

## Foreign Students and Their Perception on the Elements of Urban Mobility and Hospitality: A Comparative Study in the Cities of Boston and Porto Alegre

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### Abstract

The central theme is to investigate the motivation for choosing the destination and the strengths and weaknesses regarding the variables of hospitality and urban mobility in two cities: Boston and Porto Alegre. This comparative case study had a quantitative nature with questionnaire application to a probabilistic sampling of 73 exchange students. The research was carried out between May and September 2016. On the matter of hospitality, both cities were perceived in similar scenarios, because they didn't claim suffering any kind of discrimination. On the other hand, most results from both cities regarding urban mobility shows distinct scenarios. Although both cities were perceived with affordable public transportation, Boston seemed to be better prepared than Porto Alegre.

**Keywords:** Hospitality; Urban mobility; Foreign exchange; Boston; Porto Alegre

### Introduction

The objective of this study is to investigate the evaluation of the perception of foreign exchange students in the cities of Boston (United States - USA) and Porto Alegre (Brazil - BRA) about the motivation for choosing destinations and the strengths and weaknesses of cities in the variables of hospitality and urban mobility. The research was carried out between the months of May and September of 2016 with application of data collection instrument based on sample of exchange students.

The study and exchange tourism has been consolidating more and more as an agent of relevant economic contribution to a certain destination. Since the 2000s, exchange has been a growing phenomenon. The relationship between people of distinct cultures, despite being a very old practice, has become increasingly accessible. The search for this segment of tourism is carried out, usually with the objective of obtaining knowledge and learning of a new language, besides the intrinsic cultural exchange [1]. According to the Brazilian Association of Travel and Education (BELTA), the labor market and human resource specialists understand that the trader who has already done an exchange is more secure, sensitive and flexible in personal relationships, has a sense of leadership and a sense of teamwork. The development of these skills results in more opportunities for hiring in the labor market.

Faced with this scenario, study and exchange tourism has become notorious. Each year more people opt to study or work abroad, both for personal gain and for professional gain. Thus, an experience in another country becomes essential for a person's life.

It is well known that for the development of a tourist destination, it is necessary to contemplate in full several aspects that include security, general and specific infrastructure, hospitality, urban mobility, attractiveness. According to the Ministry of Tourism [2] the main expectations of the exchange students are related to how they will be received, the quality of services (hospitality), as well as security and infrastructure (mobility). Thus, perceiving the foreigner's perspective will be increasingly relevant and decisive in future social and organizational life [3] so that if the direction of the marketing mix

is changed, the behavioral change of the client in relation to its mode of consumption and the need for innovation [4].

In this way, this study intends to contribute with data that will be relevant to improve the quality of service and satisfaction of these exchangers during their time of stay in the two cities and, thus, allow an increasing and better growth of this tourism segmentation.

### Literature Review

Study trips originated in the Grand Tour, a trip that was called the 'study trip' and was only carried out by youngsters from rich families in its early days [5]. At the end of the eighteenth century, this type of tourism was also practiced by young urban middle class [6]. Educational journeys have spread throughout the European continent and the United States, becoming mostly used by private institutions [7]. The author also states that in Brazil these were adopted by elite colleges and consisted of trips with teachers' accompaniment, visiting historical places and with classes.

The Ministry of Tourism (MTur) [2] conceptualized study and exchange tourism as "tourism movement generated by activities and learning programs and experiences for the purpose of qualification, expansion of knowledge and personal and professional development". Some of the modalities of exchange trips and study considered by the Ministry [2] are: study program in high school; program of higher education, short-term study programs, language courses and vocational training or voluntary work.

A trip becomes an exchange when the goals of the trip are greater than just knowing a new place, visiting its famous points and using its

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tourism structure and gain a meaning of learning, personal growth [8]. For the Ministry of Tourism (2010), the main interests of the exchange students are: to know other places and cultures, quality teaching, fun, adventure and sports, nature, personal growth and professional independence. Corroborating with the interests mentioned above, the Ministry affirms that the main motivations are to explore other countries (34%); Rest and entertainment (28%); Visits to relatives and friends (17%); Study abroad (9%); Working abroad (7%); Volunteering (3%); And language courses (2%).

Referring to benefits for the student, it is considered that in making the exchange and going through the experience of being in an unfamiliar location with a different culture, it is developing on a personal level [9]. Besides studies and professional growth, the idea of the realization of the exchange also includes a desire for change, in itself and the environment around itself [10].

UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) data indicate that the number of students choosing to study outside their country of origin is increasing and the trend is for this growth to continue. According to statistics of the organization, in 2009, of 100 million students of higher education, 2.7 million were studying outside their countries of origin. Still according to UNESCO, the two most populous countries in the world, China and India, are the ones that have more people studying elsewhere. The first has almost 700,000 students outside of China, while the second place has 189,500. In 2014, the Association of the Exchange Companies Sector, estimates that the agencies that work with this service have more than US\$ 1 billion in movement in Brazil. About 230,000 Brazilians went to study abroad last year.

The Brazilian government points out that the adaptation of educational institutions is fundamental to insert the country in the market of this segment, with the objective of guaranteeing infrastructure and resources in general for the maintenance of the student's experience. But it is also necessary that the city chosen as a destination offers these conditions to make feasible and qualify the program, providing places to host exchange students, as well as a practical and effective transportation system, for example. Studying purposes and exchange tourism could be used to combat seasonality, since educational programs can be offered year-round, thus attracting students throughout the year. As stated by the Ministry, another very important aspect of this segment is the fact that the student who is doing the program usually shares his experiences with other potential students, that way, disseminating the country and the culture [2].

A clearer and more adequate conceptualization of tourism must go beyond the economic question, being necessary the appreciation of the existing relations between leisure, recreation, tourism and other social practices, and behaviour [11].

In this line of thought, it is also necessary to remember tourism and the relationship with hospitality. Even with the idea of well-being, it is necessary to remember that the foreigner is usually received with reticence because it is thus categorized, ignoring its multiplicities and diversities, making it absent in the absolute sense [3]. These same authors reaffirm that, as a foreigner, these economic exchanges are well received and stimulated by the host governments and end up by saying that "hospitality and commercial relations are in constant opposition, but at the same time one referring to the other [12].

In addition, if in tourism there is the relation of consumption production, for whatever specific reason, even in exchange tourism, the size of the movement of mobility in the destination must be

interpreted, not only the question of the mobility of people, but also the inclusion of ordinary day-to-day mobility [11]. Mobility is defined as the movement of the body between public or private spaces or localities and that the introduction of new mobile technologies, such as cell phones connected to the Internet, are leading to a re-examination of the meaning between proximity, distance and mobility [13]. Even with the increasing use of technology, the importance of tourist signage in receiving locations should be considered for guidance and information, providing a variety of itinerary options and uses of attractions and spaces, which contributes to the dissemination and appreciation of the city [14].

## Methodology and Cities Characterization

This comparative case study had a quantitative nature with questionnaire application to a probabilistic sampling of 73 exchange students in the cities of Boston (USA) and Porto Alegre (Brazil). The following criteria were used to select the research subjects (exchange students): they should reside in the cities of Boston and Porto Alegre, which are the targets of the research analysis; should be enrolled as students in teaching Institutions at research sites. The research was carried out between May and September 2016. For this work, it was decided to consider that foreign students and exchange students in a country other than their country of origin are, among other things, a contribution agent for the tourism segment of studies in the places of their stay.

The questionnaire was composed of nominal questions for the profile and scale to assess the reason for the choice of destination, the perception about hospitality and mobility. In the choice of destination, statements were placed and asked to score 1 for little relevant and 7 for very relevant. For hospitality and mobility, he was asked to score 1 if they were not in agreement and 7 if they fully agreed with the statement.

The data collected was analysed through descriptive statistics (mean, mode and standard deviation) using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software. To compare the means and verify which questions had a significant p (indicators that contribute most to the discrepancy), and because the sample is small, it is recommended to apply a non-parametric test. It was decided to apply the nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis test. This test compares means of independent samples and comes from different populations, that is, if there are differences in means [15].

### Boston

The city of Boston is the capital of the state of Massachusetts in the United States. According to its official website, the city has a total area of 232.1 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of approximately 670 thousand inhabitants (2015). Boston is one of the oldest cities in the US with a rich economy and lots of history. Featuring three large universities and quality education, Harvard, MIT and Boston University, draws the attention of students from both other areas of the country and other countries. Boston is also considered a major center for sports development and is home to leading teams in sports such as Basketball, Hockey, American Football and Baseball.

### Porto alegre

The city of Porto Alegre is located in southern Brazil and is the capital of the state of Rio Grande do Sul. According to the official website of the Porto Alegre Observatory, in 2010 the capital of the state of Rio Grande do Sul had 1,409,351 inhabitants, equivalent to 13, 2% of the population of the State to which it belongs. According to the Tourism

Portal of the city, its area is equal to 476.3 km<sup>2</sup> and has a population density of 2,837.52 hab/km<sup>2</sup>. Due to its geological formation, of 65% of its territory occupied by granite hills of 730 million years, it was possible to conserve 30% of its territory as a rural area.

According to the Municipal Tourism Statistical Bulletin of Porto Alegre (BEMTUR) in 2014, 6.8% of the collection of municipal taxes was related to tourism, with 74% paid by the hotel industry, 18% by travel agencies and 8% by planning companies And organization of events. BEMTUR data says that 8,447,380 people used the Salgado Filho Airport in 2014, of which 624,466 were foreign tourists.

## Results

Regarding the profile of the exchange students, the majority are between 22 and 30 years of age, their expected time of exchange is more than one year on average, and the main purpose is the exchange of studies (undergraduate or postgraduate).

When questioned about the reasons for choosing the destination for the exchange (Table 1), the highest averages in Boston reflect the relevance of education, pointing out the university chosen and benefits in having an education in that country, both with 6,98, practically the

maximum score and a lower standard deviation (0.141), confirming the absence of response variability (only one person scored grade 6). The city of Porto Alegre generally presented lower means and larger standard deviations, but, like Boston, values education as the primary motive for choosing the destination. The questions that presented the highest averages were quality of education (4.75) and benefits in having an education in that country (4.95). Although the standard deviations are high, the mode was in grade 7. When comparing the means of this group, and using non-parametric Kruskal Wallis test, it was noticed that the only question that did not present a p <0.05, that is, without significance, was available tourist activities (0.302). The other questions presented significance, signalling the difference between these two cities.

When analysing Table 2, which dealt with the perceptions about hospitality in the elected destination, and which should be indicated grade 1 for non-agree and up to grade 7 to fully agree, roughly the 2 destinations were perceived as hospitable and, again, the city of Boston concentrates the highest averages and the lowest standard deviations when compared with Porto Alegre, indicating a smaller variability in the answers. Porto Alegre presented, in the majority averages close to grade 5, but they demonstrate a variability in the answers. The 2 cities

Statements	Boston			Porto Alegre		
	Mean	Mode	Std. dev	Mean	Mode	Std. dev
The most important part was the language spoken in the country	5.32	5	.683	4.50	7	2.482
Security was a very important point	6.52	7	.614	4.30	5	2.029
Infra structure to host students	5.70	6	1.199	4.50	3/7	1.960
Marketing of the destination	4.66	5	1.081	3.55	1/3	1.932
Different options of Exchange program	5.96	6	.727	3.95	4	1.877
Similarities of the culture	2.26	1/3	1.065	2.45	1	2.012
Number of Exchange students in the city	1.66	1	.717	2.35	1	1.954
Opportunity to keep living in the country even after the studies are completed	5.72	5/6	1.051	3.00	1	2.224
Opportunity to work while studying	2.02	1	1.020	3.05	1	2.212
Friends living in the city of choice	1.52	1	.580	2.30	1	1.949
Quality of life in the destination	5.76	6	1.318	4.10	5	1.889
Monetary investment	2.72	1	1.429	3.90	1	2.382
University chosen	6.98	7	.141	4.25	1/7	2.531
Quality of education	6.94	7	.240	4.75	7	2.149
Benefits from having an education in that country	6.98	7	.141	4.95	7	2.350
A lot of tourism activities available	4.74	7	2.380	4.05	6	2.212

Source: Authors Elaboration (2017).

Table 1: Motivation of the destination's choice.

Statements	Boston			Porto Alegre		
	Mean	Mode	Std. dev	Mean	Mode	Std. dev
I was received well in the city	6.68	7	.587	6.15	7	1.461
I suffered discrimination of whatever kind	2.50	2	1.165	2.40	1	1.984
Communicating with the local community was hard at first due to idiomatic barriers	1.48	1	.735	4.05	3	2.012
I was well received in my school or university	6.90	7	.303	5.90	7	1.447
I had help in finding a place to live	6.28	6	.536	4.95	7	2.259
My cultural particularities were respected by everyone I met	6.16	7	.889	5.05	5	1.605
When asking for information was necessary. I had no problems of any kind	6.32	6	.653	4.65	6	1.694
Information centers are placed strategically around the town	6.60	7	.495	3.50	4	1.573
I had no problems with adaptation at the local cosine	4.06	7	2.351	4.65	7	2.033
There are ethnic restaurants with food from different places around the globe	6.70	7	.544	3.60	3	1.465

Source: Authors Elaboration (2017).

Table 2: Perceptions about hospitality.

Statements	Boston			Porto Alegre		
	Mean	Mode	Std. dev	Mean	Mode	Std. dev
The public transportation of the city is efficient	7.00	7	.000	4.05	3	1.849
It is easy to find information about public transport and that information is accurate	6.88	7	.328	3.55	2	1.986
The information provided helps while moving around the town and to other towns using public transport	6.68	7	.587	3.85	2	1.814
Public transportation is financially accessible	4.58	5	1.527	4.80	3/7	1.824
There are other options other than public transportation to move around the city. like Uber cars and taxis	7.00	7	.000	5.25	7	2.099
The city is well signalized for tourist's orientation	6.86	7	.351	3.90	2/4	1.889
I can move with no problems around the city	7.00	7	.000	4.05	4	1.905
The majority of the touristic points and suburbs are reachable with the use of public transportation	7.00	7	.000	4.35	2/6	1.927
There are different fees/benefits for international students that need to use the public transport	2.58	1/2	1.540	3.00	2/6	1.919

Source: Authors Elaboration (2017).

**Table 3:** Perceptions about urban mobility.

were approved on the issues of welcoming the foreigner (mode in grade 7), not discriminating (mode in grade 1), helping to find a place to live (mode in grade 7) and helping them in the information they (mode in grade 6). The issue that most draws attention to the difference between Boston and Porto Alegre was the issue I found difficult to communicate with the autochthonous community due to language barriers. Boston presented a mean of 1.48 and a standard deviation of 0.735 demonstrating that it did not agree that there were communication barriers at the beginning of the exchange, which did not occur in Porto Alegre, since the averages of both were above grade 4.

When comparing the means of this group by the nonparametric Kruskal Wallis test, it was observed that two questions did not present a  $p < 0.05$ , that is, without significance, that they suffered discrimination of any form or type (0.344) and did not have problems in adapting to local food (0.120). The other questions presented significance, signalling the difference between these two cities.

Regarding the perception about mobility in the chosen destination (Table 3), once again, the city of Boston presented the highest averages and the smallest standard deviations when compared with Porto Alegre. The respondents of this city were unanimous and assigned an average 7 (highest in the scale) for the following requirements: efficiency of public transport; The existence of other means of locomotion, such as taxis and Uber; Who manage to get around town without difficulty; And that it is possible to get to most of the sights, suburbs, etc. Using public transport. Porto Alegre presented the lowest averages. Only one issue was scored above grade 5: the existence of other means of locomotion, such as taxis and Uber (5.25). The other items received averages, mostly around grade 4, which reflects a concordance in part about the mobility efficiency of the destination.

When comparing the means of this group by the nonparametric Kruskal Wallis test, it was verified that only one question did not present a  $p < 0.05$ , that is, without significance, that public transportation was financially accessible (0.390). The other questions presented significance, signalling the difference between these two cities.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perception of international exchange students in the cities of Boston (United States - USA) and Porto Alegre (Brazil - BRA) about the motivation for choosing destinations and the strengths and weaknesses of cities in hospitality and urban mobility.

As outcome, both cities were differently perceived by students in almost every aspect. On the question of hospitality, both cities were perceived in this way by the exchange students, because they did not perceive suffering any kind of discrimination. On the other hand, most responses from both cities only.

Regarding mobility, although both cities were perceived with affordable public transportation, Boston seemed to be better prepared than Porto Alegre.

In an attempt to explain this scenario, we first present the population factor, since Porto Alegre is practically twice as large as Boston and could have a direct effect on hospitality and mobility. Another point to be seen is the size of the sample, which in relation to the number of universities in the cities, was small to infer a result and is left as a suggestion for expansion in future studies. Once again, the importance of studies in relation to interchange tourism is ratified in order to increase the knowledge of the perception of this segment.

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