

From fun to nightmare: Measuring students' **senior trip** experiences through a mixed-method approach

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Objectives | In recent years, it has become an established practice to hold a final trip for students who finish high school. In Portugal, as for many other countries, thousands of students travel each year to far away destinations. Whether looking for Sun and the Beach or Skiing in the Mountains, those students, still adolescents once they average eighteen or even seventeen years old, somehow 'departure to paradise,' looking for some 'unique,' 'crazy' and 'unforgettable' experience, aiming to celebrate the end of high school studies. Whereas this is a time to travel to have 'great time and fun,' the senior trip can easily end up in 'a nightmare,' as accidents happen and students face hazard contexts or engage in unforeseen behaviors or attitudes.

In this research, we specifically focus on both representations and practices on student senior trip experiences. The minor attention devoted to this issue, until now, by scientific literature, as well as recent public and noticed concerns from parents and society in general about the behavior of young people during this period, strongly justify the relevance of a specific study on the subject. Theoretically, we draw upon the conceptualization of the students' senior trip as a rite of passage (Van Gennep, 1909; Turner, 1967; 1969; Segalen, 1998; Graburn, 1989; 2001), and we argue that it is experienced as a liminal time span period, characterized by ephemeral excessive behavior, far from the structure, roles and routines of everyday life. Empirically, we prosecute a mixed-method approach aiming a theoretical discussion upon triangulation of multidimensional data. Our main goal is to contrast and compare representations and practices around the senior trip performed by students, discussing it in the view of a contemporary rite of passage at the end of high school. Specifically, we aim at: (1) To characterize the high school students' senior trip practices (Destinations; Motivations; Organization; Travel and Stay; Main Experiences, Activities and Benefits; Risky Behaviors; Unforeseen and Disrupting Events); (2) To characterize the ways in which senior trips are advertised to students; (3) To identify the main themes worked by the media in the written press; (4) To characterize the experiences reported by students as most significant in terms of Facts, Contexts, Meanings and Emotions surrounding the students' senior trip at the end of high school.

Methodology | Methodologically, we rely on an exploratory mixed-method study, developed in the academic year 2010/2011, by a set of undergraduate students enrolled in the subject 'Data Processing and Analysis' (TAD), of the tourism

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