

# The World Heritage Brand and Tourism: An Approach to the Historic Centre of São Luís, Brazil - Heritage Tourism Marketing

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## Abstract:

This study considers the relationship between tourism and historic centres highlighting UNESCO World Heritage Sites. It points out that despite the acronym, WHS (World Heritage Site) was not created with the aim of promoting tourism, it emerged as a highly desired brand with which countries could position themselves in the tourist market. The purpose of this paper is to deepen the discussion of a common vision that world heritage status increases patterns of demand and tourist flow, contextualising the analysis from the reality of a developing country. The empirical reference is the historic centre of São Luís, an island destination in northeast Brazil, whose Portuguese influence in terms of colonial buildings gave it the title of World Heritage Site in 1997. In order to see whether the World Heritage label has had significant influence on the site as a destiny choice, this research develops an analysis of tourist flows in the years 2010 and 2015 that is based on secondary data. It investigates the origin, motivation and influence of national and international travel that occurred in these periods. The results indicate that despite the tag, there were no remarkable changes in variables. These data are especially relevant when discussing marketing issues, the promotion of destinations linked to major brands, and their potential for attracting tourist flows.

**Keywords:** Historic Centres; Tourism; Development; Marketing; World Heritage

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**Resumo:**

Este estudo considera a relação entre turismo e centros históricos enfatizando os patrimónios mundiais da UNESCO. Destaca que apesar da sigla WHS (World Heritage Site) não ter sido criada com objetivo de promoção do turismo, ela emergiu como uma marca altamente desejada pelos países para se posicionarem no mercado turístico. O objetivo do trabalho é aprofundar a discussão de uma visão comum de que o status de património mundial aumenta os padrões de procura e fluxo turístico, contextualizando a análise na realidade de um país em desenvolvimento. A referência empírica é o centro histórico de São Luís, um destino insular na região nordeste do Brasil, cuja influência portuguesa de suas construções coloniais lhe conferiu o título de património mundial em 1997. A fim de verificar se a marca património mundial teve influência na escolha do sítio como destino, esta pesquisa desenvolve uma análise do fluxo turístico nos anos de 2010 e 2015 baseada em dados secundários. Ele investiga a origem, motivação e a influência das viagens nacionais e internacionais nestes dois períodos. Os resultados indicam que apesar da marca, não se verificaram mudanças assinaláveis nas variáveis analisadas. Estes dados são especialmente relevantes quando se discutem as questões de marketing e promoção de destinos vinculados a grandes marcas e ao seu potencial de atração de fluxos turísticos.

**Palavras-chave:** Centros Históricos; Turismo; Desenvolvimento; Marketing; Património Mundial

**Resumen:**

Este estudio considera la relación entre el turismo y los centros históricos realizando los Lugares declarados Patrimonio de la Humanidad por la UNESCO. Señala que a pesar de que el acrónimo WHS (World Heritage Site) no fue creado con el objetivo de promover el turismo, éste ha emergido como una marca altamente deseada por países que quieren posicionarse en el mercado del turismo. El objetivo de este artículo es profundizar una discusión sobre una visión común de que el estatus del patrimonio mundial aumenta los patrones de demanda y el flujo turístico, centralizando el análisis en la realidad de un país emergente. La referencia empírica es el centro histórico de San Luis, un destino turístico isleño en el noreste de Brasil cuya influencia portuguesa en términos de construcciones coloniales le permitió obtener el título de Patrimonio Mundial en el año 1997. Con el objetivo de comprobar si hubo una influencia significativa de la denominación Patrimonio Mundial en la selección del destino, el estudio desarrolla un análisis del flujo turístico del año 2010 al año 2015 basado en datos secundarios. Dicho estudio investiga

el origen, la motivación y la influencia de viajes nacionales e internacionales que han tenido lugar durante este período de tiempo. Los resultados indican que, a pesar de la denominación, no hubo cambios destacables en las variables. Estos datos son especialmente relevantes cuando se discuten asuntos relacionados con el marketing y la promoción de los destinos ligados a marcas principales y sus potenciales para atraer flujos turísticos.

**Palabras Clave:** Centros Históricos; Turismo; Desarrollo; Marketing; Patrimonio Mundial

## 1. Introduction

Discussions of tourism in cities and historic centres undoubtedly involves talking about a period of economic wealth, decline and revitalization, where tourism has the potential to meet the overall objective of heritage conservation, economic and social development and improvement in the living conditions of the population. It is this type of development of the old urban centres that can realise the kind of relationship with tourism industry. This baseline is intended to provide an appropriate context into which some World Heritage sites are inserted, and whose position in the rankings have been increasing worldwide. Currently, the list of UNESCO World Heritage sites consists of 1,031 properties, of which 802 are classified as cultural properties. In the Ibero-American countries, approximately 30 properties are listed as inheritances in the categories of centre, neighbourhood, district or historical city, of which six are in Brazil (UNESCO, 2015a). These data allow us to discuss approaches and practices in the context of countries with similar historical and cultural roots, thus intending to contribute to the solution of urgent problems — often with many dimensions — in areas that the tourism phenomenon reaches. In this sense this study focuses on the debate about the tourist reality of the named “historic centres”, whose expression only makes sense due to the expansion of new spaces in cities (Peixoto, 2003) and the consequent abandonment and degradation of urban central areas.

It is important to note that although the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted in 1972, has focused on the encouragement, identification, protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage (UNESCO, 1972), the label of World Heritage Site (WHS) has been widely used as a way to stimulate socio-economic development (Jha, 2005). Thus, to contribute to the planning and management of tourism, particularly in the marketing and promotion of destinations, this research discusses the issue raised in some studies that refers to the potential of the UNESCO classification to increase the

number of tourists. As such, it facilitates further discussion about the case of São Luís, whose historic centre was classified as a World Heritage Site in 1997. To this end, this paper uses secondary data to show the tourism performance of the city following the UNESCO classification. The methodology employs an analysis of tourism flows for the years 2010 and 2015 and extends this debate by presenting the results of the development of tourism in this destination.

Located in the northeast of Brazil, the city of São Luís, the capital of the Maranhão State, has a population of 1,014,837 inhabitants, according to Brazilian Institute of Geography and Tourism (IBGE, 2010). In addition to the capital of Maranhão, the island also includes the municipal districts of São José de Ribamar, Paço do Lumiar and Raposa. Its economy is based on the aluminium processing industry, food, tourism and services. Its French foundation, the Dutch occupation, and Portuguese rule resulted in a city with a historical centre covering a preserved area of 250 ha caused by the urban expansion into the neighbourhood of Praia Grande. This original core of the city dates from the early 17th century and it integrates the area recognised by UNESCO along with other adjacent neighbourhoods. The maritime trade and port functions are the basis of the city's development. The entire heritage collection, mostly civil architecture, was built when the State of Maranhão played an important role in the economic production of the country during the 18th and 19th centuries. The city of São Luís was recognised as the fourth most prosperous area after Rio de Janeiro, Salvador, and Recife (Spix and Martius, 1828 cited in Silva, 2010). However, the 20th century began with a long period of economic stagnation that somehow preserved the rectangular design of its streets and the Pombaline structures of its architecture. These details led UNESCO to consider São Luís "an excellent example of Iberian colonial city" (UNESCO, 2015b).

The study is divided into six sections. The first concentrates on the origins of the central concepts of the historical city, the process of evolution, further economic decline, and the potential for regeneration through tourism, and emphasises the creation and aims of the World Heritage Convention in 1972. The second section discusses competitiveness in tourism, the reasons for inclusion in the World Heritage List, and presents an overview of the state of the art on WHS status and the number of tourists. The third section presents some challenges related to the development of tourism in these locations and summarises the major problems in São Luís. The fourth presents the methodological aspects of the study, and the fifth refers to the empirical results. Finally, the sixth and last section presents the main conclusions.

## 2. The idea of the historical centre and city

To understand the relation between tourism and the centres or historical cities, and the context in which the two concepts and their current perspectives are formed, it is necessary to make some initial observations. The city centre, as the word suggests, usually has a central location in relation to the inhabited areas or the existing facilities. It also has defined and visible geographical boundaries and has a concentration of important shops, significant trading stores, and companies and civic administration seats. It is a main place for meetings, exchanges and information, which gives it a geographical, economic and social centrality (Salgueiro, 2005 cited in Sebastião, 2010). It is characterised by the density and quality of its functions and is therefore a concept that expresses content rather than shape (Freire Chico, 2008).

Given the large expansion of cities, scholars have broadened the concept of the centre to include larger spaces or has replaced the concept by using expressions such as old area or consolidated space (Fernandes, 2011). Other designations, such as old urban centre, old downtown areas, historic core or traditional centre, are used in the representation of these areas. According to Peixoto (2003: 213) the expression *historic centre*, “only makes sense given the prominence and centrality of new urban spaces”. In an attempt to define the concept of “historic”, the CHARTER OF WASHINGTON (1986) states that all cities are historical, leading to what is seen as “a concept in crisis” (Fernandes, 2011: 13), the use of which should be discontinued despite the fact that in 2011 the UNESCO General Conference adopted the term “historic urban landscape”, thus reinforcing the use of the word (UNESCO, 2011).

As for the space that is conventionally referred to as the historical city, this mostly only contains its old core foundation, recognised as a historic centre, that is, the oldest area that as a consequence of successive urban expansions has become the centre of the modern city. To better distinguish the two, many researchers have used the term “historical city” — as opposed to the contemporary city. As stated by Ashworth and Tunbridge (2000, cited in Peixoto, 2003: 217) (...) the dominant *ethos* of the city is historical in nature as opposed to modern. Its historic centre (...) “refers to a circumscribed and limited area where are located the sources of this *ethos* and festive manifestations, aesthetic and emblematic of his statement”. Figure 1 highlights the urban expansion of the historic centre of the São Luís.



**Figure 1. Historic centre of São Luís and the urban expansion**

Source: SETUR, 2015

### **2.1 The decline of the historic centres, tourism and the World Heritage Convention**

In the second half of the 20th century the development of decentralisation forces profoundly altered the composition and functions of the historical areas of cities. From the 1950s, what had once been the landmarks of the city were changed by the explosion of suburbanisation (Sebastião, 2010). However, the decline of the historical areas of cities has become more pronounced since the 1970s with advances in transport and communications technology. Substantial changes have been observed in economic and social organisation and, therefore, in the modes of production and land use. At the same time, manifest problems have arisen with the displacement of the population to the periphery and the consequent desertification of public space, the degradation of built-up sites, the use of housing for social strata with lower purchasing power, and residential use being replaced by administrative activities and the proliferation of night-time entertainment. There has also been an increase of areas with obsolete or incompatible activities, inadequate urban fabric for car use, parking difficulties and the creation of pedestrian zones, urban interventions in dissonance with the environment, and the discontinuity of urban policies. Consequently, we have witnessed the loss of competitiveness in the central areas due to new services, specialised trade, and modern accessibility in peripheral areas (Freire Chico, 2008; Salgueiro, 1998; Sebastião, 2010). As a result of these factors, the old zones have ceased to be the commercial, financial and political centres of the city (Gil, 2011), and as the importance of these centres decreases, public and private investment in them also reduces. Thus, there a degradation of heritage and identity has occurred in these centres (Queirós, 2007).

All these factors have led to the loss of hegemony and the decline of the ancient historic centres. One of the most visible manifestations of the problems is their physical and functional obsolescence (NORMS OF QUITO, 1977), with the consequent decentralisation of capital and new investments and developments in suburban areas. These ancient areas find themselves confronted with a huge lack of versatility to allow improvements in the quality of services for both citizens and businesses (Freire Chico, 2008). However, although they have lost some of their attractiveness in terms of functional, economic, and social change, and have also become less accessible than other areas, the historic centres will always be seen as the old town, and this explains the most striking element of the historic centre: its symbolic image (Cavém, 2007). As Peixoto explains (2003: 212–213), “the more accentuated are the changes, and more visible are the effects of urbanization, greater the sense of loss and the temptation to imagine a harmonious past that supposedly would have happened in the historic centres”. He adds that, “any heritage consciousness manifests itself from a rupture trauma. It is a reaction against the risk of disappearance, but that brings with it the goal of promoting regeneration”. One begins to accept the idea of protecting the past and safeguarding acquired knowledge (Bessière, 2013), and it is no wonder that the policies of heritage conservation in Brazil had more visibility during the Modern Art Week in full modernist movement of 1922 (Silva, 2010).

Parallel to these changes, we have attested to the need to reverse the trend of abandonment of the historic centres. Interventions in the central urban areas have intensified in order to retrieve the urban centre, to gain visibility, to attract people and investments. Driven by its economic value, its social, cultural and symbolic function, heritage becomes the centre of public policies and development projects (Gil, 2011). The central areas begin to attract the interests of capital again, either via the existing infrastructure, or by the strategic positioning of the urban fabric, or even the possibility of adding economic value to the architectural heritage, that was often preserved by the very abandonment or go to live on the margins the most progressive views of the city (Luchiari, 2005). There is now a return to the city centre, and the government has become the main catalyst in this process (Díaz-Parra, 2015). New functions and services are encouraged, and tourism appears as an agent of change in terms of heritage conservation, economic and social development, and the creation of identities (Bandyopadhyay, Morais and Chick, 2008; Nadj, Ismail, Yunos and Maulan, 2015). Figure 2 shows the dense concentration of typical buildings in Giz Street and some of them were revitalized.



**Figure 2. Typical buildings in Giz Street**

Source: SETUR/MA, 2015

It is in this scenario of the decline of historic urban centres and urban regeneration initiatives that in 1972 UNESCO established the Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage. Significant losses in the context of post-World War II stimulated concern with safeguarding the urban heritage. However, the triggering of this Convention is linked to the Aswan Dam, whose construction by the government of Egypt in 1959 would flood a valley with treasures of the ancient civilization. UNESCO launched a world campaign culminating in the removal of the Abu Simbel temples. In 1965 the idea of a World Heritage was first proposed during a conference at the White House in the US, where the term was coined (Allais, 2013, cited in Meskell, Liuzza, Bertacchini and Saccone, 2015). The idea of the Convention is that there are places of exceptional universal value — the main evaluation parameter that justifies inclusion on the World Heritage List — that, once they have met the conditions of integrity and authenticity, are integrated into a protection system and are subject to proper management. They must also meet at least one of the ten proposed assessment criteria. Criteria I to VI are related to cultural goods. São Luís was awarded three of the criteria, outnumbering other cultural sites in the country. The fifth criterion states that the site must (...) be an outstanding example of traditional human settlement (...) especially when it becomes vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change (UNESCO, 2015c).



## 2.2 Competitiveness in tourism and the world heritage brand

Consumption has become an integral part of cities and this has been reflected in the changes that have taken place. In this context, the cultural heritage has been used as a strategic element in the competition between places. The historic centres have become special places that relate to the origins of cities and are transformed into scenarios for consumption and for the leisure needs of contemporary society (Silva and Silva, 2010). However, it is not only the functional aspect that needs to be explored, but also the psychological dimension of the place (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991, 1993).

Competitiveness in the tourism sector has been generally understood as the ability of a destination to attract and satisfy tourists (Enright and Newton, 2004), leading to the positioning of cities in consumer markets, usually from the perspective of increasing the number of visitors. Within this approach, the components that determine the competitiveness of the places must be carefully designed. In this respect, the extent of tourism and the diversity on offer seem to compromise the evolution and the competitiveness of tourism destinations.

Driven by the need for competition, the urban centres are investing in imaging processes and branding. Planners have struggled to promote locations by highlighting well-known icons and landmarks (Richards and Wilson, 2006). As a symbolic resource, the brand has been used to differentiate cities through marketing policies and management cultural tourism flows (Guerreiro, 2008). In the case of the historic centres, the "time dimension tends to be used as a strategic element in promoting the site, particularly its patrimonial, historical and monumental resources" (Cavém, 2007:33). In this context Ryan and Silvanto (2011:306) posit that the WHS designation "has emerged as a highly valued brand used by countries in their efforts to market themselves as tourist destinations". Yet, in spite of not being created with the objective of promoting tourism, the acronym WHS has been widely used in national marketing campaigns (Yang, Lin and Han, 2010). According Ekern, Logan, Sauge and Sinding-Larsen (2012), the brand is highly marketable, and "it serves as a substitute for missing knowledge by attesting that the WHS is the real thing" (Ryan and Silvanto, 2011: 308-309).

There are several reasons for the inclusion of properties on the World Heritage List. Some World Heritage sites emerge as a celebration of well-preserved culture. Some have used the title as a branding or marketing strategy to attract visitors to historical sites, and others use the designation as an alarm for a heritage at risk. Finally, the label is used as "placemaking" or catalyst for socio-economic development, where the valued heritage contributes to enhancing and developing identities of place and/or actions for desired changes (Rebanks Consulting Ltd,

2009 cited in Kaltenborn, Thomassen, Wold, Linnell and Skar, 2013). According to information in the nomination dossier to UNESCO, in São Luís the interest has focused on the conservation of architectural heritage, despite the intensive use of the World Heritage designation in promoting tourism (Silva, Costa and Ferreira, 2015) and small investment in housing.

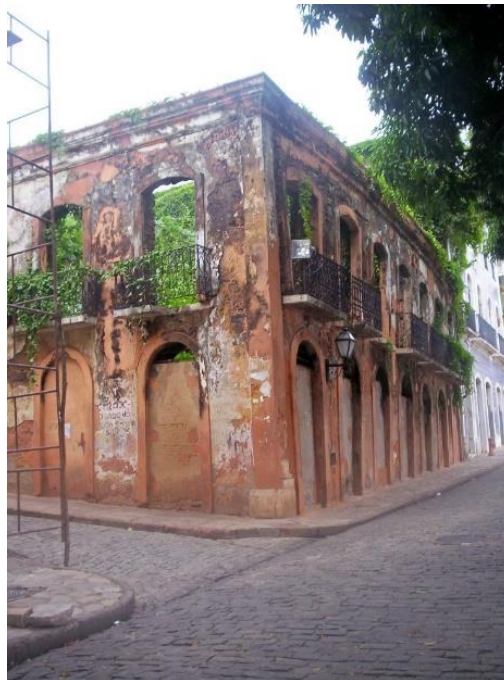
In the relationship between tourism and World Heritage, the emphasis on the WHS designation can bring prestige and international visibility, socio-economic development, job creation, pride and local identity. The designation can attract visitors and especially stimulate the development of tourism as a way to resolve these same issues, and this has aroused interest in the world heritage status in many countries. However, although this is a subject that attracts attention, with a range of studies based on this theme, there is limited research on the number of visitors who frequent these places (Frey and Steiner, 2011). In their study, Tucker and Emge (2010) found an increase in domestic and international visitors. Other studies point to an increase in domestic visitors (Jimura, 2011; Prentice cited in Evans, 2002) or refer to the positive influence of the arrival of international tourists in a large number of countries (Su and Lin, 2014), or even in a specific country (Yang, Lin and Han, 2010). There are also studies that discuss the real extent of this relationship and associate it with several factors that characterise the different contexts, and the absence or insufficiency of data in research (Buckley, 2004; Tisdell and Wilson, 2001). The purpose of this work is to continue this debate in the context of a developing country where the challenges of heritage preservation and tourism development are more pronounced.

### **2.2.1 Challenges of tourism management in historic centres and World Heritage Sites**

All the opportunities for tourism in historical sites are not exempt from problems. One of the main problems faced by planners is the tension between the need to preserve the physical fabric of the city and the search for activities that can take place in these spaces, which implies the adaptation of old urban functions to new needs (Oliveira, 2010; Vinuesa and Torralba, 2010). These new activities are often incompatible with the spatial configuration of the centre and may lead to changes to the buildings and their surroundings to “expand infrastructure to accommodate increasing tourist flows” (Harril, 2004:257). Also observed is increased traffic and pollution, reduced security levels, and changes to the social structure. Another concern revolves around the maintenance of the distinctive character of the place (Human, 2008), which gives it the potential for differentiation in the tourism market. In addition, there are also challenges posed by the use of the UNESCO title. These consist of the restrictions in the economic activities and social habits of the residents, as well as the need for heritage conservation (Yan, 2015).

Furthermore, there are reports of many conflicts surrounding the growth of tourism at these sites, particularly those related to asset management for tourism (Zhang, Fyall and Zheng, 2015).

The greatest challenges in the historic centre of São Luís, which interfere directly with the image of the site, are the heritage degradation, the re-functionalization of buildings and urban infrastructure issues and services. Silva (2010) reports the transformation in 2008 of private parking in 50 homes, attested by National Artistic and Historical Patrimony Institute (IPHAN). In 2009, a civil defence survey indicated the imminent risk of collapse of 33 buildings. The functional change is directed more to attractions for tourist use, such as bars, restaurants, hotels, museums and public administration, and has little focus on residential use. The heritage preservation policies arising from the 1970s, which came into effect in the 1980s and 1990s, and some specific actions in later years were insufficient to cover the full range of issues and to promote a return to the city centre. The situation continues to endanger the safety of residents, the UNESCO title itself, the commercial activities in the area, and the viability of credible marketing campaigns (Silva, 2010). In figure 4, there is an old building that collapsed and is being rebuilt to be a museum.



**Figure 3. Ruin in Estrela Street**

Source: Mota, 2008

### **3. Methodology**

This study analyses secondary data obtained from the Research Receptive Tourism of the São Luís Municipal Secretary of Tourism (SETUR). It includes the years 2010 and 2015 and aims to identify the main destinations of domestic and international tourists, the motivating factors for travel and their influence. Survey data were grouped by SETUR, highlighting the states/destinations of tourists in Brazil. The surveys were applied for three to four days in each of those years. The analysis of tourism demand included two periods of high season that corresponded to the months of January and July, and two periods of low season, covering the months of May and November. The average of each time period was used in order to simplify the data analysis. The reason for the selection of these two years was due to the absence of complete data in other years.

The work focused on the eight states of the country with a higher frequency in the issuance of tourists in the two years under review, 2010 and 2015. For the analysis of the international flow we calculated the frequency of visits to each country in the four periods of each year. Thus, from the total of 22 countries, ten were considered for individual analysis as emitting countries of tourists to São Luís. It was also found that the greatest diversity of countries was in 2010.

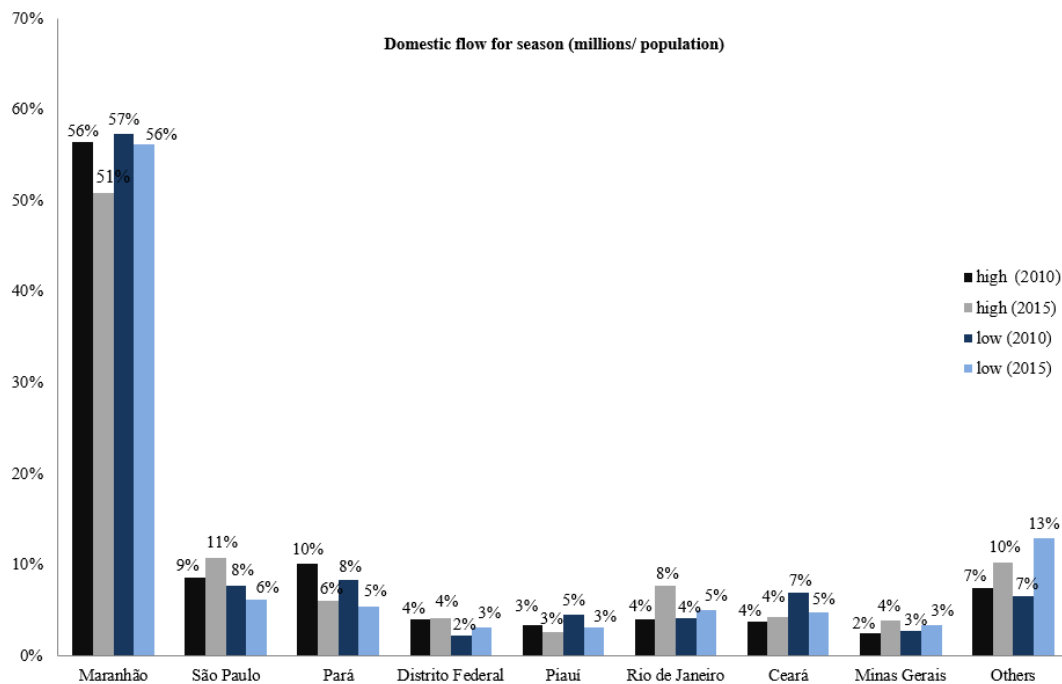
The study of SETUR includes questions that allow us to analyse the main reasons for travel, particularly business and study, leisure, visiting relatives and/or friends, health, sports, events and others. The second section explores the motivations of flows when the decision for the trip is linked to leisure, and in the third part we examine the vehicles of influence in the decision to travel to São Luís.

### **4. Results and discussion**

#### **4.1 Analysis of domestic tourist arrivals**

In the two years analysed it can be seen that the tourist flow in São Luís is predominantly regional with the highest number of visitors coming from the state of Maranhão. The overall results, shown in Graph 1, indicate that the highest frequency of tourists to São Luís came from São Paulo, Pará, Rio de Janeiro, Ceará, Piauí, Distrito Federal and Minas Gerais. In 2010, the highest percentages of tourists during the high season came from Pará and São Paulo with 10% and 9% of the total flow of visitors. During the low season, these two locations also have the two best indices with equal percentages around 8%. Therefore, one can infer that there was a small

percentage increase in the number of visitors between these two main destinations during the high season. In the low season of 2015, São Paulo and Pará again assume the best rates with 6% and 5% respectively of the total sample. In the high season, while São Paulo was ranked highest with 11%, Rio de Janeiro appeared as the second place of origin with 8%, and Pará took third position with 6%. Therefore, the analysis shows a change in the origin of visitors in 2015. In this particular case, two more distant destinations and two major Brazilian business centres represent the main source of tourists.



Graph 1. Domestic flow for season in 2010 and 2015

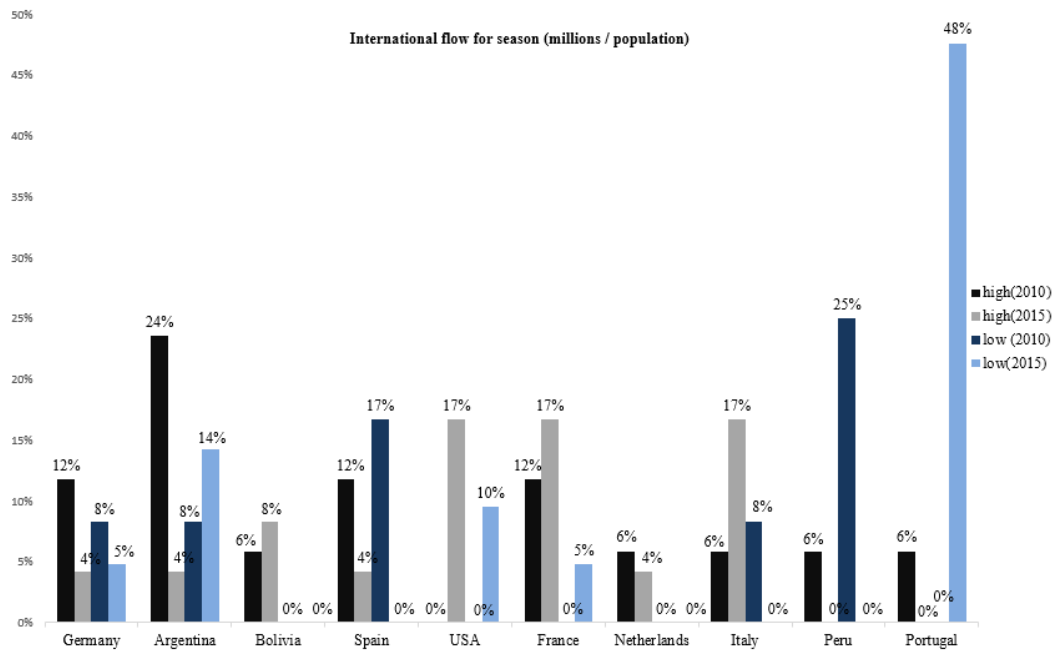
Source: Adapted from SETUR

The results in São Luís are similar to those found in several studies in other countries. In fact, despite being a phenomenon with an international dimension, most research has focused on the domestic flows. This is likely to continue to be the case given the current economic and political crisis, the latter with serious implications for international tourism in many places. Winter (2010, cited in Ekern et al., 2012) sees the tourist and the tourism development entrepreneur in Asia as domestic or regional. Turker (2013) describes how in 2012, Safranbolu in Turkey had close to 600,000 visitors, of which 183,000 were domestic and 38,000 were foreigners, indicating the regional character of the flow (although the author has not made any mention of tourism demand on a regional scale). Another source that confirms the domestic character of tourism

can be found in a recent Consumer Survey by the Ministry of Tourism - Mtur in Brazil, where 77.6% of Brazilians intend to take a national tour (MTur, 2015). There is no doubt that these questions relate to the interpretation of different realities. For example, the fact that Brazil covers a large territory increases the number of its attractions and therefore encourages national tourism. Another point is related to the average income of Brazilians, which is considered low when compared to other countries, leading to a reduction in international travel for Brazilians. Exchange rates and the devaluation of the Brazilian currency are also determining factors in the decision to travel within the country.

#### **4.2 Analysis of international tourist arrivals**

In respect of international flow, shown in Graph 2, in 2015 the largest number of visitors come from Portugal in the low season and accounted for 48% of the flow. This was followed by Argentina in the high season in 2010, with 24%. Italy, France and Spain accounted for equal percentages of visitors in the high season, with 17%. According to the results it is possible to establish that the two highest frequencies occur for Germany and Argentina with flows in the four periods analysed. In an analysis of national and international flows it can be seen that the latter is residual, reaching the highest rates slightly above 2%. Light and Prentice (1994) report in their study at 12 sites in Wales that overseas visitors are minority, so that heritage sites are clearly dependent on the British market.



Graph 2. International flow for season 2010 and 2015

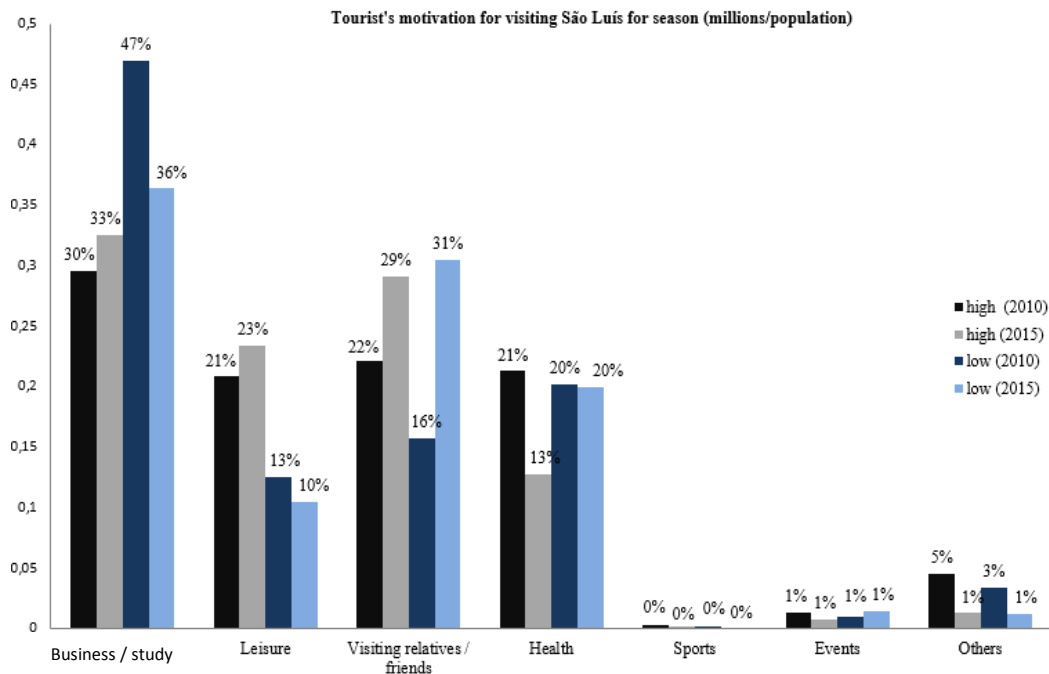
Source: Adapted from SETUR

The ability to attract international visitors by using the World Heritage brand has been the object of analysis in some countries. In the evaluation of how the World Heritage brand must affect tourism in developing countries, Ryan and Silvanto (2011) argue that the economic returns tend to be higher because of the distance from many visitors' country of origin. This results in higher expenses for longer trips and stays, implying major tourist spending. However, the level of development in the host country can affect the site's appeal to tourists, such as the transport infrastructure and hosting. It is considered, however, that the variable of geographical distance can be a limiting factor in the decision to travel due to long distances, which impacts on the total volume of travel and the benefits generated, especially in island destinations that exacerbate this difficulty because of restrictions to access. São Luís, for example, has a single access by land. This variable can justify low inbound tourism from other, more distant regions of the country where it takes into account the cost of transport and the time factor of travel. In assessing flows it perceived that nearby destinations, such as Pará, Ceará and Piauí, have the facility for sending tourists because of the smaller geographic distances. As Light and Prentice (1994) claim, growth of flows is influenced by physical proximity, which explains the presence in São Luís of visitors from neighbouring states and that the highest percentage of international visitors come from countries in South America and Western Europe. Research by Yang et al (2010) on the analysis of

international tourists in China, also reveals that the largest number of visitors between 2000 and 2005 came from their Asian neighbours, mainly Japan, Korea and Singapore.

### 4.3 Analysis of tourist's motivations for visiting São Luís

According to the results of the study, for the years under analysis the main reasons for travel to São Luís were related to business and/or study. The highest percentage is reached in 2010 during the low season, with 47% of the total flow of visitors (Graph 3).



Graph 3. Tourist's motivation for visiting São Luís in 2010 and 2015

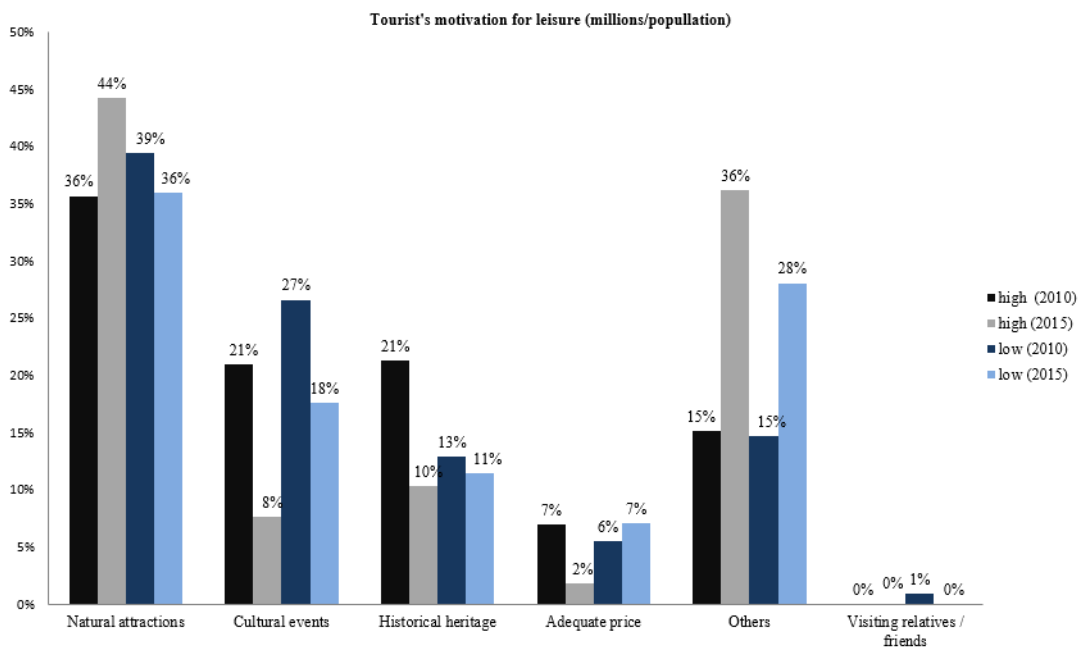
Source: Adapted from SETUR

Two other variables that cause the flows are visits to relatives and/or friends and leisure. The variable *visiting relatives and/or friends* takes the second highest values in the two years, reaching an overall percentage of 98% with better performance in low season of 2015. With a total rate of 31% lower than the variable *visiting relatives and/or friends*, leisure had its best representation in the high season of 2015 with 23% of the flow of visitors. The health variable was maintained in the analysis by the regional character of the tourist flow in the city. With respect to this variable, the data show that in 2010 this accounted for almost the same percentage of visitors in the high and low seasons, with 21% and 20%, respectively. However, in



2015 there was a decrease in the high season, indicating a reduction in the health variable as a motive for travel. The other variables, sports and events, although they are considered important for the development of tourism in many destinations, had unsatisfactory results, especially the first, with zero rates. In order to expand the leisure activities and streamline other tourist sectors, attention should be given to the two sectors of business and study, which characterise the largest flow into the city. With respect to the events category, it is important to point out that São Luís hosted the Brazilian Capital of Culture (CBC) in 2009.

In the analysis of tourism that is motivated by leisure, SETUR selected a set of variables to better define this category, as shown in Graph 4. in their study at 12 sites in Wales that when the flow is motivated by leisure it was the natural attractions that performed best with the best percentage obtained in the 2015 high season. This was followed by cultural events that presented the best rates in 2010, but experienced a significant reduction in 2015. Next was the historical heritage, which showed smaller percentage rates in 2015 with better representation in the high season of 2010. Price has lower percentage compared to other categories, from which we can infer that it has little influence as a limiting factor on the flows. Finally, the visiting relatives and/or friends variable remained inexpressive.



Graph 4. Tourists' motivation for leisure in 2010 and 2015

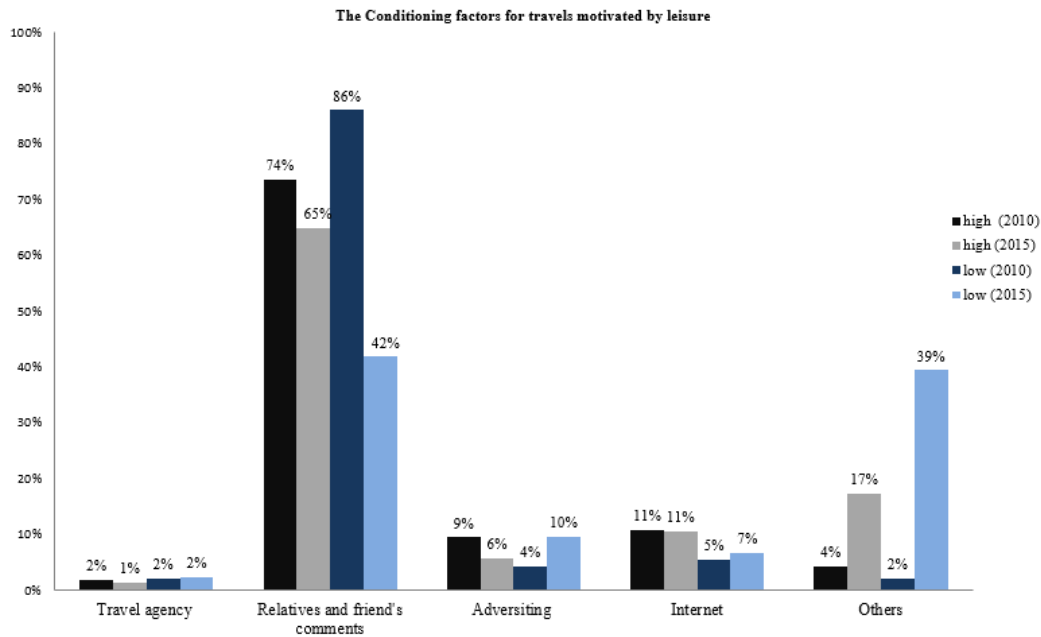
Source: Adapted from SETUR

When visitors' preference for the natural attractions is perceived as being detrimental to the heritage product, we tried to establish a relation with other realities. According to Presenza, Del Chiappa and Sheehan (2013:23), "the analysis of the Italian tourism system shows that it is almost exclusively organised around the model (3S), sun, sea and sand, despite a rich diversity of other tourist products". This has resulted in "a concentration of tourist demand in the summer and a predominance of the domestic market" (OECD, 2011, cited in Presenza et al., 2013:23). It is important to emphasise here that Italy is the country with the highest number of sites on the UNESCO list.

As noted by Buckley (2004) in his discussion about the contribution of the brand for tourism, World Heritage status often leads to an increase in the number of visitors, but the designation is just one of the factors that influences the visit. The author considers that there are still significant data limitations on the number of visitors, demographics and expenditure, which raise many questions for the attempt to discover the real contribution of the brand. The Municipal Research Report of São Luís Tourism confirms data deficiency. For example, from a total of 83 registered hotels in São Luís, only 23 submit their data monthly (SETUR, 2011). The research by Tisdell and Wilson (2001) was based only on data of international tourists because the time series data for national visitors was not available. The authors state that research on the number of visitors has many shortcomings with respect to estimating the demand for visits.

#### **4.4 Determinants of travel for leisure**

The analysis of factors that influence leisure related travel, and travel to visit relatives and/or friends reveals quite significant values with high percentages in all periods (Graph 5). Advertising increased by 5% in the high season in 2010 and decreased by 4% in the high season in 2015. The analysis thus shows 29% of flows. The Internet performs best in low seasons, with the same percentage reaching 10% rates.



Graph 5. Leisure influence in 2010 and 2015

Source: Adapted from SETUR

## 5. Conclusion

This study has addressed the issue of tourism in World Heritage Sites, especially in historic centres. The goal was to continue the debate on the effects of major brands in the development of tourism destinations, including the effect of the WHS designation and the widespread issue of the potential increase in tourist flow as a consequence of the visibility provided by UNESCO titration. From the perspective of the contribution of this brand, one can only infer that despite the fact that the city has World Heritage status, the designation has not contributed to an increase in national and international flows.

The main motivation to travel to São Luís is not related to the presence of a historical heritage in the city but is focused on business and/or study. These results indicate that most planned travel is of a commercial or educational nature. The advantage of business travel is the great expenditure of the tourists and the extension of these benefits to other sectors. On the other hand, this travel demands great initial expenditure on infrastructure. With regard to the natural attractions in São Luís, these are configured as the second product destination. When associated with leisure the influence of travel is strongly affected by comments from relatives and/or friends. This can be attributed to the predominantly regional tourist flow, and to serious deficiencies in the marketing campaigns. For example, we found that the variable “advertising”

presented low rates in attracting tourist flows, probably because it was designed to target sectors that had no interest in heritage products or because the cultural attractions are not integrated as complementary products to the business and studies sectors. In all likelihood, managers are focusing on heritage as the main product for promoting the destination, whereas they should invest in the business and studies sectors and boost the same with attractions and activities that connected to cultural heritage. The strong appeal of the rich architecture of the Portuguese colonial heritage and emphasis on the diversity of cultural expressions are widely used to promote the destination.

Indeed, there is optimism in relation to tourism in these locations and certain benefits are expected, mainly due to the government's belief that brands will attract visitors and their spending. However, some factors exist that may mean that tourism does not meet expectations, despite using an internationally renowned brand. As might be expected, tourism cannot attract enough visitors and this is a consequence of high competitiveness in the tourism sector, inequality in local resources, and the inefficiency of marketing policies.

There is no doubt that local contexts influence the performance when using the WHS designation as a catalyst and to streamline tourist flows. Regional characteristics, mainly related to heritage degradation and the lower quality of infrastructure and services, in addition to issues related to security and crime, affect many poor regions of developing countries such as São Luís and, consequently, impact on its attraction to visitors. A further factor that may impact on tourist demand in the city of São Luís is that similar attractions are offered in other national destinations, or even in the same region of northeast Brazil, such as Salvador and Olinda, some of whom also holding the same WHS status.

In terms of suggestions for further research, it is important to develop local case studies similar to that conducted in this study. For example, the analysis of tourist arrivals from various countries to a particular country does not reflect individual realities. In these cases, it is observed the compensating effect of a region or city to another. Moreover, the deficiency in the methodologies used, or even the lack of data, calls into question the actual contribution of the UNESCO brand to the promotion of tourism. In the case of São Luís, we recommend a separate analysis of regional, national, and international visitors in order to gain an accurate assessment of the flow of visitors and the benefits they bring. A further consideration is related to the lack of regularity in research that affects tourism planning and the development of strategies and actions and it came to be the main limitation of this study.

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