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## **The relevance of motivation, authenticity and destination image to explain future behavioural intention in a UNESCO World Heritage Site\***

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### **Abstract**

This paper falls within the scope of heritage tourism studies, focusing particularly on one UNESCO World Heritage Site. It seeks to contribute to tourism literature by achieving a better understanding of which cognitive and affective factors are behind tourists' decisions to travel to these sites, their experiences during their visit and behavioural intention after the visit. A self-administered questionnaire focusing on the variables included in the proposed research model was given to tourists. A composite-based structural equation modelling approach was employed for the analysis. The findings revealed a significant and high correlation between travel attitude and perceived authenticity, travel motivations and destination image, and authenticity and destination image, but it goes beyond those relations by analysing them in an integrated manner and at different stages of the visit to comprehend tourist behavioural intention after the visit. Besides the theoretical advancements with this study, the practical and managerial implications must be emphasized particularly for entities responsible for destination marketing that may be able to use the outcome of our research to work on proper promotion strategies.

**Keywords:** Prior Knowledge, Authenticity, Tourist Destination Image, World Heritage Sites, Tourists' Visit Intention, UNESCO Status, Coimbra

### **1. Introduction**

Tourism focused on visits to historic and cultural locations is often referred to as heritage tourism. It relates to travelling with the intention of experiencing the places, activities, and artefacts that reflect the cultural history and stories of each location, in an authentic way (Chaudhary & Aggarwal, 2012). Thus, one of the main objectives of heritage tourism is to provide tourists with reliable knowledge of the site, so they can appreciate local art, architecture and traditions. Heritage tourism destinations are considered key drivers that contribute significantly to national tourism revenues, with substantial influence on both regional and national development (Basaran, 2016). Therefore, an appropriate branding strategy for these

heritage sites that further boosts their image and competitiveness, will, in turn, extend throughout the region or country where it is located (Ghazi & Ammar, 2018). This competitiveness has been viewed as both a positive and negative influence on the tourism sector, its stakeholders and society in general. While a positive image is becoming widely accepted and encouraged, the competitiveness factor is increasingly rejected by both practitioners and theorists. The unwelcome effects of competitiveness are often related to increasing business investment in cities, with unsustainable practices such as the remodelling of historic neighbourhoods, the modification of original architecture and even the eviction of local residents, as well as the over-commercialisation of local culture (Lu, Chi, & Liu, 2015; Molinillo, Liébana-Cabanillas, Anaya-Sánchez & Buhalis, 2018; Park, Choi & Lee, 2019). These negative impacts on the heritage of many cities have been attributed to a lack of reliable information on issues such as the tourists' quality experience, authenticity, the tourist destination image and, finally, the behaviour of tourists when visiting historical districts, which has been described in many cases as displaying an "inappropriate" attitude to cultural heritage (García-Hernández, la Calle-Vaquero, & Yubero, 2017; Du Cros, & McKercher, 2020). All these elements have led to unsuitable and unsustainable management of tourist destinations by politicians and tourism managers, who are widely criticised, particularly in cultural heritage locations (Yap & Saha, 2013; Bennet & Dearden, 2014; Bąkiewicz, Leask, Barron & Rakić, 2017). Consequently, a better understanding of the abovementioned topics is desirable. Arguments such as the following explain and support this: 1) They are all strongly linked to tourists' satisfaction with their visits to historical districts and the subsequent impact on the cultural heritage destination (Chen & Rahman, 2018); 2) It is commonly agreed that this merits further research to provide meaningful suggestions for the development of realistic, sustainable, and accessible tourism policies and strategies more in line with the current state-of-the-art heritage tourism, according to the latest research in this field (Henderson, 2009; Nicholas & Thapa, 2013; Jamal, Al-Haddad, Safdar & Wan, 2020), and 3) Topics such as prior knowledge of the location, authenticity, destination image, or eventual tourist behaviour are interesting for both theorists and practitioners, as they are considered key factors for the sustainable and successful management of heritage tourism (Lu et al, 2015; Xu & Huang, 2018).

In addition, while it is commonly accepted that prior knowledge is a fundamental factor influencing individuals' knowledge and search behaviour before travelling, this topic is still under debate with regard to which elements should fall within the concept (Kerstetter & Cho, 2004; Choi, Hickerson & Kerstetter, 2018). As noted by these researchers, although there is

agreement that familiarity with a location has an impact on the destination image in advance of a visit, more research is needed.

Heritage authenticity is a significant driver, highly valued by both scholars and Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs), due to its positive influence on behavioural intentions towards a destination (Domínguez-Quintero, González-Rodríguez & Paddison, 2020). Hence, a good understanding of how authenticity is perceived in heritage sites is very valuable for tourism managers, to enable them to develop adequate strategies and tactics for proper destination management. However, despite the above arguments, authenticity is considered a complex issue, and even though most researchers have discussed authenticity in relation to other topics, such as tourist motivation, tourism image and sense of place, only a few have stressed the need to empirically test and discuss the relationships between authenticity and these other relevant variables before and during visits to heritage sites (Zhou, Zhang & Edelheim, 2013).

The significance and value placed on research into the tourist destination image has grown among theorists and practitioners, due mainly to the need to understand how tourists' positive perceptions influence their behaviour (Lu et al., 2015). Many researchers recognise that tourists' destination image perception is a multidimensional construct (Oktadiana, Pearce & Chon, 2016; Martin et al., 2017). However, many studies focus solely on the cognitive dimension of the destination image (Prayag & Hosany, 2014; Basaran, 2016). Only a few have approached the destination image considering both its affective and cognitive dimensions (Fischer & Zeugner-Roth, 2017; Caber et al., 2020). In this way, the present paper has answered the call to recognise the cognitive and affective dimensions of destination image in a World Heritage Site (WHS).

UNESCO WHS status implies a high quality standard and unique *in situ* experiences. It gives tourists the confidence to take the final decision to visit, decreasing their perceived risk of choosing this WHS against another natural or cultural destination (Halpenny, Kono & Moghimehfar, 2018). These tourists' decisions and actions also have significant implications for the local communities and businesses that will, directly or indirectly, experience the benefits and costs associated with satisfying World Heritage-inspired travel expectations (Jimura, 2011). Thus, mixed support for the influence of WHS status on tourists' visit intentions has been observed (Poria, Reichel & Cohen, 2013; Wang et al., 2015). Furthermore, there is a need to address some deficiencies in current tourism studies regarding these issues (Halpenny et al., 2018), especially regarding how destination image perception is influenced during a visit, not just in advance.

The paper falls within the scope of heritage tourism studies, focusing particularly on a UNESCO WHS. It attempts to understand which cognitive and affective factors are behind tourists' decisions to travel to such places, their experience during their visit and behavioural intention after the visit. This research provides a deeper analysis of the complex relationships between topics such as motivation, authenticity, destination image, UNESCO status and behavioural intention, from a cognitive and affective approach at different stages of a visit (Bagri & Kala, 2016; Piramanayagam, Rathore & Seal, 2020). Building on previous research, this study tests the moderating effect of UNESCO status on the destination image, as well as the mediating effect had by the twofold concept of authenticity on the relationship between travel motivations and destination image. A research model has been presented and a set of hypotheses have been developed to reflect these direct and indirect relationships. The aforementioned gaps in the literature gaps and calls from earlier researchers (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Stylos, Bellou, Andronikidis & Vassiliadis, 2017; Zhang, Wu & Buhalis, 2018) fully justify this study.

The following research questions are also addressed: (1) Does affective and cognitive motivation towards a destination influence object-based and existential authenticity? (2) Does the double dimension of authenticity influence destination image as perceived from its affective and cognitive dimensions? (3) Does UNESCO World heritage status moderate the relationship between destination image and behavioural intention?

The paper is organised as follows: after the introduction section, a literature review section supporting the research model and hypotheses proposed is included. Next, the research design and methodology applied are described in detail, followed by an empirical data analysis and study results. Finally, a general conclusion is drawn, some managerial implications and limitations derived from the study are discussed, and future research avenues to cover the paper's limitations are proposed.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

### **2.1. Motivation, Authenticity and Destination Image**

#### ***Motivation***

Tourist motivation has been a topic of interest both for scholars and tourism practitioners, to the point of being considered significant for improving tourist behaviour and in tourism analysis (Bashar, & Abdelnaser, 2011; Chikuta, du Plessis & Saayman, 2017; Omran & Kamran, 2018). Moreover, "for several decades, clarification of tourists' motivations has been at the centre of

tourism research”, there being several frameworks provided in this academic context (Caber et al., 2020). Although several motivational theories have been proposed, the Push-Pull Theory (Dann, 1977; Crompton, 1979) has been the most widely accepted and adopted by researchers in tourist motivation studies (Beltramo, Rostagno & Bonadonna, 2018; Giachino et al., 2019; Tseng, Lin, Lin, Wu & Sriphon, 2019). According to this theory, motivation can be described as the needs or desires that push an individual to act in order to obtain satisfaction (Bashar, & Abdelnaser, 2011; Komalasari & Ganiarto, 2019). Therefore, this theory states that people travel based on push factors from internal forces and pull factors from external forces, made up of a destination’s attributes (Mohammad & Som, 2010; Kesterson, 2013). With this in mind, Crompton (1979) classified tourist motivations into push and pull tourism factors in order to determine the significance of the destination in attracting tourists (Nikjoo & Ketabi, 2015; Yousefi & Marzuki, 2015). Push motivational factors originate from Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and are considered intrinsic motivations (Guha, 2009). They relate to the needs of the tourist and include examples such as the desire for escape, rest and relaxation, adventure, prestige, health and fitness, and social interaction (Klenosky, 2002).

Prior knowledge is widely recognised in tourism literature as a key factor influencing individuals’ information search behaviour before travelling (Sharifpour, Walters, Ritchie & Winter, 2014). Since prior knowledge represents tourists’ cognitive motivation, the issue becomes a vital driver, capable of influencing tourists’ decision-making and final behaviour (Gursoy & McCleary, 2004a). This information search process is defined by Engel, Blackwell, and Miniard (1995) as ‘the motivated activation of knowledge stored in memory or acquisition of information from the environment’, and can be classified as internal and external (Yamashita & Takata, 2020). Accordingly, prior knowledge is initially comprised of two dimensions: familiarity and expertise, as argued by researchers such as Alba & Hutchinson (1987). They define the first dimension as ‘the number of product-related experiences that have been accumulated by the consumer’, and the second as ‘the ability to perform product-related tasks successfully’. In particular, it highlights the role familiarity plays, due to the specific knowledge it provides of the target attractions (object-based authenticity) that determine tourist preferences for certain destinations (Ho, Lin, & Chen, 2012).

Based on previous findings, many other researchers have widely defended, in parallel, the multidimensional character of prior knowledge, including three main aspects: tourists’ familiarity with the attraction via acquired information (Park & Lessig, 1981; Diallo, Chandon, Cliquet, & Philippe, 2013; Sharifpour, Walters, Ritchie, & Winter, 2014); tourists’ expertise

related to their level of knowledge and skills (Mitchell & Dacin, 1996; Zehrer, 2011; Peña, Jamilena & Molina, 2013) and tourists' past experience gained during previous visits (Moore & Lehmann, 1980; San Martin, Collado & Rodriguez del Bosque, 2013; Karimi, Papamichail & Holland, 2015).

Furthermore, most of these earlier studies, far from studying prior knowledge in the context of all the above dimensions, have studied them in isolation (Kerstetter & Cho, 2004; Sharifpour, Walters, Ritchie, & Winter, 2014). However, to date, there is no consensus regarding one research activity over another. Prior knowledge is the main focus of interest for researchers, but it has not been analysed taking in consideration its various dimensions, nor has it been regarded as such an important factor or in connection with other variables related to tourist behaviour (Marchiori & Cantoni, 2015; Huang, Afsharifar, & Veen, 2016; Prayag, Gannon, Muskat, & Taheri, 2020). Srull (1983) conceptualised the familiarity dimension of prior knowledge, defined as an individual's perception of a product/service that is not necessarily derived from a personal experience. Later, Milman and Pizam (1995) described familiarity as the number of times individuals have visited a destination. Baloglu and Brinberg (1997) added that this familiarity was composed of an individual's indirect experience gained through acquired information of the tourist location and direct tourism experience obtained in the location. The authors advance this line of thought by referring indirectly to the role played by authenticity, both object-based and existential, in the relationship between familiarity as a dimension of prior knowledge and tourist destination image.

Other scholars have provided results that show how familiarity generates an adequate image of a tourist destination, and even more so, how it has a positive influence on the destination image and enhances interest in travelling to these sites to reveal objective information on a tourism destination's product attributes (object-based authenticity) (Ahmed 1991; Wright & Lynch 1995; Huang, Lurie & Mitra, 2009; Del Chiappa, Napolitano & Atzeni, 2019). Thus, as far as tourism agents, such as museums, are concerned, it is extensively recognised that prior knowledge exerts a positive influence on visitors' choice and perceptions of the potential rewards they intend to gain during their visits, ultimately favouring the tourist destination image (Falk & Storksdieck, 2010; Sheng & Chen, 2012; Camarero, Garrido & Vicente, 2015). Moreover, these visitors can gain a more enjoyable, enriching and suitable experience, enhancing their prior knowledge of the museum they intend to visit, by gathering data in advance from various sources capable of giving them an adequate level of familiarity, and thus determining their final choice. Similarly, Black (2012) demonstrated that visitors with higher

levels of museum experience, acquired through suitable prior knowledge, based on greater familiarity with the museum content and its exhibitions, are more likely to experience a higher level of engagement and, thereby, enjoyment, during the visit. This improves, definitively, the tourist destination image through elements later identified by some scholars as object-based authenticity and existential authenticity. There are similar assumptions and findings related to historic district context, Lu, Chi, & Liu (2015), heritage tourism destination, Alvarez & Korzay (2011) or WHS, Frost (2006) and Laing, Wheeler, Reeves & Frost (2014). There is a high level of agreement between researchers, who mostly hypothesise that it is likely that the knowledge tourists acquire through available information on a heritage location, might have a relevant impact on tourists' perception of authenticity, and thereby reinforce the formation of a positive image.

### ***Authenticity***

Authenticity was introduced by MacCannell (1973) from a sociological perspective to understand tourists' travel experiences at historic sites. Later, more specifically, under a heritage tourism context, authenticity has been considered by Boyd (2002) as a key issue and valuable principle capable of contributing to sustainable tourism. Accordingly, some scholars have attributed pivotal significance to authenticity in heritage tourism, since this topic connects tourists to destination attractions related both to object-based authenticity and existential authenticity (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Girish & Chen, 2017). While object-based authenticity derives from the properties of the object itself, existential authenticity is lived by the individual as a participant in experiences that activate their existential state (Wang, 1999; Zhou et al., 2013). Hargrove (2002) already argued that, in the heritage context, authenticity is essential for a meaningful experience, highlighting the existential character of this issue.

Overall, in the context of heritage tourism, both types of authenticity are considered value issues that significantly improve the tourists' quality experience and, in turn, satisfaction (Curran et al., 2018; Domínguez et al., 2020), as well as a favourable perception of a tourism destination image (Chhabra et al., 2003; Chen & Chen, 2010; Tavitiyaman & Qu, 2013). In fact, authenticity motivates tourists to engage in heritage tourism, which allows them to meet their expectations, thereby enhancing the destination image. Accordingly, in the heritage tourism context, some scholars have conducted their research to test the positive influence that authenticity exerts on the tourist destination image (Connell, 2012; Bryce et al., 2016). However, despite these previous studies, the results provided regarding the relationship between authenticity and the image of the tourist destination are considered insufficient today



in the tourist context. Consequently, these findings can neither be conclusive nor have universal acceptance, and many researchers (Domínguez et al, 2020) have made a case for the need for greater in-depth research into this relationship. Therefore, for example, Curran et al (2018), corroborate this need for further research between different types of authenticity and destination image, while also considering other tourism issues such as tourists' motivation or loyalty, which are in turn influenced by aspects of the tourism culture and context. In line with the above arguments and findings, this paper intends to further understand this association between object-based and existential authenticity and their influence on destination image, a relationship that has not been sufficiently studied so far, as mentioned above.

Following the consumer-based approach by Kolar and Zabkar (2010), authenticity is analysed in this paper as an evaluative judgment that pertains to tourist experiences taking place in a real site, culture, object or destination, in this case, the city of Coimbra, as a tourism destination with UNESCO's World Heritage Status. Here, authenticity refers to the tourists' enjoyment and their perceptions of genuine cultural experiences. These tourists' perceptions encompass both types of authenticity (object-based and existential) since, in line with Kolar and Zabkar (2010), this research considers that they must be tested as two separate issues in the model proposed. Thus, also based on Waitt's (2000) and Reisinger & Steiner's (2006) arguments, as "tourists' existential experiences are not 'object- and context-free'" (p. 655), object-based authenticity positively influences existential authenticity. Based on their results, other works have also approached this relationship by using other models and statistical techniques, applied in different tourism contexts (Yi, Lin, Jin & Luo, 2017; Domínguez-Quintero, González-Rodríguez & Roldán, 2019).

### ***Destination Image***

The real value of tourism destination image relies on its large, direct impact on other significant tourism issues, as revealed by previous research. Thus, significant relationships have been established between tourism destination image, tourists' quality experience, motivation, satisfaction, and visit intention (Albayrak, Caber, González-Rodríguez & Aksu, 2018). So, it is increasingly assumed that positive perceptions concerning a tourist destination help to create a favourable tourism destination image, which leads to greater motivation and satisfaction (Sun, Chi & Xu, 2013; Gursoy, Chen & Chi, 2014). Consequently, the likelihood of visiting or re-visiting the locations also seems to improve through a favourable destination image (Stylos et al, 2017; González-Rodríguez, Díaz-Fernández & Pino-Mejías, 2020).

Following this stance, many authors have also conducted research which largely reveals how the tourist destination image influences tourist behaviour before and during their visit, since a positive perceived destination image is a key contributor to tourist loyalty (Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Agapito et al, 2013; Wu, 2016). Thus, some authors such as Stylos et al (2017), attribute these results to the fact that tourists tend to classify their travel alternatives based on a series of criteria, such as personal motivations (push factors), cognitive motivations (pull factors), destination images (attraction factors), and availability of time and funds (situational restrictions) (Gilbert, 1991; Goodall, 1991; Pike & Page, 2014; Sharpley, 2018). The intention of tourists to visit or re-visit a tourist destination due to favourable previous experiences, is considered as a proxy for the real behaviour of tourists (Loureiro, 2014; Song, Lee, Park, Hwang & Reisinger, 2015) and their loyalty (Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Lee, Kyle & Scott, 2012).

Based on the previous arguments, a positive direct effect of both cognitive and affective images on tourists' intentions to re-visit a destination has been increasingly tested (Bigné, Sánchez & Blas, 2009; Chew & Jahari, 2014). In addition, Stylos et al. (2016) have recognised a positive effect of cognitive images. Therefore, as claimed earlier, for scholars such as Echtner and Ritchie (2003) and Prayag (2009), in a general way, tourists are more likely to choose and visit a tourism destination if these sites have a well-known positive image. Similarly, more recently, Zhang, Wu and Buhalis (2018) tested how a memorable tourism experience has a direct positive effect on tourists'-visit intention.

However, although the influence of destination image on travellers' decision making widely acknowledged (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Chen & Chen, 2010), it is also necessary to consider other factors that might influence tourists' initial intentions and eventual behaviour. Thus, as stated by Li and Vogelson (2006), since a tourist destination image is a tourist-based image, constructed by a personal and subjective impression of the tourism site, the destination image these tourists have in mind might not be akin to the image projected by marketers (marketer-based image). Consequently, developing a suitable image is critical to properly promote a tourism destination and, in turn, to capture the tourists' interest and their intention to visit. Accordingly, as established by Yüksel & Akgül (2007), tourist destination marketers must use previous results to develop effective promotion strategies, to make potential travellers go from ignorance to awareness of the benefits that visiting the tourist destination would bring. Thus, only favourable awareness through effective tourist destination promotion, can influence their intention, condition their final behaviour, and guarantee that they visit and even re-visit these tourist locations (Becken, Jin, Zhang & Gao, 2017; Jiménez, Rubio & Campo, 2019; Ragb,

Mahrous & Ghoneim, 2020). As such, the consideration of World Heritage Sites (WHS) as tourist destinations, as noted by Halpenny et al. (2018), might play a significant role in increasing visitor numbers, since the status improves the tourist destination's overall image. Furthermore, according to these researchers, the brand equity associated by tourists with the WHS classification of a tourist destination by reputable organisation like UNESCO, together with the social influence exerted, can be considered strong positive predictors of these tourists' intentions to visit this tourist destination in the future.

## **2.2 The relationships between motivation, authenticity, destination image, behavioural intention and hypotheses**

Based upon the findings in the literature review, the following hypotheses related to motivations, authenticity and destination image are formulated:

- H1a: Familiarity as a dimension of prior knowledge, determines tourists' cognitive motivation, positively influences object-based authenticity
- H1b: Familiarity as a dimension of prior knowledge positively influences existential authenticity
- H1c: Prior knowledge positively influences destination image perception through object-based authenticity
- H1d: Prior knowledge positively influences destination image perception through existential authenticity
- H1e: Affective motivation positively influences object-based authenticity,
- H1f: Affective motivation positively influences existential authenticity,
- H1g: Affective motivation positively influences destination image perception through object-based authenticity
- H1h: Affective motivation influences destination image perception through existential authenticity

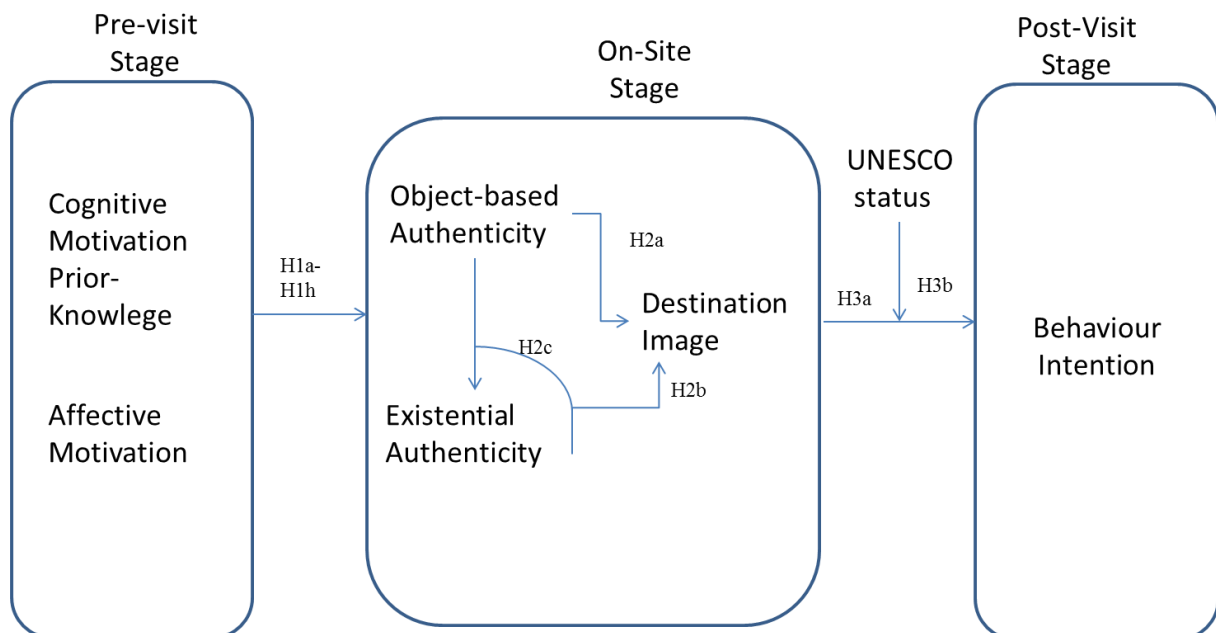
From the literature review, an understanding how authenticity perceptions can achieve a favourable destination image appears to be relevant for the whole tourism sector: DMOs, stakeholders, and developers of historic tourism districts (Li et al, 2010; Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2018). According to previous discussions, the following hypotheses are formulated:

- H2a (+): Objective authenticity positively influences the perception of the destination image
- H2b (+): Existential authenticity positively influences the perception of the destination image
- H2c (+): Object-based authenticity positively influences the perception of the destination image through existential authenticity

Despite the arguments in the literature, and although there seems to be sufficient evidence of the link between tourism destination image and behavioural intention, the relationship between tourist destination image and tourists' visit intentions in a heritage tourism context still needs to be confirmed, especially regarding the formation of destination image during the visit. Drawing on previous researchers' results, the following hypotheses are formulated:

- H3a: Destination image positively influences tourist behavioural intention
- H3b: UNESCO WHS moderates the relation between destination image and behavioural intention

The hypotheses are summarised in the research model proposed in Figure 1



**Figure 1.** Research Model

### **3. Methods**

#### **3.1. Study site and Context**

Coimbra, in central Portugal, is home to one of the oldest universities in Europe, dating back to 1290, the century following the foundation of the Portuguese nation. The University of Coimbra - Alta and Sofia comprises many medieval colleges, cathedrals, churches, museums, a baroque library, modern buildings and a Botanical Garden, and in June 2013, it was registered on the UNESCO World Heritage list. In July 2019, the Machado de Castro National Museum was integrated into this classified group. This classification was due both to its material heritage, given the exceptional nature of its architectural features, and its intangible legacy, notably for the role it played in the dissemination of the Portuguese language and culture. Its global significance is noticeable in the growing number of visitors in recent years, which also poses critical challenges to cultural tourism managers. According to official data (National Statistical Institute), Coimbra received 202,490 tourists in 2013, year of the UNESCO classification. The University ensemble, being the most popular centre in the region, registered an increase of 31% in visits from 2012 to 2013 (Menezes, 2017). From data provided by the University of Coimbra, in 2016 the University welcomed 450,000 tourists, which represents an increase of 26% comparing to the figures in 2015. The University registered 538,000 visitors in 2017 and 581,040 visitors in 2018, of which 54% came from Portugal and 46% from other countries, mainly France (22%), Spain (10%), Italy (10%), Germany (8%) and USA and Japan (5%).

#### **3.2. Data Collection**

Over 2019, visitors to Coimbra city were asked to answer a self-administered questionnaire which consisted of questions related to the respondents' socio-demographic profile, information about their visit (length of stay, attractions visited, or events attended, the main purpose of the trip) and information related to the variables included in the research model (discussed further in the measurement section). Data were collected in the surroundings of Coimbra University, the classified buildings, museums, as well as in several hotel units. The questionnaire was provided in Portuguese and in English. Since Common Method Bias (CMB) may be a concern in self-report surveys (Lindell & Whitney, 2001; Podsakoff, McKenzie, Lee & Podsakoff, 2003), the CMB issues were addressed in the questionnaire at the design stage, by applying proposed procedural remedies (Podsakoff, MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012). Furthermore, before data collection, a pilot survey was conducted in the heritage destination to ensure the validity of the questionnaire. To minimise response bias, potential respondents were targeted at

different times (morning, afternoon and evening) and during both weekdays and weekends. During the period of data collection, 815 visitors were approached, and 582 valid answers were obtained.

### **3.3. Description of the Variables**

The variables involved in the research model were measured by adapting the relevant measurement scales from the literature. The indicators of the variables used in the analysis are displayed in Table 2.

Prior knowledge constitutes the cognitive attitude to travel and represents the familiarity dimension of subjective knowledge. Prior knowledge has been measured with 5 items based on the study of Ho et al. (2012) and Kerstetter and Cho (2004). The variable affective motivations (or push motivations) represent the internal or psychological factors of one's own person, which traditionally have been considered useful to explain a person's internal desire to travel. Push motivations have been used to represent the affective attitude to travel and it has been adapted from the affective dimension of motivation in the studies by Yoon and Uysal (2005) and Nowacki (2009). The pre-visit cognitive and affective attitudes were measured on a seven-point Likert scale (1-Not relevant at all to 7-Fully relevant).

The measurement of the authenticity variable in its double perspective – object-based authenticity and existential authenticity – has been adapted from the study by Kolar and Zabkar (2010). The object-based authenticity – tourist perception of architectural features, feeling of the sense of antiquity, long history and harmony with the environment, as opposed to a site being overcrowded by modern civilization and over-commercialized – was measured with five items. Existential authenticity, associated with tourists' feelings and emotions, unique spiritual experience and intimate feeling of human history and culture, feeling “closer to history”, was measured with six items. Objective and existential authenticity were measured on a seven-point Likert Scale (1-Completely disagree to 7-Completely agree).

The variable UNESCO Status, which affects destination image, recognises the value of preservation and instills pride in residents (Su & Wall, 2014), was measured with 8 items on a seven-point Likert scale (1-Completely disagree to 7-Completely agree).

The measurement of destination image is based on the seminal work of Baloglu and McLeary (1999). It is measured as a second-order composite with four dimensions: quality of experience, attractions, value/environment and affective image. Destination image attributes were measured on a seven-point Likert scale (1-Not good at all to 7-Excellent).

The variable behavior intention was adapted from the measurement scale employed by Yoon and Uysal (2005) and Lam and Hsu (2006). Statements for assessing behaviour intention are measured on a seven-point Likert scale (1-completely disagree to 7-completely agree).

### **3.4. Statistical method**

The research model displayed in Figure 1 was tested using a composite-based structural-equation modelling approach, the Partial Least Squares (PLS) technique (Trinchera & Russolillo, 2010; Rigdon, 2013). The selections are motivated by the following reasons: (i) the goal is to estimate a model of composites, either in mode A or B (Rigdon, Sarsted & Ringle, 2017); (ii) the complexity of the research model and the different effects established between the variables (direct, mediation and moderation relations) (Hair et al., 2017b); (iii) the skewness values of latent variables' indicators are not over -1.3, which reveals that the degree of skewness is not severe, showing PLS-SEM is suitable for estimating the model (Hair et al., 2017a). To conduct the analysis, SmartPLS software (Ringle, Wende, & Becker, 2015) was used.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1. Description of the sample**

Table 1 presents the profile of respondents. Most visitors came from Portugal, followed by visitors from the European Union. There were no large differences regarding gender: 51.20% were female and 48.80% were male. The majority of visitors were between 18 and 34 years old (62.72%) with a high level of education, 62% with a college education. 51.8% of the visitors declared an income level of between €1501 and €5000. The main motivations for visiting Coimbra were leisure and vacation (31.2%), and visiting a UNESCO WHS (33.1%), and most were visiting the city with family members or individually (90.8%).

**Table 1.** Social demographic information.

| <b>Coimbra's Visitors</b>        |        |
|----------------------------------|--------|
| (%)                              |        |
| <i>Gender</i>                    |        |
| Female                           | 51.20% |
| Male                             | 48.80% |
| <i>Age</i>                       |        |
| 18-34                            | 52.92% |
| 35-49                            | 24.23% |
| 50-64                            | 14.95% |
| Over 65                          | 7.90%  |
| <i>Level of Education</i>        |        |
| Primary                          | 1.7%   |
| Secondary/Vocational             | 34.6%  |
| Education                        |        |
| College Education                | 62%    |
| <i>Level of Income</i>           |        |
| Up to 1500 €                     | 28.5%  |
| 1501-3000€                       | 33.4%  |
| 3001-5000€                       | 28.8%  |
| Over 5000€                       | 7.5%   |
| <i>Origin</i>                    |        |
| Portugal                         | 46.48% |
| European Union                   | 36.95% |
| Rest of the world                | 16.57% |
| <i>Type of trip</i>              |        |
| Individual or family trip        | 90.8%  |
| Travel on tours                  | 5.8%   |
| <i>Main purpose of the visit</i> |        |
| Leisure and Vacation             | 31.2%  |
| Rest and health reasons          | 1.7%   |
| Visit UNESCO World               | 33.1%  |
| Heritage Site                    |        |
| Cultural and recreational        | 14.2%  |
| events                           |        |
| Visit friends or relatives       | 7.3%   |
| Others                           | 10.8%  |

#### **4.2. Measurement Model**

The analysis starts by conducting a confirmatory analysis of the saturated model (Henseler et al., 2016; Henseler, 2018) based on the standardised root mean square residual (SRMR) index (Hu & Bentler, 1998). The saturated model displays a SRMR value of 0.072, which is below the threshold value of 0.08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). This result supports the composite model, since the composites do not appear to act as individual indicators, but rather within a nomological net.



To assess the measurement models, composites estimated in mode A and Mode B are distinguished depending on the theoretical nature of the constructs. While composites in mode A are expected to be used for those constructs with high correlated indicators, composite measurements estimated in mode B are preferred when the correlation of their indicators is not presupposed (Henseler, 2017a). The constructs cognitive and affective motivations, objective authenticity, existential authenticity and UNESCO status, have been defined as composite mode A. Destination image has been defined as second-order composite in mode B, and its dimensions have been defined as composites mode A.

The individual items: reliability, construct reliability, convergent validity (Table 2) and discriminant validity, (Table 3) were obtained in order to assess the measurement model for composites mode A. Table 2 shows that all indicators have a factor loading greater than 0.70, the correlation weights are significant, and the composite reliability for these composites is higher than 0.80. Therefore, the measurement models have internal consistency and reliability. Secondly, average variance extracted (AVE) values greater than 0.50 also confirm the existence of convergent validity. Table 3 shows that all mode A composites achieve discriminant validity following the Hetrotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations criterion of 0.85, HTMT85 (Henseler et al., 2015) and the Fornell and Lacker discriminant validity criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). To assess the measurement model for mode B composites, the constructs' discriminant validity, the indicators' collinearity and the statistical significance of the indicators' weights are evaluated. The variance inflation factor (VIF) values are lower than the threshold of 3.3 (Table 2), which means no multicollinearity issues between the indicators of each composite. Table 2 also shows the magnitude and statistical significance of the composites' indicators, revealing the relative importance of each indicator on its composite (Henseler et al., 2009). Discriminant validity is confirmed since the correlation between composite B and the rest of the constructs (Table 3) is less than 0.7 (Urbach & Ahlemann, 2010).

**Table 2.** Measurement model.

| <b>Construct/Dimension/Indicator</b>  | <b>Weight</b> | <b>Load</b> | <b>CR</b>    | <b>AVE</b>   |
|---|---------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| <b>Affective Motivation: Push Motivation (MOV_AF) (Composite, Mode A)</b>                                     |               |             | <b>0.807</b> | <b>0.603</b> |
| Leisure/Vacation  | 0.214*        | 0.785       |              |              |
| Relaxation/Escape   | 0.113*        | 0.723       |              |              |
| Excitement/Adventure  | 0.133*        | 0.822       |              |              |
| Affection and Sympathy of locals  | 0.341*        | 0.783       |              |              |
| Social  | 0.262*        | 0.771       |              |              |
| Prestige  | 0.141*        | 0.742       |              |              |
| <b>Cognitive Motivation: Prior Knowledge(MOV_CO) (Composite, Mode A)</b>                                      |               |             |              |              |
| History of the City   | 0.245*        | 0.824       | <b>0.901</b> | <b>0.705</b> |
| History of the University   | 0.326*        | 0.801       |              |              |
| Students' traditions  | 0.289*        | 0.789       |              |              |
| Coimbra Fado  | 0.128*        | 0.822       |              |              |
| Museums and Parks   | 0.121*        | 0.815       |              |              |
| <b>Objective Authenticity (OA) (Composite, Mode A)</b>  |               |             |              |              |
| Restoration of historic buildings respects the same style (Architecture, furniture, utensils, etc).           | 0.231*        | 0.831       | <b>0.922</b> | <b>0.677</b> |
| I liked the peculiarities about the interior design and furnishing  | 0.251*        | 0.843       |              |              |
| I liked the way the site blend with the attractive landscape, Scenery, historical ensemble, the town.         | 0.237*        | 0.851       |              |              |
| I liked the information about the site and I found it interesting.  | 0.253*        | 0.832       |              |              |
| <b>Existential Authenticity (EA) (Composite, Mode A)</b>  |               |             |              |              |
| I liked special arrangements, events, concerts, celebrations  | 0.231*        | 0.783       |              |              |
| Connected to the site   | 0.201*        | 0.783       | <b>0.885</b> | <b>0.658</b> |
| The visit provided a thorough insight into different historical Periods of the city.                          | 0.236*        | 0.768       |              |              |
| During the visit I sensed the related history, legends and Historical personalities                           | 0.231*        | 0.827       |              |              |
| I enjoyed a unique experience that allowed me to be in contact with Local people, their traditions and custom | 0.212*        | 0.831       |              |              |
| <b>Destination Image(second-order Composite, Mode B) (DI)</b>   |               |             | <b>n.a.</b>  | <b>n.a.</b>  |
| Qualitative of experience (Composite, Mode A)   | 0.342*        | 0.843       | <b>0.872</b> | <b>0.671</b> |
| Attractions (Composite, Mode A)   | 0.205*        | 0.835       | <b>0.892</b> | <b>0.722</b> |
| Value/Environment (Composite, Mode A)   | 0.293*        | 0.821       | <b>0.869</b> | <b>0.705</b> |
| Affective Image (Composite, Mode B)   | 0.367*        | 0.845       | <b>0.801</b> | <b>0.718</b> |
| <b>Behaviour Intention (Composite, Mode B) (BI)</b>   |               |             |              |              |
| Likelihood to visit Coimbra in the next 12 months   | 0.342*        | 0.856       | <b>0.832</b> | <b>0.725</b> |
| Intend to visit Coimbra in the next 12 month  | 0.316*        | 0.889       |              |              |
| Want to visit Coimbra   | 0.372*        | 0.903       |              |              |
| <b>UNESCO STATUS (Composite, Mode B) (US)</b>   |               |             | <b>0.886</b> | <b>0.795</b> |
| It improves the image of the city   | 0.334*        | 0.832       |              |              |
| It alerts for the need of conservation and monuments protection   | 0.372*        | 0.806       |              |              |
| It promotes the development of tourism  | 0.321*        | 0.817       |              |              |
| It contributes to the pride of residents  | 0.352*        | 0.857       |              |              |
| It encourages the networking of the various entities and operators  |               |             |              |              |

CR: Composite Reliability; AVE: Average Variance Extracted; \*p<0.001; n.a: not applicable for Composite Mode B

**Table 3.** First-stage measurement models.

|               | HTMT criteria |               |           |           |              |              |              | Fornell-Lacker criteria |               |               |              |              |              |              |              |              |
|---------------|---------------|---------------|-----------|-----------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
|               | <i>MOV_AF</i> | <i>MOV_CO</i> | <i>OA</i> | <i>EA</i> | <i>UN_ST</i> | <i>DI_QE</i> | <i>DI_AT</i> | <i>DI_V</i>             | <i>MOV_AF</i> | <i>MOV_CO</i> | <i>OA</i>    | <i>EA</i>    | <i>UN_ST</i> | <i>DI_QE</i> | <i>DI_AT</i> | <i>DI_V</i>  |
| <i>MOV_AF</i> |               |               |           |           |              |              |              |                         | <b>0.853</b>  |               |              |              |              |              |              |              |
| <i>MOV_CO</i> | 0.622         |               |           |           |              |              |              |                         | 0.413         | <b>0.817</b>  |              |              |              |              |              |              |
| <i>OA</i>     | 0.643         | 0.768         |           |           |              |              |              |                         | 0.433         | 0.523         | <b>0.880</b> |              |              |              |              |              |
| <i>EA</i>     | 0.789         | 0.739         | 0.783     |           |              |              |              |                         | 0.329         | 0.509         | 0.762        | <b>0.874</b> |              |              |              |              |
| <i>UN_ST</i>  | 0.657         | 0.629         | 0.789     | 0.728     |              |              |              |                         | 0.237         | 0.638         | 0.682        | 0.667        | <b>0.887</b> |              |              |              |
| <i>DI_QE</i>  | 0.698         | 0.697         | 0.747     | 0.767     | 0.727        |              |              |                         | 0.661         | 0.538         | 0.567        | 0.667        | 0.727        | <b>0.883</b> |              |              |
| <i>DI_AT</i>  | 0.734         | 0.729         | 0.742     | 0.695     | 0.627        | 0.720        |              |                         | 0.554         | 0.439         | 0.573        | 0.698        | 0.747        | 0.756        | <b>0.868</b> |              |
| <i>DI_V</i>   | 0.684         | 0.704         | 0.723     | 0.726     | 0.719        | 0.723        | 0.705        |                         | 0.534         | 0.414         | 0.441        | 0.576        | 0.719        | 0.765        | 0.635        | <b>0.854</b> |
| <i>DI_AF</i>  | 0.688         | 0.713         | 0.728     | 0.789     | 0.704        | 0.713        | 0.774        | 0.720                   | 0.688         | 0.560         | 0.423        | 0.689        | 0.704        | 0.693        | 0.674        | 0.689        |

Notes: Discriminant validity (HTMT<sub>85</sub>). First-Stage Measurement Models. Discriminant validity.

*MOV\_AF*: Affective Attitude; *MOV\_CO*: Cognitive Attitude; *OA*: Objective Authenticity; *EA*: Existential Authenticity; *UN\_S*: UNESCO Status. *DI\_QE*: Destination Image Quality of Experience; *DI\_AT*: Destination Image Attractions; *DI\_V*: Destination Image Value/environment; *DI\_A*: Destination Image affective.

Diagonal elements (bold)(Fornell-Lacker criteria) are the square root of the variance shared between the constructs and their measures (AVE). Off-diagonal are the correlations among constructs.

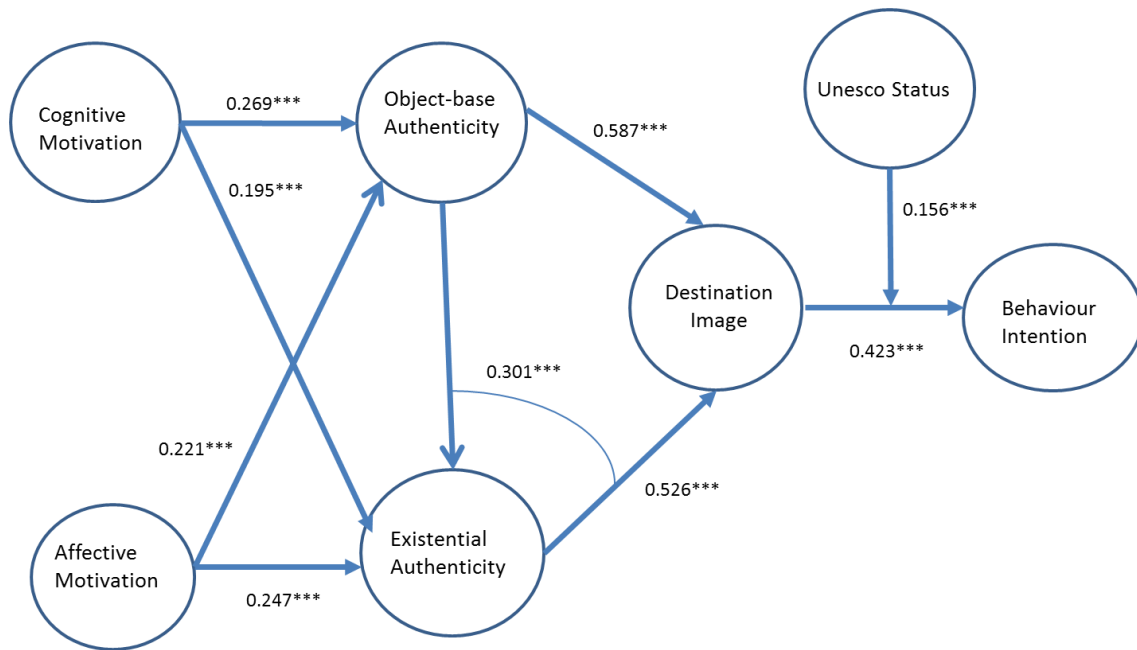
### 4.3. Structural Model

First, the SRMR is obtained to assess the structural model. The SRMR value is below the cut-off value of 0.08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999), which means the goodness-of-fit of the overall performance of the PLS models is adequate. Then, the path coefficients, the  $f^2$  values, the  $R^2$  and  $Q^2$  of endogenous latent variables, are assessed. Additionally, the bootstrapping procedure with 5000 resamples (Hair et al., 2011) was used to generate t-statistics, together with the percentile bootstrap 95% confidence interval (Chin, 2010) to evaluate the statistical significance of the path coefficients.

**Table 4.** Structural Model Estimates.

|  | Coeff.<br>Direct effect | t-value | Direct Effect |                     | $f^2$ | Supported |
|--|-------------------------|---------|---------------|---------------------|-------|-----------|
|  |                         |         | p-val         | Conf. Interval      |       |           |
| <b>Objective Authenticity</b>                                |                         |         |               |                     |       |           |
| R <sup>2</sup> =0.358  |                         |         |               |                     |       |           |
| Q <sup>2</sup> =0.213  |                         |         |               |                     |       |           |
| H1a(+): Cognitive motivation→Object-base Authenticity        | 0.269                   | 2.95    | 0.002         | 0.170-0.355         | 0.153 | Yes       |
| H1b (+): Affective motivation→Object-base Authenticity       | 0.221                   | 2.89    | 0.002         | 0.143-0.348         | 0.124 | Yes       |
| <b>Existential Authenticity</b>                              |                         |         |               |                     |       |           |
| R <sup>2</sup> =0.520  |                         |         |               |                     |       |           |
| Q <sup>2</sup> =0.247  |                         |         |               |                     |       |           |
| H1c(+):Cognitive motivation→Existential Authenticity         | 0.195                   | 2.65    | 0.002         | 0.009-0.289         | 0.174 | Yes       |
| H1d(+): Affective motivation→ Existential Authenticity       | 0.247                   | 3.79    | 0.000         | 0.094-0.288         | 0.173 | Yes       |
| <b>Destination Image</b>                                     |                         |         |               |                     |       |           |
| R <sup>2</sup> =0.569  |                         |         |               |                     |       |           |
| Q <sup>2</sup> =0.336  |                         |         |               |                     |       |           |
| H2a(+): Object-base Authenticity→Destination Image           | 0.587                   | 6.12    | 0.000         | 0.321-0.693         | 0.254 | Yes       |
| H 2b (+): OA→EA→Destination Image                            | 0.301                   | 4.23    | 0.000         | 0.241-0.453         | 0.187 | Yes       |
| H2c(+): Existential Authenticity→Destination Image           | 0.526                   | 7.65    | 0.000         | 0.383-0.651         | 0.237 | Yes       |
| <b>Behaviour Intention</b>                                   |                         |         |               |                     |       |           |
| R <sup>2</sup> =0.565  |                         |         |               |                     |       |           |
| Q <sup>2</sup> =0.313  |                         |         |               |                     |       |           |
| H3a(+): Destination Image→Behaviour Intention                | 0.423                   | 5.83    | 0.000         | 0.218-0.541         | 0.263 | Yes       |
| H3b(+): Destination Image* Unesco Status→Behaviour Intention | 0.156                   | 2.64    | 0.004         | 0.072-0.304         | 0.276 | Yes       |
| <b>Indirect Effect</b>                                       |                         |         |               |                     |       |           |
| <b>Indirect relations</b>                                    |                         |         |               |                     |       |           |
|  | Coeff. Indirect effect  | t value | p-value       | Confidence Interval |       |           |
| <b>Destination Image</b>                                     |                         |         |               |                     |       |           |
| H1e (+):Cognitive motivation→OA→ Destination Image           | 0.1579                  | 3.324   | 0.000         | [0.062;0.195]       |       |           |
| H2d(+):Affective attitude→OA→Destination Image               | 0.1297                  | 3.091   | 0.000         | [0.057;0.256]       |       |           |
| H1f(+):Cognitive motivation→EA→Destination Image             | 0.1026                  | 2.88    | 0.000         | [0.048; 0.161]      |       |           |
| H1g(+):Affective motivation→EA→Destination Image             | 0.1299                  | 3.54    | 0.000         | [0.673, 0.1821]     |       |           |

\*p<0.001. Bootstrapping based on n=5000 subsamples. A one-tailed test for a t-Student distribution is applied for direct and mediation effects. .  
CI- bias corrected 95% confidence interval based on 5000 bootstrap subsamples.



**Figure 2.** Estimated Model

From Table 4 and Figure 2, t-statistic, p-values, and confidence intervals show the statistical significance of the main (or direct) effects and the mediating (or indirect) effects in the research model.

Focusing on the main (direct) effects, the following results have been achieved: cognitive motivations based on prior-knowledge influence positively the objective authenticity ( $\beta=0.269$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Affective motivations toward visiting Coimbra as a WHS exert a positive and significant influence on the perception of the objective authenticity ( $\beta=0.221$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Similarly, cognitive positively influences the perception of the existential authenticity ( $\beta=0.195$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), and affective motivation positively influences the perception of the existential authenticity ( $\beta=0.247$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Hence, hypotheses H1a and H1b are confirmed. A positive and significant effect of objective authenticity on destination image ( $\beta=0.587$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and existential authenticity on destination image are also observed ( $\beta=0.526$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Thus, hypotheses H2a and H2b are supported. A favourable destination image when visiting Coimbra positively influences the tourists' future behavioural intention as expected ( $\beta=0.423$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). In addition, Coimbra's UNESCO status exerts a positive and moderating effect in the relation established between destination image and future behavioural intention ( $\beta=0.156$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Therefore, hypotheses H3a and H3b are confirmed.

Table 4 also reports the mediating (indirect) relationships in the model as the product of the coefficients of each of the causal relationships in the mediating chain (Hayes, Preacher, &

Myers, 2011). Based on the one-tailed t-test, the indirect effect of objective authenticity (OA) through existential authenticity (EA) on destination image (DesImage) is significant:  $OA \rightarrow EA \rightarrow \text{DesImage}$  ( $\beta=0.301$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Hypothesis H2c is supported. Cognitive motivation (CM) towards visiting Coimbra positively influences destination image through objective authenticity:  $CM \rightarrow OA \rightarrow \text{DesImage}$  ( $\beta=0.1579$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Affective motivations (AM) towards visiting Coimbra positively influence destination image through objective authenticity:  $AM \rightarrow OA \rightarrow \text{DesImage}$  ( $\beta=0.1579$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Hypotheses H2d and H2e are confirmed. Likewise, cognitive motivations towards visiting Coimbra positively influence destination image through existential authenticity:  $CM \rightarrow EA \rightarrow \text{DesImage}$  ( $\beta=0.1026$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Furthermore, affective motivations towards visiting Coimbra positively influence destination image through existential authenticity:  $AM \rightarrow EA \rightarrow \text{DesImage}$  ( $\beta =0.1299$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Hypotheses H2f and H2g are supported.

In addition, the main effects have  $f^2$  values above the medium effect of 0.15, as suggested by Cohen (1992). The research model also displays an appropriate predictive power (in-sample prediction) for the endogenous variables, since the  $Q^2$  values are larger than zero (Hair et al., 2016).

Additionally, the predictive performance of the model checked the robustness of the results achieved. The predictive performance of a model is based on the accuracy of predictions from new observations, that are not the hold-in sample, used to estimate the model path coefficients. The study employed the PLS predict algorithm in SmartPLS software to evaluate the model predictive relevance, both at the endogenous construct and constructs' indicator levels (Shmueli et al., 2016). Table 5 displays the root mean squared error (RMSE), the mean absolute error (MAE) and  $Q^2$  values at the endogenous constructs level. Those values at the indicator values are assessed but not displayed due to the number of indicators. Findings show positive  $Q^2$  values and low prediction errors, based on RMSE and MAE for both at the construct level, as presented in Table 5 and at the indicator levels. Thus, the model presents a satisfactory predictive performance, supporting the robustness of the results achieved.

**Table 5.** Model Predictive Relevance

| <b>Endogenous construct</b> | <b>RMSE</b> | <b>MAE</b> | <b>Q<sup>2</sup>_predict</b> |
|-----------------------------|-------------|------------|------------------------------|
| Objective authenticity      | 0.675       | 0.485      | 0.560                        |
| Existential authenticity    | 0.626       | 0.481      | 0.601                        |
| Destination Image           | 0.758       | 0.564      | 0.388                        |
| Behaviour Intention         | 0.535       | 0.458      | 0.327                        |

## **5. Discussion and Implications**

The paper responds to a call in tourism literature to investigate the relationships between motivation, authenticity, destination image, UNESCO status and behavioural intention, from a cognitive and affective approach at different stages of a visit (Bagri & Kala, 2016; Piramanayagam, Rathore & Seal, 2020). The present research observes that certain aspects related to a heritage destination, such as prior knowledge of the place, tourists' affective motivation toward the place, its authenticity, its favourable image and its UNESCO status, appear to be essential for the development and sustainability of a World Heritage Site (Bagri & Kala, 2016; Pavlić, Portolan & Puh, 2017).

The findings show that cognitive and affective travel motivation factors have a direct and significant influence on how the authenticity of a WHS is perceived from an objective (object-based) and a subjective (existential) approach, and on perceived destination image. This finding supports previous studies, which revealed a significant and high correlation between travel attitude (motivation) and perceived authenticity (Lin & Liu, 2018; Submitter, Chang & Kuo, 2019), between travel motivations and destination image (Pan et al., 2014; Khan et al., 2017; Arya, Sharma, Sethi, Verma & Shiva, 2018), and between authenticity and destination image (Shams, 2016; Jiang, Ramkissoon, Mavondo & Feng, 2017). Moreover, this paper goes beyond previous studies by analysing these relationships jointly at different stages of a visit, to understand tourist behavioural intention after the visit.

Although the influence of UNESCO WHS status has been analysed through a direct or main effect on the destination image before the visit and, therefore, on the choice of destination (Hamid, Abdulla & Lee, 2018), the present research has focused on the moderating effect of UNESCO status on the destination image, as formed during the visit and future behavioural intention. Furthermore, the mediating effect of the two dimensions of authenticity on the

relation between travel motivations and destination image has not been explored in tourism literature so far. The results showed positive and significant mediating effects of both cognitive (object-based) and affective authenticity (existential authenticity), on the relationships between cognitive motivation (prior-knowledge), and between affective motivation and destination image.

### **5.1 Theoretical implications**

There are some theoretical implications that arise from this study. In tourism research, prior knowledge appears to be a vital driver, capable of influencing tourists' decision to travel. However, the relevance of prior knowledge, defined as tourists' familiarity with the attraction or place, achieved by means of acquired information before the visit (Park, Mothersbaugh & Feick, 1994; Kerstetter & Cho, 2004; Gursoy & McCleary, 2004b), has not been sufficiently explored in literature. This paper highlights, in particular, the role played by familiarity, as a dimension of prior knowledge, due to the specific information it provides tourists about target attractions (object-based authenticity), and determining their preference for a certain tourist destination (Ho, Lin, & Chen, 2012; Chen, Shang & Li, 2014).

This paper also highlights the relevance of authenticity in its cognitive and affective dimensions, when analysing its influence on tourist behavioural intention. Unlike other research (Naoi, 2004; Lu et al., 2015), this paper highlights the influence of both cognitive and affective authenticity on the mental construction process of destination image. Although there is not a single and universal way of measuring tourism destination image in tourism literature, this study employs a multidimensional approach that includes both the cognitive/perceptive and affective aspects of destination image (Kim & Park, 2015) to reach a better comprehension of tourists' behaviour, with the aim of developing the potential pull of a tourism destination.

The UNESCO status attributed to World Heritage Sites has been considered in academic literature as a valuable indicator, that gives tourists good expectations of potential memorable experiences (King & Halpenny, 2014; Hamid, Abdullah & Lee, 2018; Lee, Phau & Quintal, 2018). Despite the relevance of understanding WHS status, and specifically, the potential influences that it might exert on tourists' expectations and, therefore, on their subsequent visit intention to certain tourism destination with the UNESCO designation, scholars have increasingly revealed complex relationships among the above variables, particularly, between these, tourism demand and WHS status (Halpenny et al, 2018). This paper answers this appeal to provide better knowledge of the role of WHS status during the "on site" stage of the visit,



through its moderating effect on the destination image and, hence, on its influence on future behavioural intention.

Even though the relationships involved in the research model, such as travel motivation and authenticity, travel motivation and destination image, and authenticity and destination image, have been examined in similar contexts (Lu, Chi and Li, 2015; Domínguez-Quintero, González-Rodríguez and Paddison, 2020), the present research analyses all of those relationships in the research model proposed. Thus, the present research model is an attempt to consider simultaneously different stages of the visit: the “pre-visit” and “on site” stages of a visit. Furthermore, those relations have not been analysed using cognitive and affective approach for those variables. As seen from the results, both cognitive and affective dimensions of travel motivation and authenticity are relevant to destination image, as defined as a composite with cognitive and affective elements, which in turn will influence the future behavioral intention at the post-visit stage.

The mediating effect of object-based authenticity and existential authenticity on the relationship between travel attitude and perceived destination image has not been studied so far in tourism literature. This paper, therefore, has contributed to a better understanding of the direct and indirect effects of the perceived authenticity in the construction of the destination image, as well as the moderating effect of UNESCO status on destination image, which undoubtedly explains the mechanism to adopt a positive behavioral intention after the visit.

## **5.2 Managerial Implications**

There are several managerial implications derived from the research. Despite the aforementioned increase in visitor numbers since the year of the UNESCO classification, the problem of how to retain tourists in the city for a long stay remains. Nevertheless, the average stay continues to be around 1.5 days. This means that DMOs still have a role to play in the strategic and sustainable planning of destination management, through anticipating scenarios and reacting accordingly. These organisations’ main goal is to foster economic growth with an integrated approach, that takes into consideration resident communities and tourist interests, which implies being able to foresee and meet market opportunities.

In the case under study, there are four DMOs that have to coordinate and share a vision for all the stakeholders involved and aim towards collective interest: The National Tourism Association, Turismo do Centro (Regional DMO), Turismo de Coimbra (local / municipal DMO), and Turismo da Universidade de Coimbra (site DMO). These organisations facilitate

dialogue between stakeholders and above all function as a vehicle for competing and attracting visitors to a differentiated space, achieving an competitive advantage for tourist destinations.

The increase in visitor numbers demonstrates that the UNESCO seal is a powerful motivation factor in attracting tourists, as it also acts as an authenticity warrant. Moreover, the results of the survey confirm that UNESCO's designation also improves the image of the city and advocates conservation and protection of monuments. Furthermore, the results also show that tourists value participatory activities (theatre, music, dance, exhibitions), and if there were a stronger activity offering, it would take them more time to engage in such activities, which would make their stay longer. At the same time, both those programs and other cultural activities, such as guided tour visits that enhance personal knowledge and valorise heritage, that can be participated in *in situ*, as well as broadcast or streamed in view of the pandemic situation, is certainly a line of action to be followed.

Special attention should be paid to authenticity perceived in objects, artefacts and customs, as well as interactions with the local community and the environment that surrounds visitors, because it will undoubtedly influence the perceived WHS image. During the visit, efforts must be focused on providing an unbeatable cultural experience, through the perceived authenticity on how buildings are faithfully restored and how heritage blends with the town in harmony. Universal design must be present in the access and communication of the emblematic sites, which allow visitors to immerse themselves in different times with detailed and accurate information. For those sites that are not accessible due to architectural or heritage reasons, applications based on augmented reality or virtual reality might be used to be enjoyed by everyone. Furthermore, the visitor experience would improve if DMOs joined efforts to integrate visitors with local people, their traditions and customs and promoted a relaxed and respectful environment.

The current Covid-19 pandemic and all that evolved from it, economically, socially and politically, has further increased the use of innovation and technologies in tourism. The aim is to keep tourists motivated to travel, by generating prior knowledge of a heritage destination, and helping to construct a favourable destination image (Hosteltur.com). The new scenario from COVID-19 has given stronger evidence that generating motivations (cognitive and affective) and a preconceived idea of the authenticity of the place to visit in WHS, as well as the construction of a destination image is essential to promote the site. Promotion of the UNESCO WHS through the use of disruptive technologies, both in advance as well as during the stay, especially under the health crisis scenario, has gained a high degree of acceptance by

potential tourists. In fact, these technologies would provide potential tourists prior knowledge about the UNESCO site, aiming to keep the desire to travel alive through cognitive and affective motivations before the visit, and to offer new ways of enjoyment while at a destination, in spite of the current restrictive mobility measures imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Design the right strategies will undoubtedly give visitors prior knowledge and help form a favourable destination image through the perception of authenticity, which in turn will influence future behavioural intentions to re-visit or to visit other UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Tourist managers would also be able to boost authenticity perception through innovative concepts that help tourists have memorable experiences, which leads to a better destination image and higher likelihood that they will re-visit (Moutinho et al., 2012; Han, tom Dieck and Jung, 2018; González-Rodríguez et al, 2020b).

## **6. Limitations of this study and suggestions for future research**

Further research to consider the affective and cognitive dimensions of the variables, as well as the different stages of a visit, is of great relevance for DMOs with regard to promotion and providing visitors with memorable experiences, and in turn stimulating the demand for cultural tourism.

The analysis of the causal relationships involved in the research model has been restricted to the city of Coimbra and therefore limits the generalisation of the study's findings. Future research that might test the relationships explored in the research model with other UNESCO World Heritage Sites is necessary. A multigroup analysis could be employed to detect differences across UNESCO World Heritage Sites, relating to the influence of the affective and cognitive dimensions of motivation on the perception of authenticity and destination image. Furthermore, differences in the moderating effect of the WHS status on the relation between destination image and behavioral intention could be also analysed.

Recognising differences in the cognitive and affective dimensions at different stages of the visit and across cultures might help to extend the generalisability of the model. This may also offer insightful information to DMOs for appropriately managing a UNESCO WHS from the beginning to the end of the visit, to meet visitors' expectations, adjusting the offering and customising visitors' experience.

To conclude, we would like to highlight that the data was collected before the Covid-19 outbreak. We consider that the current scenario of the tourism sector opens a research line to understand how this affects motivation (cognitive and affective) to visit a heritage destination,

as well as the experience in terms of authenticity perception, destination image when visiting a destination under health restrictions and the behavioural intention if the health crisis continues. The Covid-19 context may be cause to extend the research model by incorporating new variables and new relationships that have emerged that can influence our research aims and findings.

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