

## The folk as a resource in the construction of the tourism image of Alto Minho (Portugal)

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**Abstract:** Based on the analysis of the discourse (s) on Portuguese folklore and the rescue of the past and the traditions through the invention/ reinvention of the cultural heritage, the objectives of the research are focused on the study and the valorization of folklore while An an important resource that shapes the image of Minho (Northern Portugal). We also propose to identify some of the most representative folk groups and to analyze the repercussions of the use of these manifestations of popular culture, especially the traditional dances and songs of the Alto Minho region (Portugal), in the formulation of the image of the destination, with special incidence in the district of Viana Of the Castle Viana do Castelo. We also propose to ascertain to what extent these folkloric manifestations have broadened their function of affirming the cultural identity of the receiving community. And how can we discuss an eventual deconstruction of the identity brought about by tourism? Taking into account the epistemological framework of the Social Sciences, we propose to adopt fundamentally the qualitative/ deductive methodologies since we will start from a documentary collection and analysis of the folklorist discourse (s), plus the unstructured and open data collection, namely open interviews and observation participant. The research design follows an ethnographic matrix with the use of deductive methodologies, and the guiding thread of the narrative presents a duality of the way folklore is conceived, an analysis that focuses on the confrontation and overlap of the so-called “paradigm of recomposition” Which formulates it as a representation of past customs and tradition and the pattern of ‘stylization’ which expresses folklore as an ‘object’ in itself.

**Keywords:** Folklore; Identities; Authenticity; Simulacrum; Tourist destination.

### O folclore como recurso na construção da imagem turística do Alto Minho (Portugal)

**Resumo:** Com base na análise do(s) discurso(s) sobre o folclore português e do resgate do passado e das tradições através da invenção/reinvenção do património cultural, os objetivos da investigação centram-se no estudo e na valorização do folclore enquanto importante recurso que molda a imagem do Minho (Norte de Portugal). Propomos identificar alguns dos grupos folclóricos mais representativos e analisar as repercussões da utilização destas manifestações da cultura popular, em especial as danças e cantares tradicionais da região, na formulação da imagem do destino, com incidência no distrito de Viana do Castelo. Propomos também averiguar em que medida essas manifestações folclóricas ampliaram a sua função de afirmação da identidade cultural da comunidade recetora. E como discutir uma eventual desconstrução da identidade provocada pelo turismo? Tendo em conta o enquadramento epistemológico das Ciências Sociais, propomos adotar metodologias qualitativas/dedutivas, uma vez que partimos de uma recolha e análise documental do(s) discurso(s) folclorista(s), a que somamos a recolha de dados não estruturados e abertos, nomeadamente entrevistas abertas e a técnica da observação participante. O desenho da pesquisa segue uma matriz etnográfica com o uso de metodologias dedutivas. O fio condutor da narrativa apresenta uma dualidade da forma como o folclore é concebido, cuja análise incide no confronto e sobreposição do chamado “paradigma da recomposição” vs padrão da “estilização”, o primeiro formulando o folclore como uma representação de costumes e tradições passadas, o segundo que o expressa como um ‘objeto’ em si.

**Palavras-chave:** Folclore; Identities; Autenticidade; Simulacro; Destino turístico.

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## 1. Introduction

Folklore is now commonly accepted as synonymous with culture of popular origin, although it also serves to express its study and establish the representation of that same culture. In this last assertion, folklore forms an object that “defines a social field” (Bourdieu, 1989). However, it is within the scope of the discourse on Portuguese folklore (Branco, 1999) that, from the 1920s-30s, when the first folkloric groups were founded (Carvalho, 1999; Alves, 2013), to the present day, we can verify a duality of the way it is conceived. On the one hand, it is understood as a form of “representation” associated with past customs; on the other hand, it is considered a mode of “stylization” that turns folklore into an “object” in itself (Vasconcelos, 2001; Carvalho, 1996). Therefore, taking into account the “tension” presented by the “folkloric figuration” that fed recurrent “instrumental discourses” (Vasconcelos, 2001), today we can see the existence of a “sociological discourse” around folklore. This discourse crosses it with the study of social memories of cultural heritage, as a “symbolic and meta-cultural representation of local identities”, in an eminently socio-anthropological perspective. Aware of the current use of folklore as a manifestation of popular culture as a tourist resource (Scott, 2000; Santagata, 2004; Linhares, Henriques & Moreira, 2014). for the construction of the destination image (Minho), we consider this way of activating cultural heritage to be a substantive element of the strategy of “self-survival”. and self-definition” of the place. And it is here that the question of its commodification and “staged authenticity” (Fortuna, 1995; Baudrillard, 1991; McIntosh, 1999) arises.

## 2. Litterature Review

The image itself is a “complex and multidisciplinary” concept that has enabled studies under various approaches, such as the image of the tourist destination, the brand and its identity and value, but also the territorial image, for example. In the present work we will approach the image of the tourist destination, now formulated as an object of study in the scope of tourism and leisure (Etchner, C. M. & Ritchie, J. 2003). It is recalled that Echtner and Ritchie already defined the destination image as the “set of attributes” or “ideas” that tourists visiting the place or intending to visit have of that same destination area, which is also associated with tourist product idea (Etchner & Ritchie, 1993). In fact, the study of the image of the tourist destination takes us back to the end of the 20th century, although interest in this topic has now increased in the context of tourism research, with a special focus on territorial branding (Gallarza, M.; Saura, I. & Garcia, H., 2002; Davis, 2002). There is also an interest in t(he constitutive elements of the offer and the way in which they embody an identity and a composite product and how they are perceived by the visitor (Kastenholz, 2002), studies that have been pursued in an academic context or by territorial and tourist management entities (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Choi, Lehto & Morrison, 2007). The image of the destination that permeates the outside can be approached as a result of the way the “consumer” perceives the tourist product, which emphasizes the need for the “destination manager” to anticipate an “image” of it in order to stimulate a “destination manager”. impact” on tourist behaviors (Kastenholz, 2002; Beerli & Martin, 2004). The image of a tourist territory results from a construct based on “signs” that, in the global computation, embody the formulation of values (Gallarza, Saura & Garcia, 2002)

In an analytical study on the “state of the art” of the tourist destination image and what should shape it, Gallarza, Saura and Holbrook (2011) highlights the “receptiveness” of the host community, the scenic environment and the “cultural attractions”. The appreciation of a culture through everyday and social experience constitutes what is now called cultural heritage, “a symbolic synthesis of identity values in connection with the environment” (Pereiro Pérez, 2013; Bourdieu, 1989). However, the way in which individuals use and recreate their heritage goes beyond simple conscious choice. As is well known, that concept was born in France in the 1980s and came to redefine the expressions of folklore, popular and traditional culture. The concept of cultural heritage has become, at the same time, the “emblem of the community” and the reinforcement of identities, even promoting solidarity and making differences and internal conflicts disappear in order to build images of the community. It should be noted, however, that the notion of “heritage” encompasses all the resources that are inherited, movable and immovable assets, with the aim of interconnecting generations and guaranteeing the survival of groups, where the notion of “legacy” is subsumed; “cultural heritage” must have a “public”, community and identity meaning (Pereiro Pérez, 2013: 40; Escalera, 2009). But the distinction between this and the concept of culture must also be observed, mainly because of the way it is externalized in the representation of this “through the transformation of the value of cultural elements”. And because it is not plausible to patrimonialize or preserve everything that encompasses culture (Barreto, 2000),

cultural heritage is simply a “symbolic representation of culture” imbricated in the “negotiation of meanings”. This representative synthesis of identity values of a society that culture contains and in which the signs are confirmed as their own and related to their environment, makes cultural heritage a “transversal product”. Therefore, the cultural tourist consumes products that are rescued from the past (Santana Talavera, 2003), naturally without dispensing with contemporary culture and experiencing the lifestyles of a host group. There are several works that tend to theoretically frame the understanding of the so-called “folk performance” on a European scale, of which the studies *The invention of tradition*, by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983), and *Some problems of theory and method in the study of musical change*, by John Blacking, included in the *Yearbook of the international folk music council* and more recently in the *Yearbook for the traditional music* (ICTM, 2019). Aware of the current use of folklore as a manifestation of popular culture as a tourist resource (Scott, 2000; Santagata, 2004) and as a construct of the destination image (Minho), we have in this way of activating cultural heritage a substantive element of a self-survival strategy. and self-definition of the location. And it is here that the question of its commodification and “staged authenticity” (Fortuna, 1995) arises.

### 3. Methodology

Taking into account the epistemological framework of the Social Sciences, our study adopts qualitative/ deductive methodologies, starting from data collection using open techniques, namely through open interviews, participant observation, discourses and analysis of meaning. In this way, we adjusted the data collection techniques to what is intended to be questioned in each component of the object of study. A causal descriptive research was chosen, in order to inventory facts, observe certain phenomena and identify variables, while testing hypotheses, with the aim of establishing cause and effect relationships between the different variables. A partially qualitative study was chosen, continuing exploratory research, to which we also associated a mixed component when a quantitative approach was applied, namely with the administration of measurement by scale through open questions using the survey in order to provide understanding on the consumer side, in this case the tourist (Quivy & Campenhoudt, 2005). As presented by Echtner and Ritchie (1993), the unstructured approach made it possible to identify “unique characteristics” of the product, enabling the collection of responses on tourist sensitivities with regard to the perceived image of the tourist destination (Gallarza; Saura & Garcia, 2002).

### 4. The tourist destination Alto Minho

Located in the North of Portugal, Alto Minho coincides with NUT III Minho Lima with around 250,275 inhabitants, corresponding to a rural-urban coastal territory with a unique diversity of endogenous resources - natural, heritage and cultural - distributed over the ten municipalities of the sub-region (Viana do Castelo district) that constitute a destination area with different poles of potential touristic valorization.

**Map 1: Viana do Castelo District, Portugal (European scale)**



**Source:** CIM Alto Minho. *Alto Minho 2020*.

The strategic positioning of the region where Alto Minho is located is articulated with a “proximity market” that has more than 3 million people (NUT II North of Portugal). In terms of infrastructure, this region has transport and communications with international airports (i.e. Francisco Sá Carneiro Airport, Porto), sea ports and a well-organized road network. At the same time, it has a duly qualified and competitive business network, as well as a higher education network that includes some of the largest universities in the country. This region also shows clear patterns of sustainability in environmental and energy terms, accompanied by sectors of specialization and strong “technological intensity” and internationalization, highlighting the economy of the sea, green energy, the forest, agri-food / wine and tourism. However, the ten municipalities in the region that make up the district of Viana do Castelo, have a territorial incidence of around 40% in mountain areas. In these mountain areas, the Serra D’Arga, the higher elevations of Ponte de Lima, Paredes de Coura and Melgaço, as well as the Serras da Peneda, Soajo and Amarela Peneda, Soajo and Amarela mountains, already within the Peneda-Gerês National Park, stand out. It is, therefore, a territory with specific characteristics, whether natural, scenic, socio-cultural and economic, today marked by a marked demographic devitalization and “agricultural abandonment”. However, tourism presents itself today as one of the components that can reverse that cycle of crisis, mainly for its cultural and natural potential, as attested by the distinction made to it in the “European Charter for Sustainable Tourism”, enshrined by the EUROPARC (European Federation of National and Natural Parks), emphasizing the commitment to a paradigm of “quality tourism” that combines the participation of institutions, companies and the local population.

## 5. Observation area

The Portuguese folkloric “field” (Bourdieu, 1989) has its “promoters” or “theorists” folklorists, as well as “practitioners” or “actors”, that is, the so-called “players”, “singers” and “dancers” of the folkloric groups or “ranchos”. In addition, the “intermediaries” who arrange and promote the festivals and pilgrimages, as well as the operators of the tourist industry and, also, consumers (Vasconcelos, 2003). This “camp” is based on more than two thousand cultural and recreational associations based on a local and regional context and alluded to with the term “folkloric”, whose activity focuses on the representation of dances and songs and/or in the ethnographic field. In turn, the Portuguese Folklore Federation (FFP, 2018) currently brings together only about six and a half hundred genuine groups in the “representation”, along with other ethnographic associations spread across the country. We can consider the existence of a “market” embodied in the “exhibition and consumption of folklore” (Vasconcelos, 2001). Agents of this market are the committees that organize local parties and pilgrimages, as well as municipalities, record labels, tour operators and the hotel sector, among others. Most of the folklore groups in activity date back to the 1980s and derive from ethnographic dynamics grounded in a “space of cultural identity” and “symbolic capital” (Vasconcelos, 2001; Alves, 2013). With the emergence of the Portuguese Folklore Federation, the main guideline began to focus on the uncompromising “imposition and defense” of the “reconstitution”, considering it imperative that the federated folklore groups continued an ethnographic collection work upstream of the presentation on stage of dancing and singing. The struggle between “authentic” representation and “pure recreation” kept many ranches away from Federation tutelage from the beginning. For example, in the district of Viana do Castelo, there are only 11 ranches with the designation of “effective associates” and three with the designation of “adherent associates” as federated. In a closer look at the same district, we find many non-federated ranches, especially in the municipalities of Vila Nova de Cerveira, Valença, Melgaço, Paredes de Coura and, particularly, in Caminha, which encompasses the Serra de Arga Mountain area. The municipality of Viana do Castelo alone, according to data from the cultural services, has 28 active folkloric groups. In fact, since the origin of the Federation, there have been several folk groups in this area that refused to be subject to federative guidelines, despite the fact that affiliation to the Federation was valued in its early years (Silva, 1994; Soromenho, 2003). The choreographic richness of the Minho region, as already highlighted by Pedro Homem de Mello in his book *Folclore*, is rooted in the diversity of areas in which folklore is presented: “[...] that of Castro Laboreiro and that which goes from Melgaço to Valença, followed by to the south, those of Vila Nova de Cerveira (village of Gondarém and Serra de Sopo), Coura valley (with Covas as its centre), Arga mountain range (Dem, Cerquido, S. Lourenço da Montaria, Arga and Estorãos), Afife and Carreço, Viana do Castelo (Meadela, Perne and Santa Marta de Portuzelo), Arcos de Valdevez (including Soajo) and, returning to the starting point, Paredes de Coura” (Mello, 1971). As an example of groups “not aligned” with the Federation, mention should be made of the Associação de

Danças e Cantares Genuínos da Serra de Arga and the Rancho Folclórico de Dem (Vasconcelos, 1997a; Castro, 1979), made up of inhabitants of the parishes of Arga. de Cima, Arga de Baixo, Arga de São João and Dem (Cerqueira, 2006; Vasconcelos, 1997b), and also in the municipality of Caminha the Rancho Folclórico das Lavradeiras de Gondar and the Group of Traditional Songs of Âncora. It should be noted that Viana do Castelo has an entity that aims to “research, defend and disseminate the folklore of Alto Minho”. Founded in 1981, headquartered in the city of Viana do Castelo, the Associação de Grupos Folclóricos do alto Minho associates the overwhelming majority of folk groups in the municipality of Viana do Castelo.

**Table 1: Folkloric groups active in the municipality of Viana do Castelo**

Name	Federated Group
Grupo de Danças e Cantares da casa do Povo de Vila Nova da Anha	Not
Grupo Recreativo e Cultural de Castelo de Neiva	Not
Grupo Folclórico de Chafé	Not
Grupo Folclórico “S. Paulo da Cruz” de Barroelas	Not
Grupo Folclórico Cultural Danças e Cantares de Carreço	Effectiv
Grupo Folclórico e Etnográfico de Castelo do Neiva	Effectiv
Grupo Folclórico da Casa do Povo de Lanheses	Effectiv
Grupo de Danças e Cantares de Perre	Not
Grupo de Danças e Cantares de S. Salvador da Torre	Not
Rancho Folclórico das Lavradeiras de Vila Franca	Not
Ronda Típica de Carreço	Not
Grupo Folclórico de Santa Marta de Portuzelo	Effectiv
Grupo Folclórico da Danças e Cantares de Alvarães	Not
Grupo Etnográfico de Areosa	Not
Grupo Folclórico das Bordadeiras da Casa do Povo de Cardielos	Not
Rancho Folclórico das Terras de Geraz do Lima	Not
Rancho Folclórico do Centro Desportivo e Cultural de Outeiro	Not
Grupo Folclórico Infantil da Associação Cultural e Desportiva de Santa Marta de Portuzelo	Not
Rancho Regional das Lavradeiras de Carreço	Not
Rancho Danças e Cantares de Afife	Not
Grupo Folclórico de Viana do Castelo	
Grupo Folclórico das Lavradeiras da Meadela	Effectiv
Ronda Típica da Meadela	Not
Grupo de Danças e Cantares de Serreleis	Not
Grupo das Cantadeiras do Vale do Neiva	Not
Grupo Folclórico de S. Lourenço da Montaria	Not
Rancho Folclórico Serradores do Monte de Vila Fria	Not
Grupo Etnofolclórico “Renascer” de Areosa	Not

**Source:** Self elaboration based on the registration of the C. M. from Viana do Castelo and Federação Portuguesa de Folclore.



Apart from the discourses of reconstitution versus figurative stylization, part of these folkloric groups collect “memories”, reinforce “identities” and contribute to “local development”. In this sense, the local associative dimension promoted by these folkloric groups is highlighted (Gallop, 1961). In a study presented within the scope of the 2nd Congress of Folklore of Ribatejo on the folklore group as an instrument of social animation, José Jana values the ethnographic aspect that, “beyond the investigation of the social forms of the past, can be affirmed as a work on the collective consciousness of time [...]” (Jana, 1990: 94). In this way, the folk group can “help to raise awareness that today is different from yesterday and that today’s behaviors cannot copy those of yesterday”. For this reason, he still considers an “expansion” of the work/action of folk groups essential, and adds: “An exhibition on agricultural implements that have fallen into disuse should perhaps be complemented with a film whose plot reconstructs that time [...] and with a debate on the current problems in agriculture and a documentary on industrial agriculture and perhaps even a field trip [...]. All this and much more constitutes and enhances the tourist product that can be sold, both in domestic and foreign tourism, and contributes to the fact that tourism development does not come at the expense of those who should be its first beneficiaries: the local population” (Jana, 1990: 94-95). The interest of alternative tourism developed after the 1980s was based on the exploration of new territories for the tourist offer. Cultural tourism as conceived today results from the development of the conventional tourism life cycle. The tourist exploitation of heritage resources began to incorporate tourism into an economic, business and institutional strategy. Thus, due to the pressure of the economy, the cultural legacy transformed into a product for consumption, can mean the attempt to transform the local culture into a consumable product (Greenwood, 1977), and it still presupposes the discussion about authenticity and about the discourse of simulacrum (Baudrillard, 1991). In turn, tourism as a means of “intercultural contact” has been outdated. Furthermore, cultural tourism has been, therefore, a promoter of exchanges, a catalyst for them and, at the same time, ballast for cultural transformations and renovations, also considering stereotypes and identities as an economic strategy (Santana Talavera, 1994).

## 6. Investigative process and results analysis

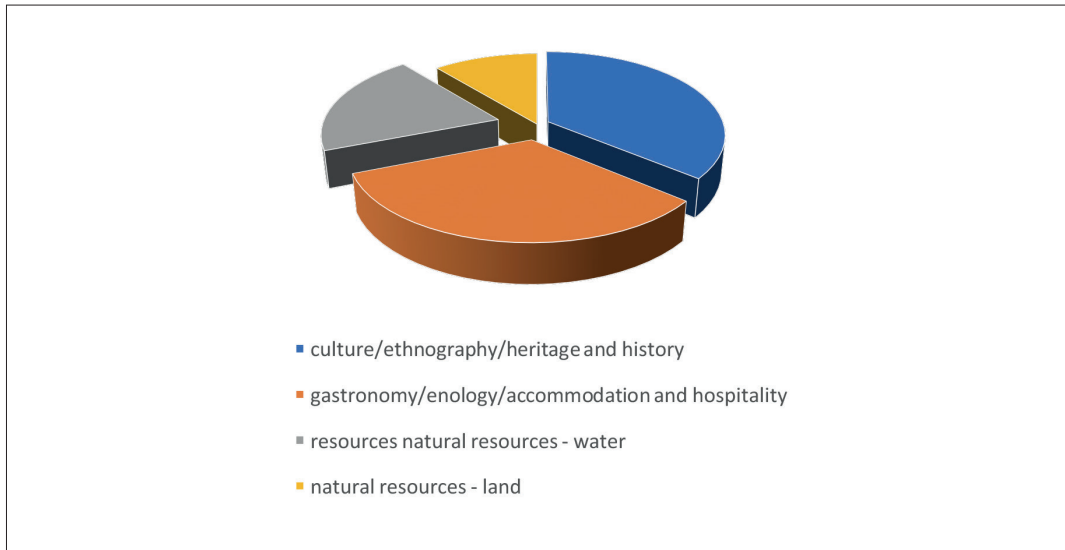
Our research was based on Pizam (1994) and McDaniel & Gates (2004). The investigation went through the identification of the problem with an exploratory approach, the review of the state of the art and direct observation. We then designed a descriptive process with a view to ascertaining the visitor and his perception of the tourist destination. For this last step, we opted for a data collection technique based on mixed measurement, by scale measurement with an open question component, in an unstructured approach. At this stage, the “non-probabilistic convenience” sample. The questionnaires were applied in multiple strategic locations of the tourist destination, namely tourist structures (institutional and private). The universe of respondents focused on visitors/tourists in transit at the destination (incidence in the municipalities of Viana do Castelo and Caminha and Ponte de Lima) over the time the questionnaire was being applied and who used the various row services available (enterprises accommodation, visitors in leisure/culture facilities, entertainment and tourist agency companies, as well as public tourist information services). The data were collected through direct collection from interested parties in the period from June to August 2021. 90 questionnaires out of the 200 applied were validated (45% validation). The information collected in the launched and validated questionnaires was inserted into the SPSS 15.0 software for the respective treatment. In general, visitors/tourists indicate leisure (76%) as motivation for travel, although other motivations such as family or business were identified. In order to perceive the relevance attributed by visitors / tourists to the various characteristics / attributes of the visit, a Likert scale (5 points) was used from a list of 14 attributes listed (Table 2). Considering the respondents’ options on the attributes of the tourist destination, we can make components, we can associate the attributes/characteristics of the offer of the destination in 4 dimensions that associate the resources of the offer. From the outset, the dimension of culture/ ethnography/ heritage and history predominates, followed by the dimension of gastronomy/enology/accommodation and hospitality. The other two dimensions are constituted by the dimension that uses natural resources – water, and the one that uses natural resources – land (Graph 1).

**Table 2: Ranking the relevance of attributes considered by the visitor/tourist**

Attributes indicated by the visitor/tourist	Degree of importance*
Gastronomy / oenological experience	4,25
Feasts and pilgrimages	4,15
Folklore and ethnography	3,75
National parks and protected landscapes	3,73
Mountains	3,56
Ocean beaches	3,40
River beaches	3,20
Archaeological Heritage	3,05
Religious Heritage	3,00
Civil Heritage – Manor Houses and Noble Houses	2,29
Quality of accommodation	2,89
Quality of restaurants	2,79
Sympathy of people	2,70
Crafts	2,20

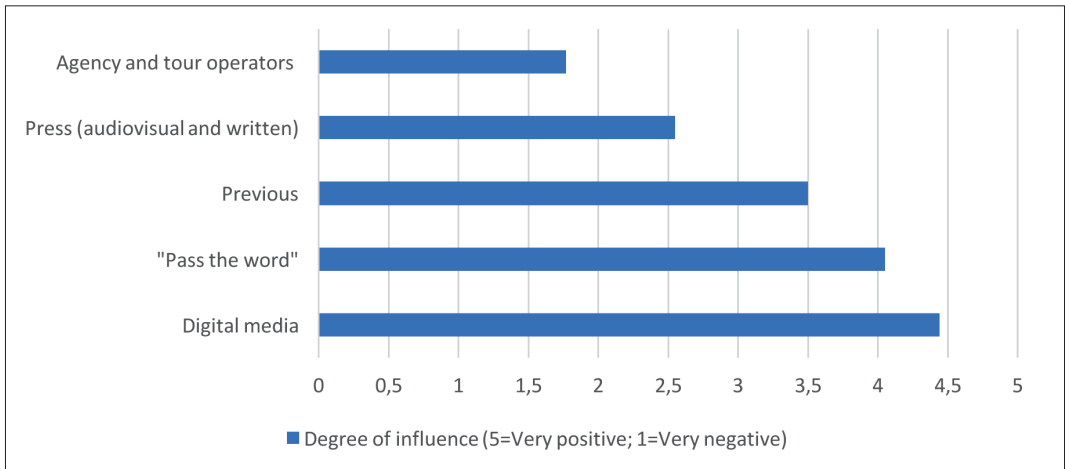
**Source:** Self-designed questionnaire. \* Degree of relevance: 5=Very important; 1=Nothing important)

**Graph 1: Dimensions of the image of the tourist destination Alto Minho**



**Source:** Self elaboration.

We also investigated the information supports that determined the options for visiting the region, with emphasis on digital media, namely the internet (Choi, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007), followed by personal recommendation (“password”). Thirdly, we note the influence of previous visits, with the written and audiovisual press, tourist promotion leaflets, travel agencies and tour operators remaining in subsequent subsequent places (Graph 2).

**Graph 2: Information supporting the options for the visit**

Source: Self elaboration

## 7. Conclusion

The “authenticity on stage is utopian”, the applause and the preference for the “beautiful” that generates it does not match the historical rigor that demands ethnoanthropological research. The folkloric bands have motivations that go beyond the search for “figurative authenticity”, as they contribute to substantiating the identity of the place and to a development of a local and regional territorialist basis. Furthermore, folklore can represent a “capital for peripheral localities” and a resource for the formulation of the tourist product. At the same time, the use of folklore as a “manifestation of popular culture” as a tourist attraction and a construct of the destination image will contribute to an activation of the cultural heritage, which subsumes a strategy of “self-survival and self-definition” of the place, commodified as authentic. The image perceived by visitors/tourists of the Alto Minho destination is strongly linked to its cultural and ethno-anthropological context, but also marked by the framework provided by its natural resources, with experiences simultaneously associated with water. and the earth. Thus, the imposition of the tourist system and the discussion of the commodification of local culture as a consumable product leads us to the analysis of authenticity and the “simulacrum” (Bourdillard, 1991), and leaves open the debate of what is the local cultural reality in the face of what is shown to the tourist.

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