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# Critical Tourism Studies 9

WITH IN DANGEROUS TIMES  
WORKING PROCEEDINGS



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## **Title**

Residents' Perceptions on Tourism Impacts: Is Tourism in Alentejo (Portugal) Perceived as Sustainable?

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## **Abstract**

Tourism is always a relational activity. Residents, tourists and places are brought together through tourism. At the same time, it has become evident with the current pandemic that human choices are transforming our, usually assumed as, secure living into a very dangerous time for life. Before the pandemic, residents were starting to be considered (mainly) by academics as powerful agents to influence the experience tourists live at destinations—ones whose needs and perceptions have to be considered for a successful (sustainable) destination. With the pandemics, sustainable tourism has gone from being an “old” academic concept to a central concept in the sector’s discourse.

This study aims to analyse the existence of differences between the perceptions of tourism impacts between residents from the inland and coast regions of the Alentejo (Portugal). Additionally, an exploratory reflection on the determinants of those different perceptions is presented.

A quantitative methodology was chosen to achieve these objectives. A survey was undertaken with the residents of Alentejo, using a probabilistic sampling method (multi-stage cluster sampling process). A total of 2,619 questionnaires were collected, representing residents from 34 municipalities, during 2019-2020. These residents reported their perceptions on economic, social, cultural and environmental impacts of tourism development at their municipality of residence.

Results show that residents from the coastal municipalities reported more negative perceptions of tourism development than those from the inland. Different factors seem to explain these perceptions, namely the number of tourists at the municipality, the sociodemographic profile of the residents and the specific types of tourism impacts.

Considering the residents’ perceptions on tourism development seems to be crucial for implementing adequate sustainable tourism strategies for destinations. In this context, for the sustainable tourism concept to be central not only in the tourism agents’ discourse but to be truly applied by them, it is essential to recognise the needs and wishes of residents for their place of residence as a tourism destination—a step this study hopes to start.