

HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH? LOCAL CITIZENS PERCEPTIONS ON TOURISM IN PORTUGAL

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ABSTRACT

This study examines residents' perceptions of tourism and evolving thresholds of acceptable development. It argues that "how much is too much?" is socially constructed and contingent on place-specific conditions, economic dependence, and governance. While tourism often brings economic and cultural gains, concerns about overtourism, spatial pressures, and inequalities arise. The study calls for place-sensitive, adaptive, and inclusive governance that balances benefits with community well-being.

Keywords: Governance; overtourism; residents' perceptions; place-sensitive management; sustainability.

¿Cuánto es demasiado? Percepciones de los ciudadanos locales sobre el turismo en Portugal

RESUMEN

Este estudio examina las percepciones de los residentes sobre el turismo y los umbrales aceptables de desarrollo. Sostiene que "¿cuánto es demasiado?" es una construcción social condicionada por el contexto local, la dependencia económica y la gobernanza. Aunque el turismo aporta beneficios económicos y culturales, surgen preocupaciones por el overtourism, presiones espaciales y desigualdades. Se propone una gobernanza place-sensitive, adaptativa e inclusiva que equilibre beneficios y bienestar comunitario.

Palabras clave: Gobernanza; sobredesarrollo turístico; percepciones de los residentes; gestión sensible al lugar; sostenibilidad.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, much has been discussed about the growth and impacts of tourism on the development of territories and the quality of life of those who live there. This debate is often conducted in an exaggerated manner, opposing two extremes. On one side, there are those who emphasise the negative effects of tourism (or overtourism, if we prefer), particularly related to real estate speculation, financialisation of territories, social and commercial gentrification, or even a certain thematisation of places, which decisively contributes to the loss of identity or authenticity of territories (Frantzeskaki and Rok, 2018; Köhler *et al.*, 2019; Cocola-Gant *et al.*, 2021). On the opposite end, we find those who prefer to highlight the role of tourism in the economic and social revitalisation of territories. The increase in urban rehabilitation and regeneration processes, the expansion and diversification of economic activities, the creation of jobs, and the ability to attract and retain new users (albeit temporary) are typically highlighted as the most relevant elements (Aall and Koens, 2019; Fields and Rogers, 2019).

However, while in the academic context these issues are closely tied to the spatial and temporal context in which the research is conducted, in political decision-making and public opinion, this debate tends to be dominated by ideological frameworks and not always by an analysis of the dynamics of each case. This, coupled with the difficulty of comparing territorial contexts with differing political and social constructions – or at different stages of development – makes it very challenging to answer a central question about tourism activity: “How much is too much?”, that is, when does tourism become excessive, and its negative externalities begin to vastly outweigh the positives.

This article seeks to answer this question based on the perception of permanent residents, expressed through responses to a survey conducted in the five municipalities with the highest number of tourist overnight stays in 2023: Lisbon, Albufeira, Funchal, Porto, and Loulé. The survey aimed to gather a comprehensive view of the benefits and challenges of tourism, helping to identify priority areas for the implementation of sustainable tourism policies. To this end, we gathered residents’ opinions on the impacts of tourism in their municipality, addressing various issues related to the social, economic, and environmental effects of this activity. The questions help to understand how residents evaluate the impact of tourism on local development, particularly in terms of quality of life, the real estate market, the increase or rise in the cost of living, as well as the dynamics of local commerce and the preservation of heritage. Additionally, questions about overtourism and measures to promote more sustainable tourism provide insights into residents’ perceptions of issues such as the degradation of quality of life, pressure on services and infrastructure, and potential solutions to mitigate these impacts.

The article is structured as follows. This first section introduces the objectives and research questions. In the second section, the theoretical framework supporting the research is presented, focusing on the evolution of urban tourism and the main conceptual frameworks that structure the identification of effects on territories and communities. In the third section, we explain the methods used and briefly present the study area. In the fourth section, we contextualise the research by analysing the recent evolution of tourism in Portugal, identifying areas under the greatest tourism

pressure, and examining the relationship between the number of tourists and a set of economic and social variables. The following section presents the research results, followed by their discussion. The final section summarises the main conclusions of the work undertaken.

2. URBAN TOURISM AND ITS CONCEPTUAL EVOLUTION: A STATE OF THE ART

2.1. The growth of urban tourism

Urban tourism has been a subject of increasing academic interest, particularly in the context of its evolving relationship with socio-economic transformations. Historically, studies on the urban environment have paid attention to the structuring of city centres as the focal points of social, economic, and political life. Following the work of the Chicago School, particularly Murphy and Vance (1954), urban theory began to consolidate the idea that the city centre was not just a central point in terms of physical geography, but also a space of symbolic importance. Over time, this understanding has evolved, with scholars recognising the multiple, often fragmented, urban centres and the complex interactions between centrality and periphery.

The concept of the city centre has been discussed in several influential models, from the concentric zone model (Burgess, 1925) to the sector model (Hoyt, 1939), each offering a different view of how urban spaces were structured and interacted. However, these models, while important, oversimplify the urban reality by implying a clear central-peripheral dichotomy. Urban spaces are inherently diverse, and the past decades have witnessed profound changes driven by shifts in sustainability, tourism, and mobility dynamics.

With the rise of low-cost international travel, particularly within Europe, and the advent of digital platforms facilitating easier travel and accommodation bookings, city tourism has boomed. As a result, cities—especially those with cultural, historical, and environmental appeal—have seen an influx of visitors. While tourism brings economic benefits, it also triggers challenges such as gentrification, overtourism, and significant changes to the urban landscape and social fabric. These transformations are often marked by the displacement of local populations and the rising costs of living, driven by the simultaneous increase in real estate investments and the demand for tourism-related services.

In this context, cities have also become laboratories for new ideas about sustainability. Urban sustainability, which was traditionally associated with the minimisation of environmental impacts, has become increasingly tied to the preservation of social and cultural identities. Urban renewal projects, often initiated by tourism, have created opportunities for the revalorisation of historical centres and cultural heritage, but they have also exacerbated socio-economic inequalities and threatened local authenticity. In Portugal, for instance, the rise of Airbnb and other short-term rental markets has exacerbated gentrification, transforming previously affordable neighbourhoods into tourist-centric areas and pricing out local residents (Fernandes *et al.*, 2018; Chamusca *et al.*, 2019).

2.2. New dynamics and conceptual evolution

Urban tourism has a significant positive impact on local economies, particularly in historical and cultural areas that directly benefit from the influx of visitors. Increased demand for accommodation, dining, and leisure services drives the creation of new jobs and revitalizes local commercial sectors, contributing to revenue generation. This phenomenon is especially evident in cities with a strong tourism industry, where tourism serves as an economic engine, helping to reduce unemployment rates and promote local business revitalization. Furthermore, tourist destinations attract both public and private investments in infrastructure, such as transportation and urban services, which enhances the overall quality of life and supports urban modernization (Cochrane, 2020; Simas *et al.*, 2021).

In terms of urban rehabilitation, tourism has acted as a catalyst for the regeneration of areas that might otherwise have remained neglected. Cities have leveraged the tourism sector to restore historic centers, preserving cultural heritage while adapting old buildings for new uses, such as boutique hotels, art galleries, and high-quality restaurants. This rehabilitation not only helps maintain the identity and history of urban areas but also fosters the integration of new functions that contribute to the economic and social diversity of neighborhoods (Maxim, 2016). At the same time, it creates a cycle of attractiveness that can further stimulate investment and economic development, creating a positive synergy between conservation and urban revitalization.

However, the interplay between tourism, urban development, and sustainability can be better understood through various theoretical lenses. Early discussions on urban sustainability were primarily concerned with limiting environmental degradation and managing urban growth. However, in the 21st century, the term “sustainability” has evolved, encompassing not just environmental concerns but also economic and social dimensions (Frantzeskaki and Rok, 2018; Köhler *et al.*, 2019). Within this broader framework, several key concepts have emerged, notably in the context of urban tourism. These include touristification, gentrification, overtourism, tourismphobia, and sustainable urban tourism.

2.2.1. Touristification

Touristification refers to the process by which an urban area becomes increasingly geared towards the needs and expectations of tourists. This phenomenon results in significant changes to the physical, economic, and social fabric of a city. While it can lead to increased revenue generation through tourism, it also often leads to the displacement of local populations and the loss of traditional, local businesses. The focus on creating a tourist-friendly environment can neglect the needs of residents, who may feel excluded from their own neighbourhoods as housing prices rise and cultural traditions are diluted to cater to external visitors (Ashworth and Page, 2011; Cochrane, 2020).

As the number of tourists increases, so does the intensity of these changes. Cities like Lisbon and Barcelona have witnessed firsthand the challenges of balancing the benefits of tourism with the need to maintain social equity (Shaw, 2018; Aall and Koens, 2019; Fields and Rogers, 2019; Irigoy, 2019; Montezuma and McGarrigle, 2019; Zhang *et al.*,

2019). The proliferation of short-term rental markets, such as Airbnb, has exacerbated these dynamics, leading to higher rents and pushing out long-time residents (Fernandes *et al.*, 2018b; Chamusca *et al.*, 2019). These issues are exacerbated by the fact that the economic benefits generated by tourism are often not evenly distributed, further aggravating inequalities in urban areas.

2.2.2. *Gentrification*

Gentrification is a critical issue tied to urban tourism, referring to the process of neighbourhood changes in which lower-income residents are displaced by wealthier individuals or businesses, often as a result of rising property values. In many European cities, tourism-driven gentrification is a significant concern, especially in areas that have historically been affordable and culturally rich. The rise of tourist accommodation, along with investments in infrastructure and services designed to attract visitors, leads to an increase in real estate prices, which in turn forces out the local working-class population (Lees and Phillips, 2018; Carvalho *et al.*, 2019; Chamusca *et al.*, 2019).

While gentrification can bring economic revitalisation and urban renewal, it often leads to social fragmentation. Traditional services such as local grocery shops, artisan workshops, and family-run restaurants are replaced by international chains, souvenir shops, and high-end boutiques that cater to the demands of tourists rather than the needs of residents (Helbrecht, 2017). This process has been particularly pronounced in historic city centres, where the social and cultural fabric of neighbourhoods is irreversibly altered.

2.2.3. *Overtourism*

Overtourism refers to the negative impacts of excessive tourism on local communities, environments, and economies. The term describes a situation in which a destination's carrying capacity is exceeded, leading to overcrowding, degradation of local heritage sites, environmental damage, and a decline in residents' quality of life. This phenomenon is often associated with the over-concentration of tourists in certain areas, particularly during peak seasons, and can result in the dilution of local culture and authenticity (Cocola-Gant, 2016; Koens *et al.*, 2018).

Overtourism also contributes to rising living costs and the exclusion of local populations from the benefits of tourism, as well as creating a sense of frustration and resentment among residents. In cities such as Venice and Barcelona, overtourism has triggered protests and calls for stricter regulations on tourist flows. The challenge lies in finding a balance between the economic benefits of tourism and the need to protect the social, cultural, and environmental integrity of urban spaces (Goodwin, 2021).

2.2.4. *Tourismphobia*

As the negative effects of overtourism have become more apparent, tourismphobia—defined as a rejection or hostility towards tourism—has emerged as a social phenomenon in many urban areas. This sentiment is often expressed through acts of

vandalism, protests, and campaigns against the presence of tourists. In some cases, tourismophobia has resulted in violent confrontations between tourists and locals, particularly in areas where tourism has become a dominant economic driver (Milano, 2018; Postma and Schmuecker, 2017; Pérez-García and García Abad, 2018; Simas *et al.*, 2021). This reaction is often rooted in the perceived loss of local identity, the displacement of long-term residents, and the erosion of community values due to the influx of transient populations.

2.2.5. Sustainable Urban Tourism

Sustainable urban tourism aims to reconcile the economic benefits of tourism with the need to preserve the social, cultural, and environmental integrity of urban areas. This concept emerged in response to the negative impacts of mass tourism and the growing recognition of the limits to growth in urban environments. Sustainable tourism seeks to promote responsible travel practices that minimise environmental harm, protect cultural heritage, and ensure that local communities benefit from tourism development (Hall *et al.*, 2015).

In practice, sustainable urban tourism requires a careful balance between the demands of tourists and the needs of residents. It involves managing tourist flows, preserving local culture and heritage, and ensuring that economic benefits are shared equitably. Several European cities, such as Barcelona and Paris, have developed policies aimed at limiting overtourism, reducing the environmental impact of tourism, and promoting local engagement in tourism development (Aall and Koens, 2019; Maxim, 2016). However, despite the increasing focus on sustainability, the practical implementation of sustainable urban tourism remains challenging, particularly when it comes to regulating the tourism industry and balancing the interests of tourists, residents, and policymakers.

2.3. The new challenges for urban planning and governance

Urban tourism, while bringing economic benefits and opportunities for urban renewal, also presents significant challenges for cities, particularly concerning gentrification, overtourism, and the erosion of local culture and identity. Gentrification, for instance, occurs when the influx of tourists and higher-income residents displaces original inhabitants, resulting in rising housing prices and altering the social fabric of historic neighbourhoods. Overtourism, on the other hand, has led to the overburdening of urban infrastructures and the degradation of tourist areas due to the large number of visitors, often exceeding the city's hosting capacity. Additionally, the erosion of local culture is a growing concern, as local traditions and practices may be diluted or altered to meet tourist expectations, which compromises the authenticity and cultural diversity of cities.

The tension between the socio-economic benefits of tourism and the need for sustainable urban development remains a critical issue in today's urban context. While tourism can generate jobs and stimulate the local economy, adverse effects such as increased

living costs, overburdened public services, and deterioration of residents' quality of life become evident as cities grow. The rapid expansion of urban tourism requires effective and balanced management that considers both economic development and the preservation of resources and residents' well-being. How cities manage this balance will be decisive for their long-term success.

As cities continue to evolve, it will be essential for policymakers, urban planners, and researchers to develop strategies that promote sustainable tourism while ensuring that the rights and needs of local residents are protected. Implementing sustainable tourism practices involves not only regulations and public policies but also adapting urban infrastructures, promoting an equitable distribution of tourism benefits, and creating spaces that foster interaction between tourists and residents. For tourism to be a positive driver of development rather than a threat to residents' quality of life, a holistic and multidisciplinary approach is necessary.

The concept of sustainable urban tourism offers a promising framework, but its successful implementation requires careful planning, strict regulation, and active community involvement. Cities must be able to adapt to the increasing pressures of tourism while ensuring the participation of residents in the decision-making process. Creating a tourism model that favors integration and cooperation among all stakeholders—residents, tourists, and the environment—is essential to ensure that tourism becomes a positive element in urban development. This model should prioritize not only residents' quality of life but also respect for the cultural, social, and environmental particularities of each territory.

By integrating concepts such as gentrification, overtourism, and tourismphobia into urban policy frameworks, cities can work towards achieving a more balanced, inclusive, and sustainable urban tourism model. The key to this goal is the ability to manage tourism in a way that benefits all parties involved, without compromising local identity or quality of life. The future of urban tourism will depend on cities' ability to find creative and fair solutions that align economic interests with the preservation and strengthening of urban communities.

3. METHODS

For this investigation, we employed two methods of analysis: a survey and a statistical analysis, correlating the number of overnight stays at accommodation units (absolute and relative, in 2023) with economic and social variables.

The survey was conducted online using the Survey123 application. It was administered in the five municipalities with the highest number of overnight stays in 2023, namely Lisboa, Albufeira, Funchal, Porto and Loulé. The survey took place between the 10th of January and the 20th of February 2025 and was conducted entirely anonymously, in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation in force in Portugal. The questionnaire was made freely available, the response was not limited to a specific profile (demographic, social, or economic), and only responses from those who confirmed that they were currently living in one of those municipalities were validated. Based on this response, we obtained the sample as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
SURVEY SAMPLE (VALID ANSWERS). SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION

Municipality	Valid answers
Lisboa	60
Albufeira	56
Funchal	51
Porto	54
Loulé	47
Total	268

Thus, the applied survey recorded 268 valid responses from participants who acknowledged that they were currently living in one of those municipalities. We acknowledge some limitations that affect the survey's representativeness and, consequently, the generalisability of its findings. The instrument relied on a non-probabilistic, self-selected online sample (Survey123 with an open link), which introduces coverage bias (under-representation of residents with lower digital access/literacy) and self-selection bias (greater participation by individuals with stronger interests or views on tourism). Although residence in the five municipalities with the highest 2023 overnight stays was verified, no demographic quotas were enforced and no ex-post weights were applied by sex, age, or education; moreover, the municipal distribution of the 268 valid responses (Lisbon 60; Albufeira 56; Funchal 51; Porto 54; Loulé 47) is not proportional to resident population or to the volume of overnight stays, which may induce composition effects.

The profile of the respondents was as follows:

- Sex: male (51%), female (47%), other or prefer not to respond (2%);
- Age: under 30 years old (23%), 31 to 49 years old (24%), 50 to 64 years old (20%), or 65 or older (33%);
- Qualifications: higher education (19%), secondary education (49%), third cycle of basic education (17%), lower or no qualifications (14%), or did not respond (1%);

The profile was recorded solely for sample categorization. In this survey, responses to the following questions were considered, all of which were closed-ended, allowing the selection of one or more options:

1. How do you assess the impact of tourism on the socio-economic development of your municipality?
2. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "Tourism has positively contributed to the improvement of residents' quality of life in your municipality"?
3. In your opinion, has tourism been a factor in increasing property value or raising the cost of living in your area of residence?
4. How do you evaluate the evolution of the real estate market in your municipality in recent years, considering the impact of tourism?

5. In your opinion, which statement best characterizes the evolution of the commercial sector as a result of increased tourism?
6. In your opinion, what is the contribution of tourism to the preservation of local heritage and identity?
7. To what extent do you consider that tourist influx has a negative impact on the following aspects: mobility, use of public spaces, access to services, access to housing, air quality?
8. In your opinion, has tourism in your municipality reached an excessive level?
9. How can we determine if a destination has reached an excessive size?
10. What measures do you consider a priority for more sustainable tourism in your municipality?

The second analytical component sought to determine if there was any social or economic pattern of dynamics associated to touristic places. A total of 12 variables were selected (Table 2), and a correlation analysis was performed with the number of overnight stays (2023) and the overnight stays per 100 inhabitants (2023) in each of the 308 municipalities in Portugal.

Table 2
CORRELATION VARIABLES. SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION

Resident population (2023)
% of foreigners (2021)
% of the population that lived elsewhere one year earlier (2021)
Businesses (2023)
Businesses per inhabitant (2023)
Average monthly income (2022)
Sales value (2023)
Rental value (2023)
Crime rate (2022)
Aging index (2023)
% of employed population with higher education (2022)
Average population age (2021)

The correlation sought to assess any statistical relationship (causal or non-causal) between two variables. The Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated according to the following formula:

$$\rho = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n (x_i - \bar{x})(y_i - \bar{y})}{\sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^n (x_i - \bar{x})^2} \cdot \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^n (y_i - \bar{y})^2}} = \frac{\text{cov}(X, Y)}{\sqrt{\text{var}(X) \cdot \text{var}(Y)}}$$

The Pearson correlation coefficient measures the linear relationship between two variables. To determine the statistical significance of this correlation, we need to test the hypothesis that there is no correlation between the variables (0). The Pearson correlation coefficient provides a measure of the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two variables. Values close to ± 1 indicate strong relationships, while values close to 0 indicate weak or no linear relationship. The value of 1 indicates a perfect positive linear relationship between the two variables. As one variable increases, the other variable increases in exact proportion. The value of -1 indicates a perfect negative linear relationship. As one variable increases, the other variable decreases in exact proportion.

We conducted Grubbs's test to identify potential outliers in our dataset, which comprised information from 308 municipalities. The purpose of the test was to determine if any data points significantly deviated from the others, potentially affecting our analysis. The results of Grubbs's test indicated that the presence of outliers was minimal, suggesting a high level of consistency and reliability in our data.

- Test statistic (G-value): 1.85;
- Critical value: 2.50;
- p-value: 0.08;
- Decision: no significant outliers detected.

Consequently, the test confirmed that the influence of outliers on our overall findings was negligible, allowing us to proceed with confidence in the robustness of our dataset.

4. THE PORTUGUESE CONTEXT

4.1. Recent evolution of tourism

Tourism has been a cornerstone of Portugal's economic and social development in recent years, playing a pivotal role in shaping the country's global image and contributing significantly to its GDP. As a destination known for its rich cultural heritage, diverse landscapes, and warm climate, Portugal has witnessed a remarkable growth in tourism indicators over the past decade. The sector has not only attracted millions of visitors but has also spurred economic benefits across various regions. This article provides an overview of the recent evolution of tourism in Portugal, with a focus on key metrics that highlight its expansion and transformation.

In fact, tourism in Portugal has been on an upward trajectory in recent years, establishing itself as one of the key pillars of the national economy. The national statistics (INE, 2025) allows us to understand some of the most relevant touristic dynamics. One of the most notable indicators of tourism growth is the number of tourists per inhabitant. In 2023, Portugal recorded 2.8 guests per resident, marking an increase of 0.3 compared to 2017. This statistic underscores the growing importance of tourism in the daily lives of local communities, as more visitors engage with the country's hospitality sector.

In terms of financial impact, total tourism revenues exceeded 6 billion euros in 2023, representing an impressive 63.4% growth compared to 2017. This substantial increase reflects the rising demand for Portugal as a prime travel destination and the country's ability to capitalize on international tourism trends. The accommodation sector, a key component of the tourism industry, also experienced substantial growth. In 2023, the total number of overnight stays in tourist accommodations surpassed 65 million, an 18.2% rise from 2017.

The occupancy rate of tourist accommodations remained significant, with a net bed occupancy rate of 48% in 2023. This demonstrates the consistent demand for lodging throughout the year, despite seasonal variations in different regions. Additionally, the accommodation capacity—measured by the maximum number of individuals that establishments can host—reached 478,552 in 2023, reflecting an 18.8% increase since 2017. This expansion in capacity highlights the industry's efforts to accommodate the growing influx of tourists.

Another key economic indicator is the gross value added (GVA) generated by the tourism sector. In 2023, the tourism sector contributed over 9.1% of Portugal's total GVA, a significant rise from 7.7% in 2017. This increase illustrates the sector's growing influence on the national economy and its role in job creation, investment, and business opportunities.

In 2024, preliminary data indicates significant growth across various key indicators: the number of guests reached 31.6 million, representing a 5.2% increase compared to 2023, with notable growth from markets such as the United States (+11.8%) and the United Kingdom (+4.3%). Overnight stays totalled 80.3 million, an increase of 4.0%, with 70.3% of these being from international tourists, highlighting Portugal's growing appeal on the global stage (Turismo de Portugal, 2024).

Tourism revenues have also followed this positive trend, registering an 8.8% increase in 2024 compared to the previous year. This growth reflects not only the rise in visitor numbers but also an enhancement of services offered and a potential increase in the average spending per tourist. The diversification of source markets has been a crucial factor in this performance, with countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom playing a prominent role (Turismo de Portugal, 2024).

Beyond traditional markets, there is a growing trend of tourists seeking less conventional destinations, avoiding the most crowded areas and exploring alternative regions that offer authentic and less massified experiences. This shift in behavior contributes to a more balanced distribution of tourist flows across the country, promoting economic development in areas that were previously less explored by tourism (Turismo de Portugal, 2024).

Despite its overall growth, tourism in Portugal is not evenly distributed across the country (figures 1 and 2). Urban tourism has seen substantial expansion, particularly in major cities such as Lisbon and Porto, which have become popular cultural and business hubs. These cities attract millions of visitors annually, driven by their historical sites, vibrant nightlife, and international events. Meanwhile, coastal tourism remains a vital segment, especially in the Algarve, where beach resorts continue to draw large numbers of tourists, though with a more pronounced seasonality.

The Portuguese islands—Azores and Madeira—have also solidified their positions as top tourist destinations. These regions benefit from their unique natural landscapes, adventure tourism, and ecotourism appeal. The increasing popularity of these destinations highlights Portugal’s diverse tourism offerings, catering to a wide range of traveler preferences.

Figure 1
OVERNIGHT STAYS AT ACCOMMODATION UNITS, BY MUNICIPALITY, IN 2023. SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION, USING DATA FROM INE (2025)

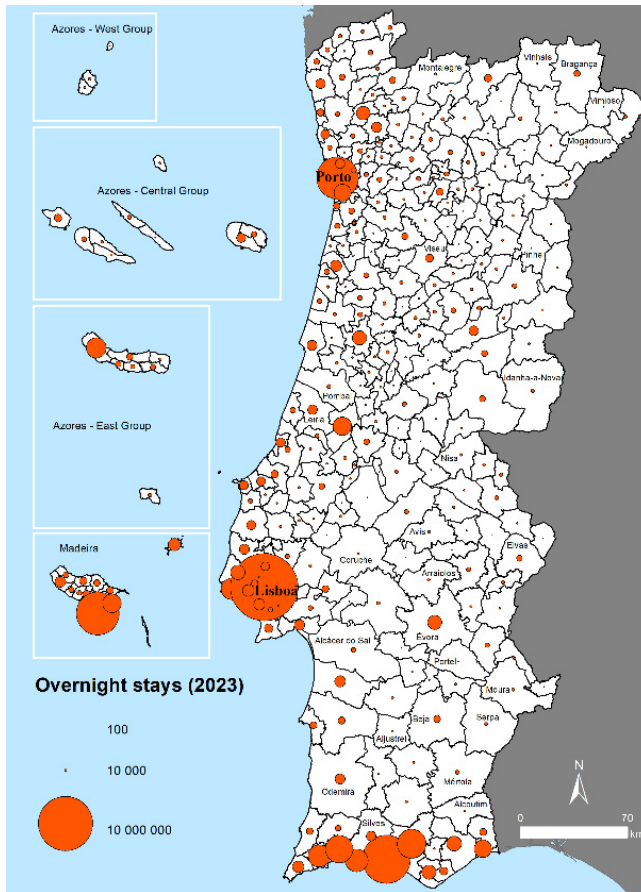
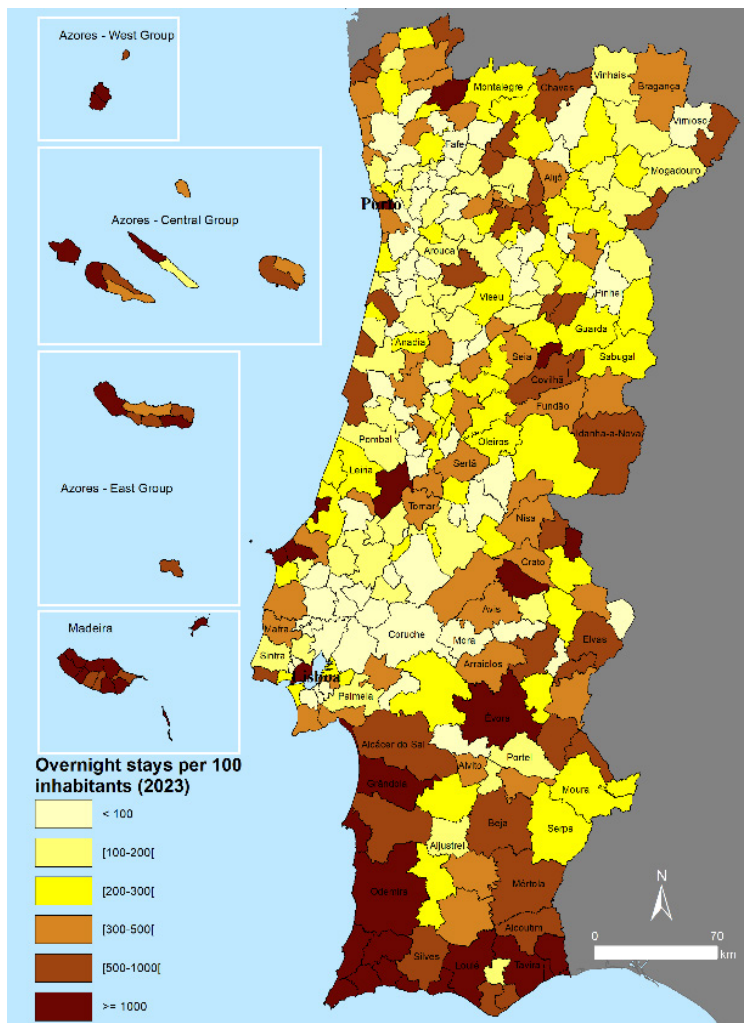


Figure 2
OVERNIGHT STAYS AT ACCOMMODATION UNITS PER 100
INHABITANTS, BY MUNICIPALITY, IN 2023. SOURCE: OWN
ELABORATION, USING DATA FROM INE (2025)



In short, Portugal’s tourism sector has experienced remarkable growth in recent years, driven by increased visitor numbers, rising revenues, and expanded accommodation capacity. While urban centers have seen a surge in tourism, traditional beach destinations and island regions continue to play a crucial role in the industry. With a strong contribution to the national economy, tourism remains a strategic pillar for Portugal’s development, reinforcing its status as a leading global travel destination.

4.2. The determinants of tourism: correlation with socioeconomic variables?

The correlation analysis between the absolute and relative dimensions of tourism and a set of social and economic variables aimed to identify the existence of a set of patterns or determinants of tourism (table 3).

Table 3
CORRELATION RESULTS. SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION, USING DATA FROM INE (2025)

	Overnight stays (2023)	Overnight stays per 100 inhabitants (2023)
Resident population (2023)	0,6	0,0
% of foreigners (2021)	0,3	0,5
% of the population that lived elsewhere one year earlier (2021)	0,0	0,1
Businesses (2023)	0,8	0,1
Businesses per inhabitant (2023)	0,3	0,3
Average monthly income (2022)	0,3	0,0
Sales value (2023)	0,5	0,4
Rental value (2023)	0,3	0,1
Crime rate (2022)	0,3	0,4
Aging index (2023)	-0,1	-0,1
% of employed population with higher education (2022)	0,4	-0,1
Average population age (2021)	-0,2	-0,1

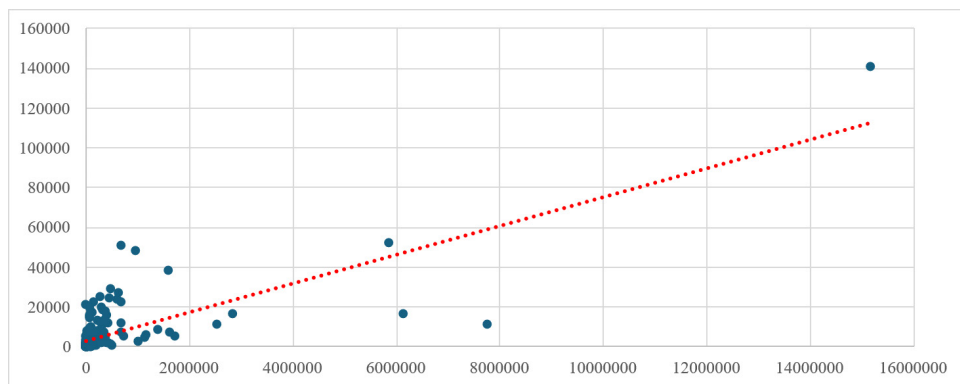
The results reveal distinct patterns in the relationship between tourism (measured by the number of overnight stays) and the characteristics of territories. In general, the absolute number of overnight stays shows higher correlations with economic variables, such as the number of businesses (0.8), sales value (0.5), and average monthly income (0.3), suggesting that more popular tourist destinations tend to have a more dynamic economy and a stronger business sector, which is also reflected in processes of real estate appreciation or speculation. Additionally, the resident population also emerges as a relevant factor (0.6), indicating that larger urban centers or municipalities with a higher population are also the ones receiving more overnight stays.

On the other hand, when overnight stays are analyzed in relative terms (per 100 inhabitants), the correlations are generally weaker and point to a different relationship between tourism and the demographic and economic profile of the territories. Positive correlations stand out with the percentage of foreigners (0.5) and rental prices (0.4), which may indicate that major tourist destinations are experiencing processes of gentrification or population displacement, with rising real estate prices (especially in rental markets) encouraging the arrival of new residents, often foreign nationals with higher investment capacity.

The analysis of correlations between the number of overnight stays and various socio-economic and demographic indicators reveals significant relationships that reflect territorial dynamics associated with tourism. Six key correlations highlight the relationship between tourism activity and aspects such as the business fabric, the local economy, the real estate market, and the population structure of municipalities.

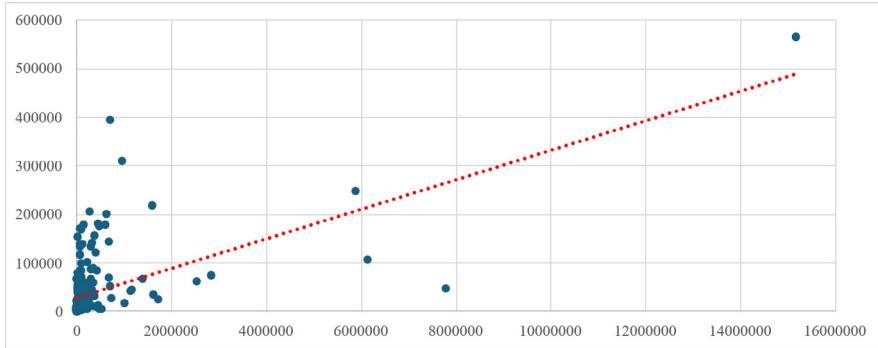
A. Tourism and business fabric – The strong correlation between the absolute number of overnight stays and the number of enterprises (0.8) (figure 3) confirms that more touristic areas have a more dynamic business fabric. Tourism acts as an economic driver, fostering the creation of businesses in the hospitality, restaurant, retail, and cultural service sectors. This effect is more pronounced in municipalities with high tourism attraction capacity, where sustained demand stimulates business diversification.

Figure 3
CORRELATION BETWEEN OVERNIGHT STAYS AND ENTERPRISES.
SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION



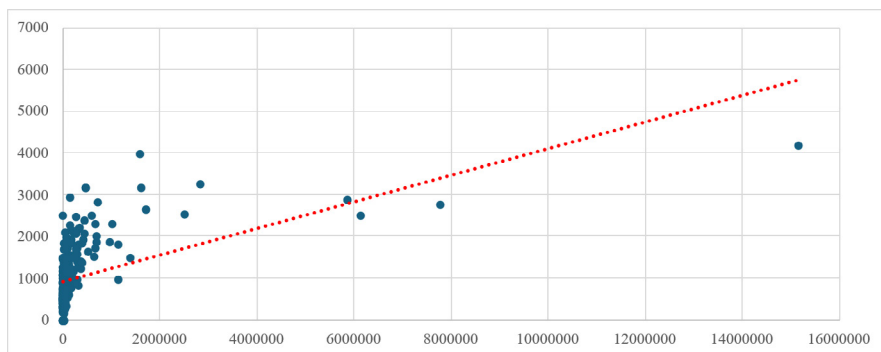
B. Tourism and population size – The positive relationship between the number of overnight stays and the resident population (0.6) (figure 4) indicates that the most popular tourist destinations are also municipalities with larger populations. This relationship reflects the importance of major urban centers, such as Lisbon and Porto, which combine high population density with strong tourist demand. However, this pattern does not exclude smaller municipalities that present a high overnight stay-to-population ratio, particularly in highly specialized tourist destinations.

Figure 4
CORRELATION BETWEEN OVERNIGHT STAYS AND INHABITANTS.
SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION



C. Tourism and the real estate market – The positive correlation between the number of overnight stays and average property sale prices (0.5) (figure 5) and rental prices (0.3) confirms that municipalities with greater tourism pressure have higher housing prices. The conversion of properties to tourist accommodation reduces the availability of housing for residents, creating a scarcity effect that drives up prices in both the purchase and rental markets. This phenomenon is particularly visible in central urban areas and well-established tourist destinations, where real estate appreciation is strongly tied to tourism profitability.

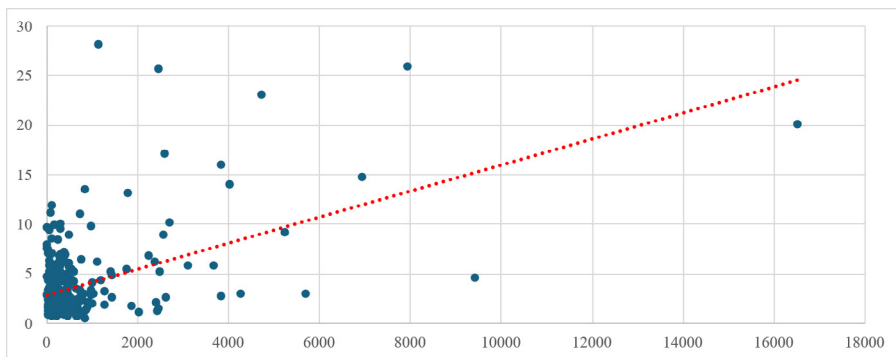
Figure 5
CORRELATION BETWEEN OVERNIGHT STAYS AND PROPERTY SALE PRICES. SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION



D. Tourism and gentrification – The positive relationship between the number of overnight stays per inhabitant and the percentage of foreign residents (0.5) (figure 6) suggests gentrification and population replacement processes induced by tourism. The growing real estate appreciation, driven by tourist demand, leads to an increase in hous-

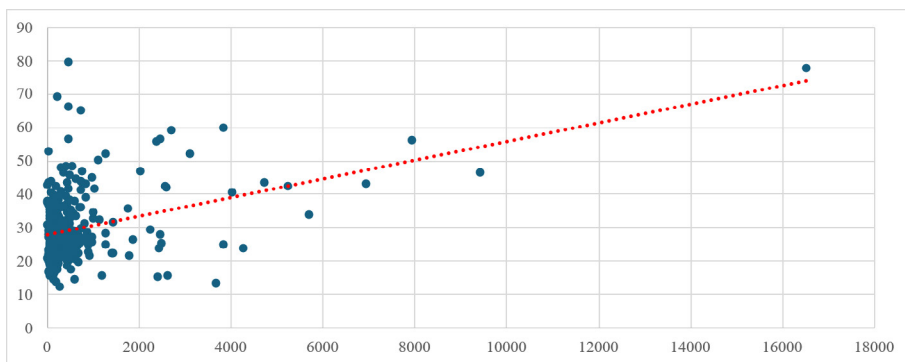
ing costs that become unaffordable for the traditional resident population. As a result, local inhabitants are displaced and replaced by new residents, many of whom are foreign nationals with greater economic capacity to bear the high costs of the housing market.

Figure 6
CORRELATION BETWEEN OVERNIGHT STAYS PER INHABITANT AND FOREIGN RESIDENTS. SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION



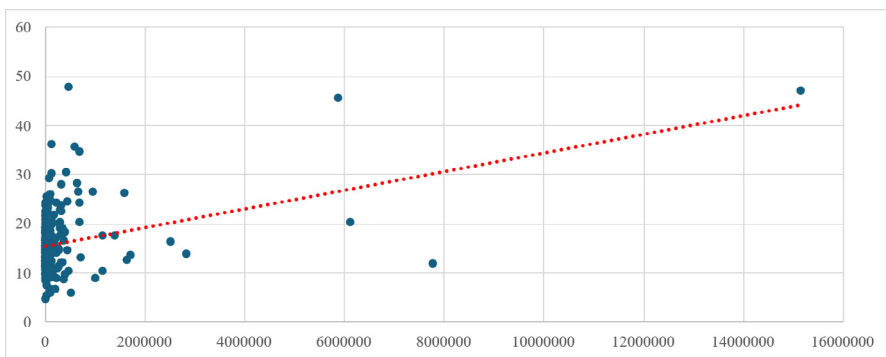
E. Tourism and public safety – The moderate relationship between the number of overnight stays per inhabitant and the crime rate (0.4) (figure 7) suggests that more touristy municipalities face additional challenges in terms of safety. The increase in visitor flows may be associated with a higher number of criminal incidents, especially in urban destinations with high tourist concentration. This effect can be explained by the growth of tourism-related economic activities, which can create new opportunities for phenomena such as thefts and petty crimes.

Figure 7
CORRELATION BETWEEN OVERNIGHT STAYS PER INHABITANT AND CRIME RATE. SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION



F. Tourism and workforce qualification – The positive correlation between the number of overnight stays and the percentage of the employed population with higher education (0.4) (figure 8) indicates that more touristy territories tend to concentrate a more qualified workforce. This effect may be linked to the presence of diversified economic sectors, including cultural, leisure, and tourism management activities, which require specialized professionals. Additionally, business and cultural tourism can attract highly qualified professionals to these areas.

Figure 8
CORRELATION BETWEEN OVERNIGHT STAYS AND HIGHER EDUCATION EMPLOYMENT. SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION



The results highlight that tourism is not only an isolated economic sector but a structural factor of the territory, with direct impacts on the economy, real estate market, and the demographic composition of resident populations. The strong correlation with real estate variables confirms that tourist demand is associated with increased housing prices, both in the purchase and rental markets, reinforcing gentrification dynamics and population displacement. At the same time, the relationship with economic and social variables suggests that more touristy municipalities have a more dynamic business fabric and a more qualified active population but also face challenges in terms of safety and housing accessibility.

5. LOCAL PERCEPTIONS ON TOURISM: A CASE STUDY ON FIVE MUNICIPALITIES

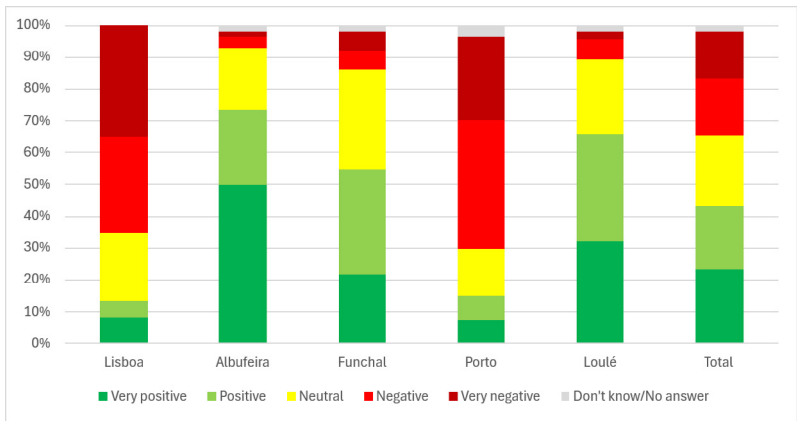
The survey on the opinion of local inhabitants on tourism aimed to gather a comprehensive view of the benefits and challenges of tourism, helping to identify priority areas for the implementation of sustainable tourism policies. To this end, ten dimensions were analysed.

5.1. Tourism's impact on development

This question aimed to assess residents' perceptions of tourism's impact on the socio-economic development of their municipalities. The results reveal significant differences

between the analyzed territories, reflecting the specific tourism dynamics of each one (figure 9).

Figure 9
INHABITANTS’ EVALUATION ON TOURISM’S IMPACT. SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION, BASED ON LOCAL INHABITANTS’ ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE



Across the five municipalities, there is a slight positive balance in the tourism evaluation, with 116 favorable responses (63 “Very Positive” and 53 “Positive”), contrasting with 88 negative responses (48 “Negative” and 40 “Very Negative”). However, a significant number of respondents (59) rated the impact of tourism as “Neutral,” suggesting that for a considerable portion of the population, the positive and negative effects of tourism tend to balance out. Only 5 people indicated that they had no formed opinion on the matter.

The analysis by municipality reveals marked contrasts. Lisbon and Porto stand out as the territories where the negative perception of tourism is most pronounced. In Lisbon, 39 respondents consider the impact of tourism negative (18 “Negative” and 21 “Very Negative”), while only 8 rate it positively. In Porto, the scenario is similar, with 36 negative responses and only 8 positive ones. The small number of neutral responses in both cases suggests that the population holds relatively consolidated opinions on the matter. The negative evaluation in these two urban centers may be linked to the impacts of touristification, notably the pressure on the real estate market, gentrification, and the overcrowding of public spaces.

In contrast, in municipalities like Albufeira and Loulé, where the local economy heavily depends on tourism, perceptions tend to be more favorable. In Albufeira, 41 respondents evaluated tourism positively (28 “Very Positive” and 13 “Positive”), against only 3 negative responses. Loulé follows a similar pattern, with 31 positive responses and only 4 negative ones. These results suggest that in strongly tourist-dependent contexts, the population tends to recognize the sector as an engine of development, valuing job creation, economic stimulation, and investment in infrastructure.

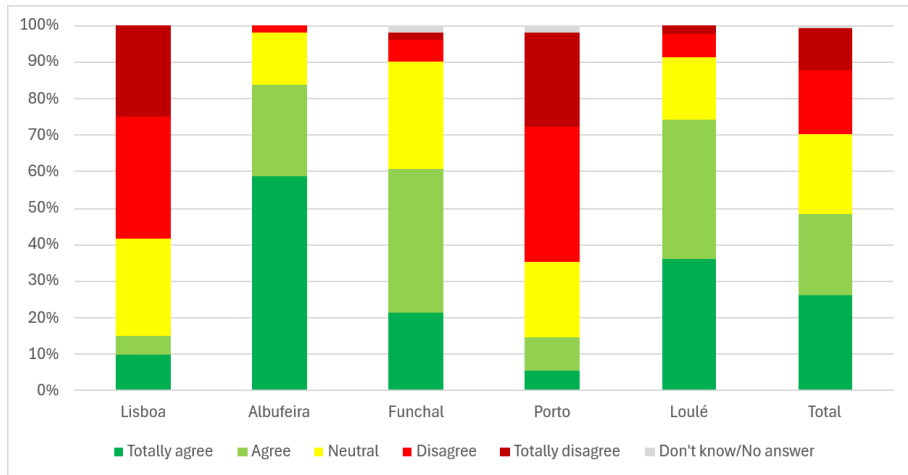
Funchal presents a more balanced picture, with 28 positive responses, 6 negative ones, and 16 neutral ones. The high percentage of neutral responses suggests that the population has a less polarized view of tourism's impacts, recognizing both the economic benefits and the challenges it may pose to local quality of life.

Overall, the survey results reflect the complexity of the relationship between tourism and local development. While in urban centers with high tourism influx like Lisbon and Porto, there is a more negative perception, in municipalities more dependent on tourism, such as Albufeira and Loulé, a positive evaluation prevails.

5.2. Tourism and quality of life

The question regarding tourism's impact on residents' quality of life reveals a clear division in perceptions, reflecting significant territorial differences (figure 10). In total, 130 respondents expressed agreement with the statement (70 "Totally Agree" and 60 "Agree"), while 78 disagreed (47 "Disagree" and 31 "Totally Disagree"). A significant number of 58 people remained neutral, and only 2 did not know or did not wish to respond.

Figure 10
INHABITANTS' EVALUATION ON TOURISM'S IMPACT ON THE
QUALITY OF LIFE. SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION, BASED ON LOCAL
INHABITANTS' ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE



Analyzing the results by municipality, there is a strong contrast between the more tourist-dependent areas and larger urban centers. In Albufeira and Loulé, where the local economy heavily relies on tourism, the positive perception is predominant. In Albufeira, 47 respondents agree with the statement (33 "Totally Agree" and 14 "Agree"), against only 1 negative response and 8 neutral ones. Similarly, in Loulé, 35 people agree that tourism improves quality of life, while only 4 disagree and 8 remain neutral. These results

suggest that in strongly tourist-dependent territories, residents recognize the benefits of tourism, particularly in job creation, economic dynamism, and investment in infrastructure and services.

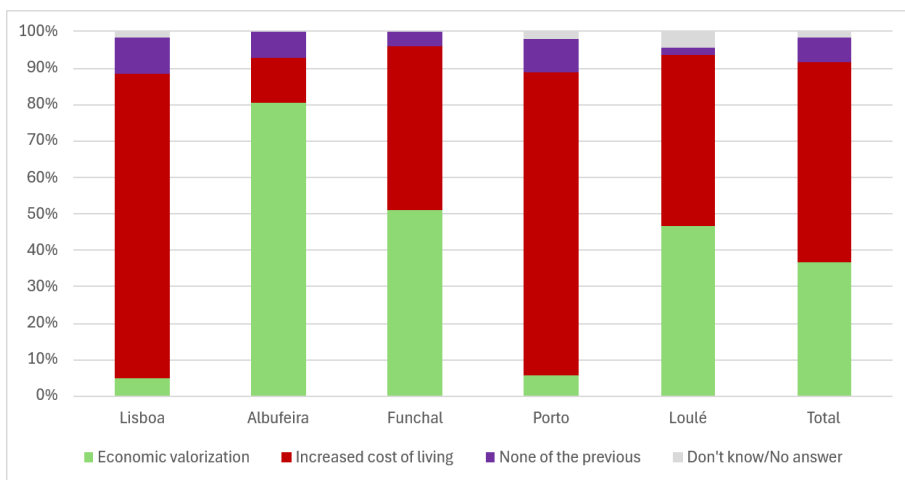
Funchal presents a more balanced scenario, with 31 positive responses and 4 negative ones, while 15 respondents adopt a neutral position. The high percentage of neutral responses may indicate a less polarized perception, where the benefits and challenges of tourism are recognized in a measured way.

In Lisbon and Porto, the pattern is reversed, with a predominantly negative perception. In Lisbon, 35 respondents disagree that tourism has improved quality of life (20 “Disagree” and 15 “Totally Disagree”), while only 9 agree and 16 remain neutral. In Porto, the results are similar, with 34 negative responses, 8 positive ones, and 11 neutral ones. These figures suggest that in cities where tourism has been a major driver of urban transformation, residents’ perceptions are more critical, possibly due to factors like real estate pressure, neighborhood touristification, and the loss of urban identity.

5.3. Tourism’s impact on the cost of living

The majority of respondents associate tourism with an increase in the cost of living (figure 11). In total, 147 people indicated that tourism has been a factor in raising prices, while only 99 perceive it as an element of economic valorization without negative impact. Only 18 consider that there is no relationship between tourism and the cost of living, and 4 did not know or did not wish to respond.

Figure 11
INHABITANTS’ EVALUATION ON TOURISM’S IMPACT ON THE COST OF LIVING. SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION, BASED ON LOCAL INHABITANTS’ ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE



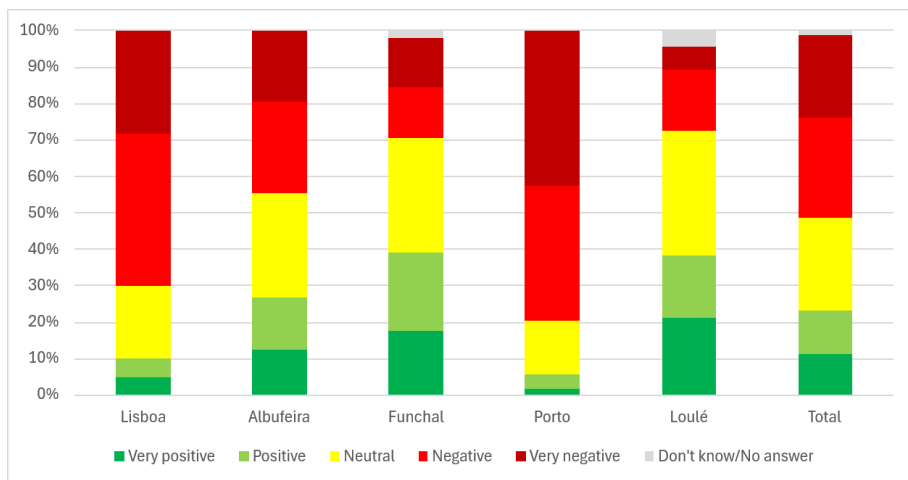
Lisbon and Porto stand out for the large number of responses indicating an increase in the cost of living (50 and 45 responses, respectively), contrasting with very few positive perceptions (3 responses in each city). These results reinforce the idea that the growing touristification may be generating significant economic pressures on residents, especially regarding housing costs and essential goods.

On the other hand, Albufeira shows an inverse pattern, with 45 responses indicating that tourism has been a factor in economic valorization and only 7 pointing to an increase in the cost of living. In Funchal and Loulé, opinions are more balanced, reflecting distinct perceptions within the territories themselves.

5.4. Evolution of the real estate market

The data from this question reinforce previous conclusions, suggesting a predominantly negative view of the relationship between tourism and housing (figure 12). In total, 135 respondents evaluated the impact of tourism on the real estate market negatively (74 “Negative” and 61 “Very Negative”), while only 62 responses indicated positive effects (30 “Very Positive” and 32 “Positive”). 68 people remained neutral, and 3 did not respond.

Figure 12
INHABITANTS’ EVALUATION ON TOURISM’S IMPACT ON THE
EVOLUTION OF THE REAL ESTATE MARKET. SOURCE: OWN
ELABORATION, BASED ON LOCAL INHABITANTS’ ANSWERS TO THE
QUESTIONNAIRE



Lisbon and Porto are again the municipalities with the strongest negative perceptions. In Lisbon, 42 respondents evaluated the real estate market evolution negatively, against only 6 positive responses. In Porto, the situation is even more evident, with 43 negative evaluations and only 3 positive ones. These results indicate that tourism has been per-

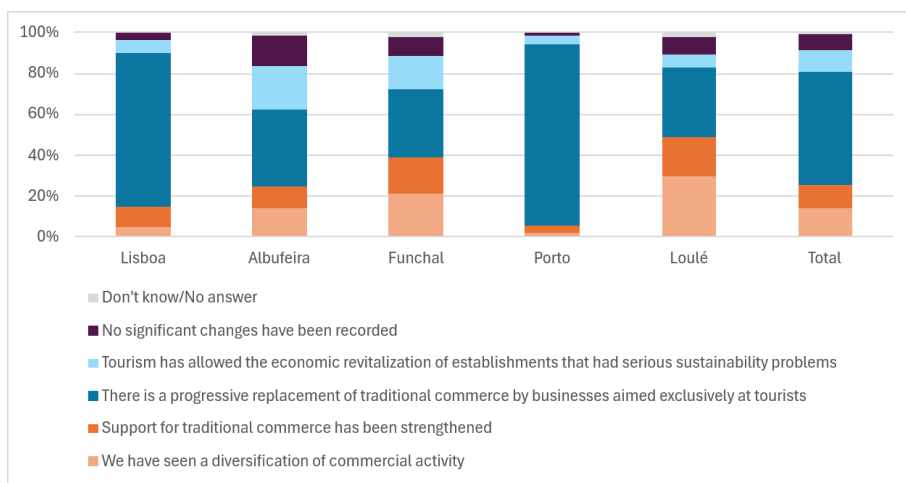
ceived as a factor putting pressure on the housing market, possibly due to rising housing prices and the conversion of residential properties into tourist accommodation.

In more tourist-dependent municipalities like Albufeira, Funchal, and Loulé, perceptions are more balanced, with a higher number of positive and neutral responses. Nonetheless, the negative evaluation of tourism’s impact on real estate is still significant, reflecting concerns about housing accessibility for local residents.

5.5. Evolution of the commercial fabric

Regarding local commerce dynamics, the data suggest that tourism is causing a significant transformation in the commercial fabric, with differentiated impacts depending on the territory (figure 13). The most selected option was “There is a progressive replacement of traditional commerce by businesses exclusively aimed at tourists,” with 147 responses, highlighting a widespread concern about the loss of traditional commerce.

Figure 13
INHABITANTS’ EVALUATION ON TOURISM’S IMPACT ON THE
EVOLUTION OF THE COMMERCIAL FABRIC. SOURCE: OWN
ELABORATION, BASED ON LOCAL INHABITANTS’ ANSWERS TO THE
QUESTIONNAIRE



Lisbon and Porto are the most extreme cases. In Lisbon, 45 respondents highlight the replacement of traditional commerce with tourism-oriented activities, and in Porto, this number is even higher (48 responses). These data reinforce the perception that touristification has not only impacted the real estate market but is also altering the commercial identity of the cities.

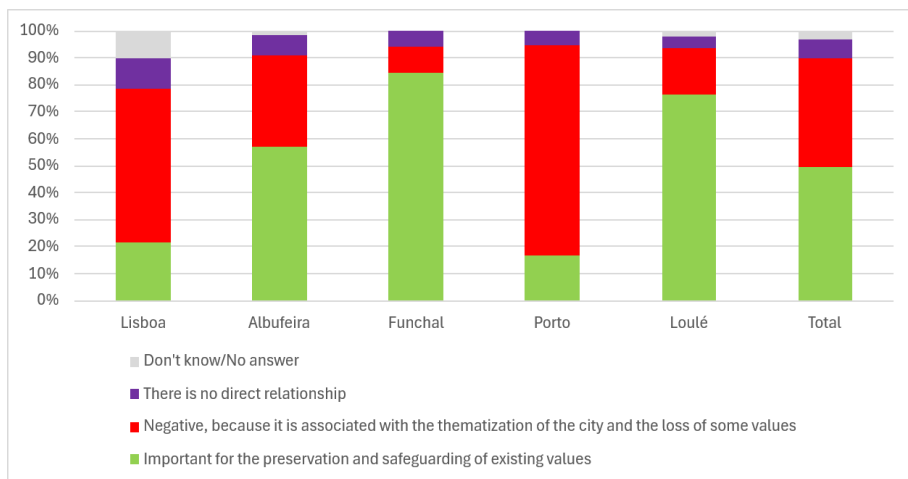
In Albufeira, Funchal, and Loulé, the results are more distributed, with a relatively high number of responses indicating a diversification of commerce (8, 11, and 14, respectively)

and some recognition of tourism's role in revitalizing commercial establishments (12 in Albufeira, 8 in Funchal, and 3 in Loulé). These figures suggest that in more tourism-dependent territories, the impacts on commerce are viewed less negatively, possibly because this sector has always been strongly linked to tourism activity.

5.6. Preservation of heritage and local identity

Regarding the contribution of tourism to the preservation of heritage and local identity, there is a division of opinion among the respondents (figure 14). In the municipalities analyzed, 133 participants believe that tourism plays an important role in safeguarding heritage and cultural values. This view is particularly strong in Funchal and Loulé, where the majority of respondents acknowledge a positive impact of tourism on heritage preservation. However, 108 respondents express concerns about how tourism has led to the thematization of cities and the loss of some cultural and identity values, a sentiment that is more pronounced in Lisbon and Porto, where tourism pressure has resulted in gentrification processes and homogenization of cultural and commercial offerings. Additionally, 19 respondents do not identify a direct relationship between tourism and heritage preservation, and 8 were unsure or unwilling to answer the question. These results reflect a differentiated perception of tourism's role in cultural enhancement, depending on the specificity of each municipality and how the tourism sector has been managed.

Figure 14
INHABITANTS' EVALUATION ON TOURISM'S IMPACT ON THE PRESERVATION OF HERITAGE AND LOCAL IDENTITY. SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION, BASED ON LOCAL INHABITANTS' ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

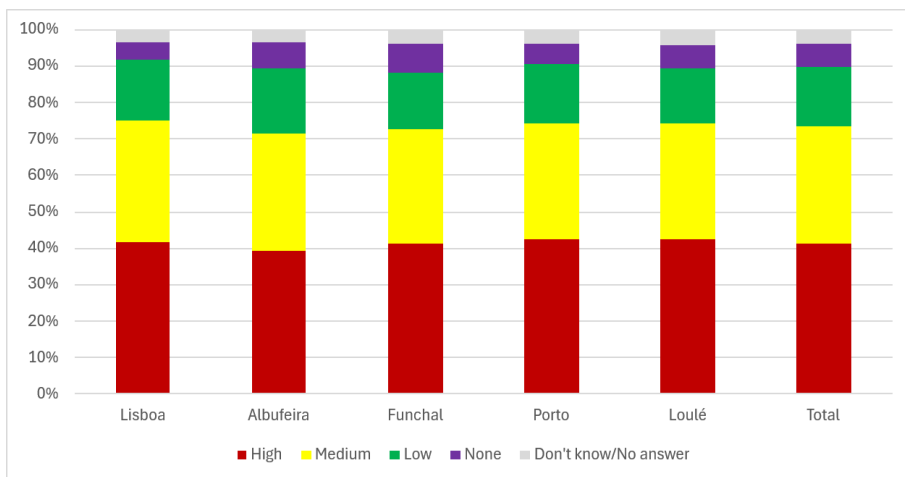


5.7. Territorial impact

The issue regarding the impact of tourist influx on different urban dimensions reveals that the negative effects of tourism are felt differently depending on the policy area analyzed. Regarding the impact of tourist influx on various dimensions of urban quality of life, the data show that mobility, use of public spaces, access to services, and access to housing are the most negatively affected areas. In all the municipalities analyzed, a significant number of respondents identify high or medium impacts in these areas, with special emphasis on Lisbon and Porto, where the pressure of tourism on the real estate market and public transportation is particularly felt. Air quality is the least mentioned dimension, although some participants acknowledge that tourism may have some environmental impact.

Regarding mobility (figure 15), the majority of respondents believe that tourism has a negative impact, with 111 participants rating this impact as high and 86 as medium. These perceptions are more pronounced in Lisbon and Porto, where the high tourist influx contributes to the overloading of public transportation and congestion on urban roads. In Albufeira, Funchal, and Loulé, although the impact on mobility is recognized, its intensity tends to be more moderate. Only a minority believes that tourism has a minimal (44 respondents) or non-existent (17 respondents) impact on mobility, with 10 participants unsure of their answer.

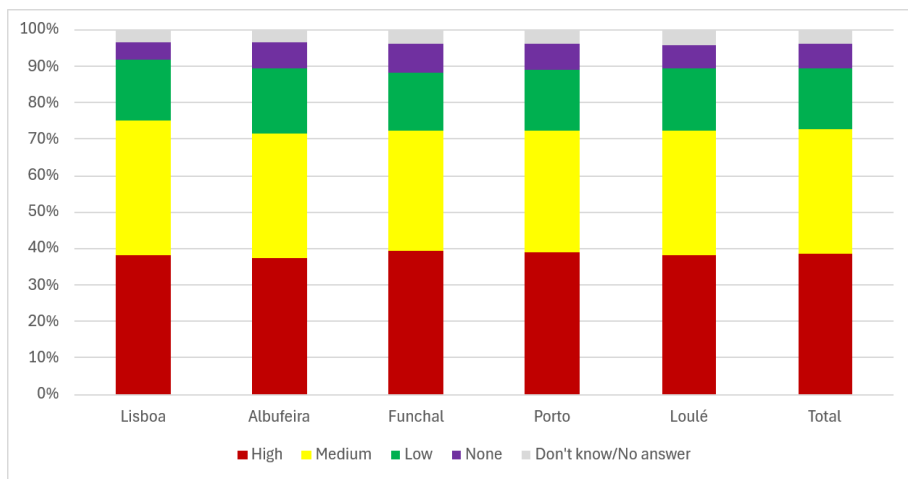
Figure 15
INHABITANTS' EVALUATION ON TOURISM'S NEGATIVE IMPACT ON MOBILITY. SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION, BASED ON LOCAL INHABITANTS' ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE



Regarding the use of public spaces (figure 16), 103 respondents rate the tourist impact as high and 92 as medium, indicating that the vast majority recognize significant tourism

pressure on the leisure and social spaces of the cities. Lisbon and Porto are again the municipalities where this perception is most evident, due to the high concentration of tourists in certain areas of the city. In Albufeira and Funchal, the impact is also noticeable, but somewhat more subdued. Only 49 respondents believe that the use of public spaces has not been significantly affected by tourism, with 19 attributing a low impact and 22 claiming there is no effect. Six respondents were unsure.

Figure 16
INHABITANTS' EVALUATION ON TOURISM'S NEGATIVE IMPACT ON PUBLIC SPACES. SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION, BASED ON LOCAL INHABITANTS' ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE



Regarding access to services (figure 17), the negative impacts of tourism are perceived as less intense than in other areas analyzed. Still, 90 respondents state that the impact is high, and 79 say it is medium. The main concern is the increased demand in sectors such as restaurants and transportation services, which may result in difficulties for residents to access services. The impact is more strongly felt in Lisbon and Porto but also manifests in Albufeira and Funchal. A total of 50 respondents indicate that the effect of tourism on access to services is minimal, while 28 do not identify any impact. Seven respondents were unsure.

In terms of housing access (figure 18), the results show that this is one of the most affected dimensions by tourism. Among the respondents, 134 rate the impact as high and 66 as medium. Lisbon and Porto stand out as the municipalities where this perception is strongest, due to the pressure of tourism on the real estate market and the increase in local accommodation, which has reduced the housing supply for residents. In Albufeira, Funchal, and Loulé, although a significant impact is recognized, the situation seems slightly less severe. Only 49 respondents believe that the impact of tourism on housing is minimal or non-existent, and 10 were unsure.

Figure 17
INHABITANTS' EVALUATION ON TOURISM'S NEGATIVE IMPACT ON PUBLIC SERVICES ACCESSIBILITY. SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION, BASED ON LOCAL INHABITANTS' ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

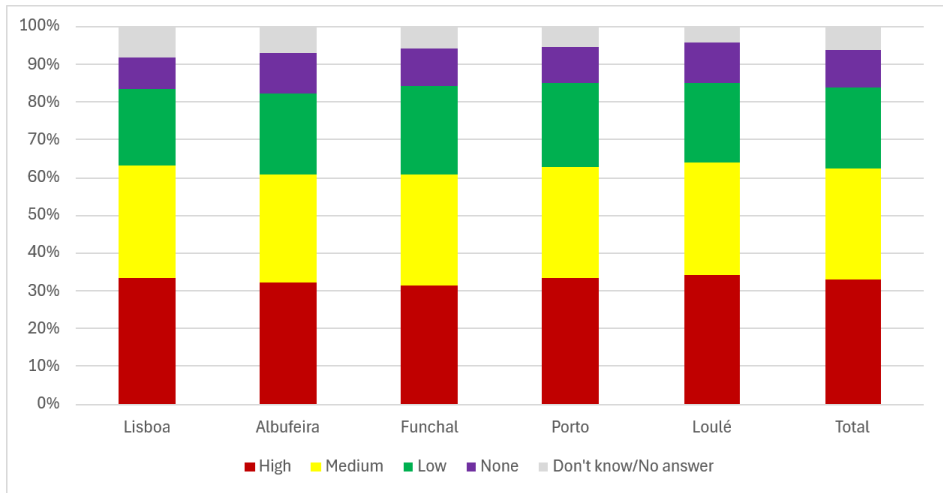
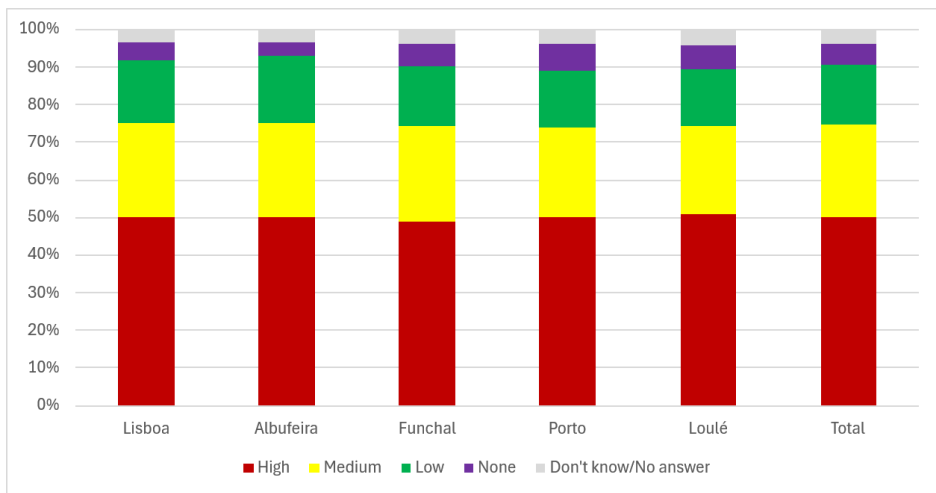
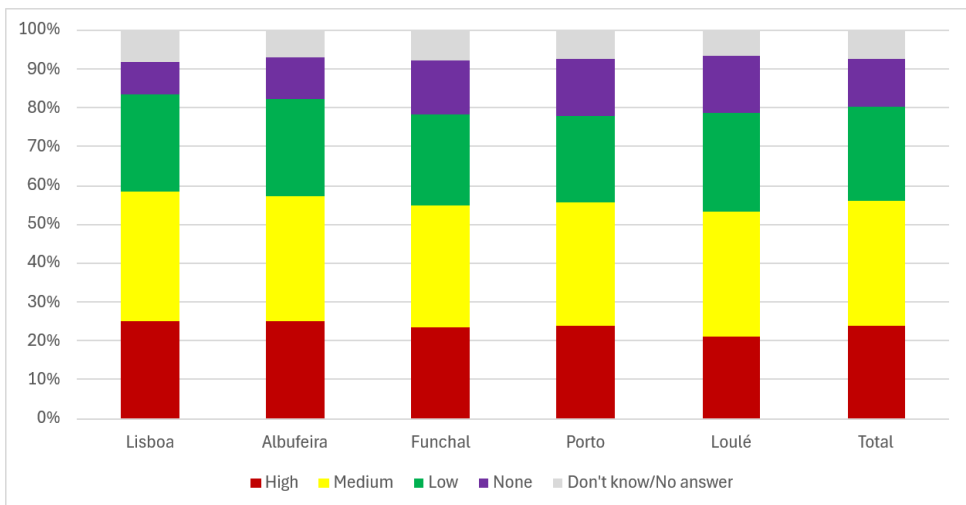


Figure 18
INHABITANTS' EVALUATION ON TOURISM'S NEGATIVE IMPACT ON HOUSING ACCESSIBILITY. SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION, BASED ON LOCAL INHABITANTS' ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE



Regarding air quality (figure 19), the impacts are less consensual. Among the respondents, 64 believe that tourism has a high impact on this dimension, while 86 claim the impact is medium. This result suggests that, although tourist influx may contribute to increased atmospheric pollution, particularly due to road traffic and emissions from the aviation sector, this issue is not seen as one of the main concerns. The impact is more evident in Lisbon and Porto, where tourism is associated with high transport flows. In Albufeira, Funchal, and Loulé, the perception of the impact is more moderate. A total of 65 respondents believe the impact of tourism on air quality is minimal or non-existent, and 18 were unsure.

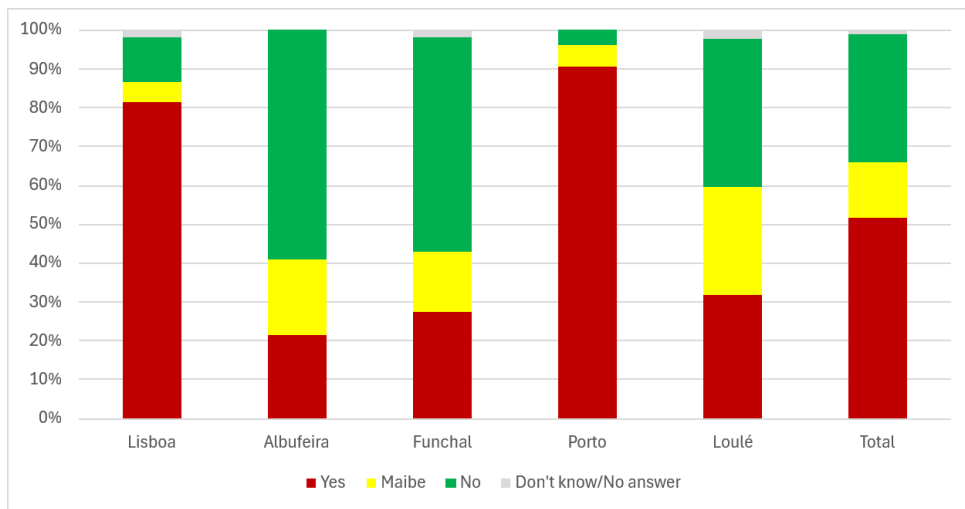
Figure 19
INHABITANTS' EVALUATION ON TOURISM'S NEGATIVE IMPACT ON AIR QUALITY. SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION, BASED ON LOCAL INHABITANTS' ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE



5.8. Overtourism: current situation

The eighth question concerns the respondents' perception of whether there is an excessive level of tourism in their municipalities (figure 20). In total, 139 people believe tourism has reached an excessive level, with this perception being particularly strong in Lisbon and Porto, where almost all respondents agree. In contrast, Albufeira and Funchal show a different perception, with most respondents considering that tourism has not yet reached problematic levels. In Loulé, the opinion is more divided between those who see an excess and those who see no problem at this point.

Figure 20
INHABITANTS' EVALUATION ON CURRENT SITUATION OF
OVERTOURISM. SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION, BASED ON LOCAL
INHABITANTS' ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

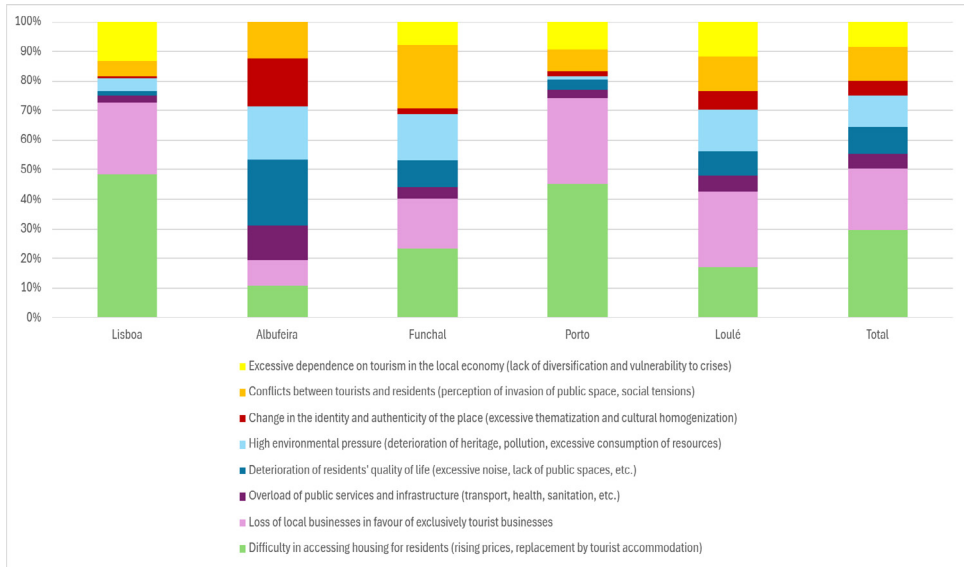


5.9. Determinants of overtourism

Regarding the identification of excessive tourism levels, the results reveal that the difficulty of housing access for residents is the most used criterion by respondents to assess whether a destination has reached an unsustainable tourism dimension (figure 21). In total, 159 people pointed to this factor as one of the two most relevant, particularly highlighted in Lisbon (58 responses) and Porto (49 responses), where real estate pressure due to tourism has contributed to a significant increase in housing prices and the conversion of residential properties into local accommodation. In Funchal (24 responses) and Loulé (16 responses), this concern is also present, though less pronounced. In Albufeira, although tourism has a strong impact on the housing market, this criterion was indicated by only 12 respondents, which may reflect a lower perception of the housing crisis compared to large urban centers.

The loss of local commerce in favor of purely tourist businesses emerges as the second main concern, with 111 responses in total. This phenomenon is particularly felt in Porto (31 responses) and Lisbon (29 responses), where the proliferation of tourist-oriented shops has led to the disappearance of traditional businesses. In Loulé (24 responses) and Funchal (17 responses), this concern is also significant, reflecting a gradual transformation of commercial offerings. In Albufeira, this factor was noted by 10 respondents, suggesting that, despite the city’s strong tourist orientation, the perception of the loss of traditional commerce is not as pronounced as in other destinations.

Figure 21
INHABITANTS' EVALUATION ON THE DETERMINANTS OF
OVERTOURISM. SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION, BASED ON LOCAL
INHABITANTS' ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

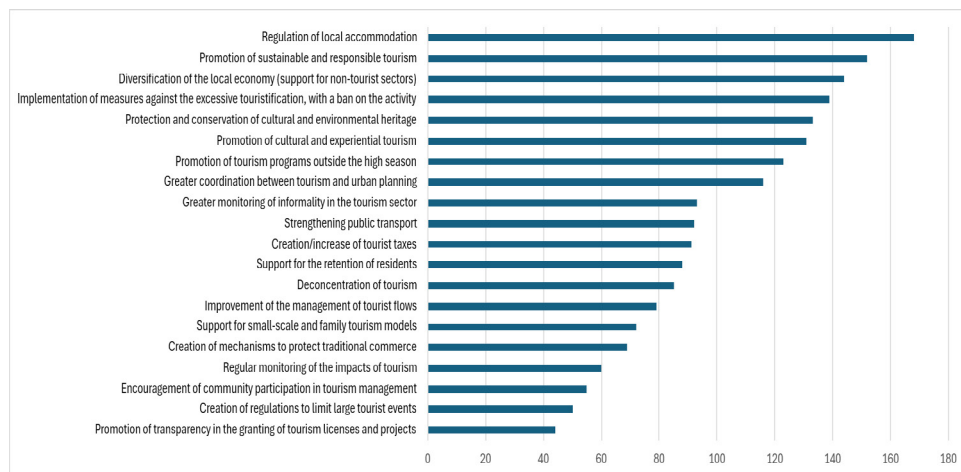


Other factors are also identified as indicators of excessive tourism, though with less significance. High environmental pressure (55 responses) and conflicts between tourists and residents (61 responses) are particularly relevant in Funchal (16 and 22 responses, respectively), suggesting that, in addition to economic and social pressures, there are also concerns related to ecological impact and the relationship between visitors and residents. Overload of public services and infrastructure (28 responses) is more notable in Albufeira (13 responses) and Loulé (5 responses), while the degradation of quality of life due to noise and lack of public spaces (48 responses) is more pronounced in Albufeira (25 responses) and Funchal (9 responses). Excessive reliance on tourism in the local economy (45 responses) is identified especially in Lisbon (16 responses) and Funchal (8 responses), indicating concerns about the lack of economic diversification.

5.10. Promotion of sustainable tourism

Regarding the priority measures for more sustainable tourism (figure 22), the results show that the regulation of local accommodation is the most frequently mentioned (168 responses), with a focus on Lisbon (40 responses) and Porto (38 responses), where tourism pressure on housing has been particularly intense. In Albufeira (35 responses) and Funchal (25 responses), this concern is also present, although less strongly.

Figure 22
INHABITANTS' EVALUATION ON THE PRIORITY MEASURES FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM. SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION, BASED ON LOCAL INHABITANTS' ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE



Promoting sustainable and responsible tourism through awareness campaigns for tourists is the second most highlighted measure (152 responses), highly valued in Lisbon (35 responses), Porto (32 responses), and Albufeira (30 responses). The idea of raising visitor awareness for a more respectful tourism towards local communities and the environment reflects a common concern across the municipalities analyzed.

The protection and conservation of cultural and environmental heritage also emerges as a priority (133 responses), with greater emphasis in Porto (30 responses) and Lisbon (28 responses), where mass tourism has raised concerns about the degradation of built heritage and historical spaces.

Diversifying the local economy is identified as an essential strategy to reduce excessive dependence on tourism (144 responses), with particular mention in Lisbon (35 responses) and Porto (30 responses). Funchal (27 responses) and Albufeira (28 responses) also recognize the need to support non-tourism sectors to avoid risks associated with sector crises.

Promoting cultural and experiential tourism, focused on local authenticity, received 131 responses, reflecting a push towards a more qualified and less massified tourism model. Lisbon (30 responses) and Porto (28 responses) lead this perception, followed by Albufeira (26 responses) and Funchal (25 responses).

Other measures include supporting resident retention (88 responses), particularly valued in Lisbon (22 responses) and Porto (18 responses), and creating mechanisms to protect traditional commerce (69 responses), a concern relevant in Loulé (12 responses) and Albufeira (14 responses). Improving the management of tourist flows (79 responses) and decentralizing tourism to less visited areas (85 responses) are also mentioned, highlighting the need to better distribute tourist flows across the territory.

The results thus indicate that the perception of “overtourism” varies according to the municipality and that the most advocated measures are directly related to the specific challenges faced in each location. In large urban centers like Lisbon and Porto, regulating local accommodation and diversifying the economy are the main priorities, while in destinations more dependent on tourism, such as Albufeira and Funchal, the focus is on raising awareness among visitors and conserving heritage.

6. DISCUSSION

The impact of tourism on the quality of life of residents is perceived differently depending on the territorial context. In destinations more dependent on tourism, such as Albufeira and Loulé, there is a predominance of a positive outlook, while in Lisbon and Porto, the perception tends to be more negative, reflecting the urban challenges associated with tourism growth. Funchal occupies a middle ground, suggesting a greater diversity of opinions. The high number of neutral responses across all municipalities indicates that a significant portion of the population holds a moderate view on the effects of tourism, recognizing both the economic benefits and the challenges associated with the sector. In particular, we can observe that:

- a) Lisbon and Porto face the most severe impacts of overtourism, with a widespread perception of rising living costs, difficulties in accessing housing, and the replacement of traditional shops with businesses catering to tourists.
- b) Albufeira and Loulé reflect challenges typical of seaside tourist destinations, with less consensus on overtourism but strong concerns about the degradation of residents’ quality of life due to seasonal tourist pressure.
- c) Funchal presents a more balanced profile, where tourism is recognized as a positive factor for heritage preservation, but also associated with challenges such as the overload of public services and changes in local identity.
- d) Major urban centers prioritize regulating short-term rentals and protecting traditional commerce, while in the tourist destinations of the Algarve and Madeira, there is greater concern with diversifying the economy and managing tourist flows.
- e) Perceptions of tourism’s impacts vary according to each municipality’s economic and social structure, with Lisbon and Porto registering more dissent, and Albufeira and Funchal revealing a more pragmatic view, accepting tourism as an essential element of the local economy.

These results point to the need for public policies that balance tourism development with residents’ quality of life, promoting a sustainable equilibrium between economy, housing, and urban identity. These policies should focus on addressing specific challenges, with respondents highlighting ten key points as central:

- a) Tourism contributes to rising living costs, especially in Lisbon and Porto, where it is seen as a factor in widespread price increases.
- b) The impact of tourism on the real estate market is mostly negative, with significant effects on access to housing, rising prices, and the replacement of residential properties with tourist accommodation.

- c) The commercial fabric is transforming, with an increasing replacement of traditional commerce by businesses focused solely on tourists, particularly in the most visited cities.
- d) Tourism plays an ambivalent role in the preservation of heritage and local identity, being seen as positive in some places, but associated with theming and loss of authenticity in others.
- e) Tourism negatively affects mobility, public spaces, and access to housing, with these dimensions being the most impacted by the high influx of visitors.
- f) The perception of overtourism is evident in Lisbon and Porto, where most consider that the number of tourists has surpassed a sustainable level, in contrast to other locations where opinions are more divided.
- g) The difficulty in accessing housing and the loss of local commerce are the main indicators used to identify whether a destination has reached an excessive level of tourism.
- h) Regulating short-term rentals and diversifying the economy are the most advocated measures to make tourism more sustainable and reduce excessive dependency on the sector.
- i) The decentralization of tourism and improved management of tourist flows are priority strategies to alleviate pressure on urban centers and better distribute the impacts of tourism activity.
- j) Heritage protection and the promotion of sustainable tourism are highly valued, emphasizing the need to balance economic development with cultural and environmental preservation

7. CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights the complex and socially constructed nature of residents' perspectives on tourism and its perceived limits. The question of "How much is too much?" does not have a universally applicable answer; rather, it is shaped by local contexts, historical trajectories, and socio-economic conditions. The findings reveal that perceptions of tourism's impact are heterogeneous, influenced by factors such as the scale of development, governance frameworks, and community engagement. While some residents see tourism as a driver of economic vitality and cultural exchange, others perceive it as a source of spatial, social, and economic pressures. This divergence underscores the importance of contextualized assessments when addressing concerns about overtourism and sustainability.

Furthermore, the study reinforces the notion that residents' acceptance of tourism evolves dynamically, shaped by lived experiences and changing external conditions. The same level of tourism development that is welcomed in one context may be considered excessive in another, emphasizing the need for adaptable and locally informed strategies. Managing tourism growth requires a nuanced understanding of place-specific sensitivities, ensuring that development aligns with the values and priorities of host communities.

While this research provides valuable insights into residents' perspectives, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study's reliance on specific case studies limits the generalizability of findings to other geographical and socio-economic contexts. The

perceptions documented here may differ in regions with distinct tourism profiles or governance structures. Additionally, methodological constraints, such as the self-selection bias in survey responses, may influence the representativeness of the findings. Future research could benefit from broader comparative analyses, integrating longitudinal approaches to capture evolving attitudes toward tourism.

Given the variability in residents' perspectives and the socially constructed nature of tourism thresholds, a place-sensitive management approach is essential. Policymakers should move beyond one-size-fits-all strategies and instead develop flexible, adaptive frameworks that account for local characteristics. This includes fostering participatory governance mechanisms that empower communities to shape tourism policies, ensuring that development trajectories reflect residents' priorities and concerns.

Moreover, strategies should prioritize resilience by balancing tourism growth with socio-environmental sustainability. This may involve implementing regulatory measures to mitigate negative externalities, diversifying economic opportunities to reduce dependency on tourism, and promoting alternative forms of tourism that align with community values. Ultimately, effective tourism governance requires a continuous dialogue between stakeholders, enabling adaptive management that responds to changing circumstances and maintains a harmonious balance between tourism development and local well-being.

Our evidence supports a governance agenda centred on flexibility, participation, and continuous learning. At municipal level, local governments should (i) adopt adaptive, capacity-based planning with clear thresholds and indicators for mobility, housing access, public-space use, and environmental quality, reviewed on regular cycles; (ii) apply targeted spatial instruments—differentiated zoning and licensing for short-term rentals and tourism uses, protection of residential cores, and heritage-conservation overlays—aligned with neighbourhood-level sensitivities; (iii) deploy housing-affordability measures (tightened STR rules where displacement pressures are high; hypothecation of tourist-tax revenues for affordable housing and local services); (iv) manage visitor flows via demand-management (time-windowed access to hotspots, public-transport prioritisation, wayfinding and dispersal to secondary areas, and seasonality management); (v) diversify the local economy and tourism offer toward products that fit community values (e.g., cultural/creative, nature-based) with targeted support to local SMEs; (vi) institutionalise participatory governance (standing resident panels, co-design workshops, participatory budgeting for tourism investments); and (vii) establish an open-data observatory that integrates resident sentiment (recurrent survey waves), municipal statistics, and operational metrics to trigger adaptive policy responses. These actions operationalise place-sensitive strategies that balance tourism development with social well-being and territorial cohesion.

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