % newcomers**  
**46% short-break visitors**



Nationality	%
Portuguese	49.3
German	10.2
British	7.5
French	7.3
Dutch	5.3
Spanish	4.4
Belgian	3.3
Brasilian	2.4
US American	2.3

## Image Assessment

- **Holistic image:** “very good- very bad impression”
- **Affective image: 15 semantic differential scales**  
(adapted from Malhotra, 1982)
  - **PCA: 3 quite consistent factors: pleasant, simple, calm**
- **Destination-Self-Congruity:** “very similar- very different from me”
- **Cognitive image: 25 Likert-type scales**  
(presence of destination features in North Portugal)
  - **PCA: 5 consistent factors: nature; basics/ welcoming atmosphere; culture; information; action/ fun/ socializing**

## Assessing “Cultural Proximity”

- based on “nationality” plus place of residence
- **“Closest”:**  
**all Portuguese and foreign emigrants in Portugal**  
-> **50% of sample**
- **“Quite close”:**  
**geographical proximity, cultural closeness (language, history),**  
**“latin” countries: Spain, Italy, France, Latin America, Portuguese Ex-**  
**Colonies (Brasil, Angola, Mozambique) -> 16% of sample**
- **“Distant”:**  
**all other foreign tourists -> 34% of sample** (29% German, 22%  
British, 16% Dutch, 10% Belgian, 7% US American, 3% Swiss, 3%  
Canadian etc.)

## Assessing “psychographic traveler type”

### ■ **Psychographic Traveler type:**

qualitative indicator of “degree of allo-centrism” (1 to 3), based on the average of several indicators, such as frequency of holidays, type of destination visited before (relative exoticism), period of prior reservation, type of lodging arrangement, etc. (Plog, 1974)

- 15% extreme ends of distribution of mean values of “allocentrism” classified as “psycho-” versus “allocentrics”

## Results: cross-sectional data

Tendencies visible via Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney tests, significance level: 0.001

DISTANT	QUITE CLOSE	CLOSEST
	- calm	+ calm
- simple		+ simple
- similar		+ similar
- nature		+ nature
	+ basics	
	+ fun/ action	
	+ information	
	+ culture	
	+ overall image	

- Hypothesis 1 and 2 are confirmed.
- Hypothesis 3 not confirmed, no consistent tendency “the closer, the better”.

## Results: Psycho-/ Allocentrics

PSYCHO-CENTRICS		
DISTANT	QUITE CLOSE	CLOSEST
- similar		
- nature		+ nature

ALLOCENTRICS		
DISTANT	QUITE CLOSE	CLOSEST
		+ simple
- nature		+ nature
	+ culture	- culture

➤ Hypotheses 4 hardly confirmed.

Only for “culture”: “the culturally closest the worse”, but comparing with the “quite close”, not “the most culturally distant, the better”.

## Conclusions

- **“cultural proximity” affects the image of North Portugal as a rural tourist destination;**
- **no clear tendency “the culturally closer, the more favorable destination image”, as might be expected following self-congruity theory;**
- **tendency of “quite close tourists” viewing North Portugal as most favorable, confirming the need for balance between novelty and familiarity (Cohen, 1972)**
- **“Psychographic traveler type” does not moderate the relationship in the suggested way;**
- **psycho- and allo-centrics view the destination more homogeneously, independently of “cultural proximity”**

## **Conclusions**

- **Implications for destination planners and marketers:**
- **need to provide the right balance between familiarity and novelty;**
- **best chances with the culturally quite close market;**
- **need to decrease “feeling of distance” for the culturally more distant tourist (e.g. “cultural brokers”, tourist information)**

## **Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

- **Operationalization of “cultural proximity”, “destination-self-congruity” and “psycho-graphic traveler type”**
- **eventual moderating effect of other variables (e.g. prior visitation, duration of stay);**
- **replication studies with other rural tourist destinations and other types of destinations.**



*THE END*

*THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR  
ATTENTION!*