

TOURISM DESTINATION IMAGE OF RUSSIA IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE PORTUGUESE MARKET

*Liliya Arslanova*¹

*Dora Agapito*²

*Patrícia Pinto*³

ABSTRACT

In recent decades the importance of destination image has been increasingly analyzed and it is generally considered to be vital in the marketing of destinations. It can be noted that the tourism industry in Russia has not been the subject of a great deal of research with regard to its destination image. Therefore the purpose of this work is to assess Russia's destination image in the perspective of Portuguese people. The research instrument was an online questionnaire, comprised of open-ended and closed questions. A combination of two software programs, NVivo and IBM SPSS Statistics 21, was employed to analyze the data. This exploratory study suggests that Portuguese peoples' perceptions of Russia are mostly favorable and they have a high awareness about Russia's destination features.

Keywords: Destination Image, Russia, Tourism Destination, Portuguese Market.

JEL Classification: Z32, Z33

1. INTRODUCTION

Russia, as the largest country in the world, has diverse attractions worth visiting: unique nature, beautiful sceneries, historical, cultural and ethnographical heritage, sea and ski resorts. These characteristics put Russia on a prominent place among countries with the potential for tourism development. Nevertheless, despite that Russian outbound tourism has been increasing over the past decade, the growth of inbound tourism is slow (Stepchenkova & Morrison, 2008). As a result, the contribution of inbound tourism to Russia's economy is relatively small: according to the World Travel & Tourism Council, visitor spendings generated only 3.5% of total exports of Russia in 2014 (WTTC, 2015). As stressed by Stepchenkova and Morrison (2008: 548) the possible problems that do not allow Russia's incoming tourism to develop faster could be: a lack of infrastructure, especially in the country's eastern areas, complicated visa procedures, rising prices for tour packages, and lack of advertising. To be able to reach its tourism potential, the country should solve the aforementioned issues and, moreover, create an attractive destination image for international tourists.

Although the concept of tourism destination image is one of the most popular subjects in tourism studies, there is a lack of research on the topic of Russia's destination image, as according to the literature review of the articles published between 1973 and 2000 (Pike, 2002) out of 142 articles about a destination image only one was dedicated to the image of Russia and considered the image of Soviet Russia (see Pizam, Jafari & Milman, 1991), which nowadays is not relevant anymore. Since then, a few studies were added to the

¹ University of Algarve, Research Centre for Spatial and Organizational Dynamics, Portugal. (lily.arslanova@hotmail.com)

² University of Algarve, Research Centre for Spatial and Organizational Dynamics, Portugal. (dlagapito@ualg.pt)

³ University of Algarve, Research Centre for Spatial and Organizational Dynamics, Portugal. (pvalle@ualg.pt)

topic. In particular, the research conducted by Stepchenkova, Chen and Morrison (2005); Stepchenkova and Morisson (2006); Stepchenkova and Morisson (2008). Therefore, the contribution of this study is evident, as it adds knowledge to such scantily explored topic as the destination image of Russia.

2. AROUND THE CONCEPT OF DESTINATION IMAGE

Over the past few decades, destination image has been one of the most researched concepts in the field of tourism (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003, Stepchenkova & Morrison 2008, Pan & Xiang, 2011) and it has been defined in a number of ways. For example, Hunt (1975: 1), in one of the first works in this area, defined destination image as “the impression that a person or persons hold about a state in which they do not reside.” Further, Crompton (1979: 18), stated that “destination image is a sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination.” For Phelps (1986: 168) destination image is “perceptions or impressions of a place.” Based on the multiple definitions of the concept, a definition of destination image can be proposed as the result of the perception of a particular destination that is formulated with utilization of information gathered by individuals (usually tourists) via various types of sources.

A variety of studies have presented different approaches to destination image formation (Campo, Brea & Muñiz, 2011). Baloglu & Brinberg (1997) and other authors (e.g. Baloglu & McCleary, 1999) considered the image as a concept that consists of at least two components: cognitive and affective. The cognitive component is the summary of a knowledge about a destination and could be organic or induced; the affective component is the sum of feelings about a destination and could be favorable, unfavorable or neutral for the destination under analysis.

Echtner and Ritchie (1991, 1993) reviewed psychology and marketing studies of tourism destination image and presented three-dimensional framework of a destination image concept: attribute – holistic, functional-psychological and common-unique. The attribute-holistic dimension implies that destination image has both the traditional attribute-based component and a total-gestalt expression of a destination that is formed by destination attributes. In other words, this component represents the overall picture and stereotypes which a person holds about a place. The functional-psychological dimension points that destination features vary from directly observable or measurable attributes (for instance, landscape, weather) to intangible, less observable attributes (for example, characteristics of local people, safety). The third, common-unique dimension indicates that there are not only common functional and psychological features of destinations that could be ranked and compared, but also some unique features, events or atmosphere that distinguish places from each other. These three dimensions are connected and cannot be understood apart.

Gunn (1972), based on the different types of informational sources, identified two levels of image formation: organic and induced. The organic image includes all the information about destination that is formed unintentionally and by non-tourism sources such as television, newspapers, books, history, geography, local people. The induced image is created by promotional information such as tourist brochures, booklets, etc. and transmitted by local tourism organizations.

There are two main approaches in the measurement of the destination image: structured and unstructured. The structured one usually employs Likert-type scales or sets of semantic differentials to measure attributes of an image. These types of scales are easy to operate and code and obtained information can be analyzed with statistical methods. However, despite that the scale can be completed by a respondent itself, the structured approach

can not directly describe the holistic impression (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993). In this case, if the number of different attributes is high, it may be necessary to conduct a comprehensive study to ensure that all of them have been identified (Hooley, Shipley & Kriger, 1988). The unstructured techniques do not apply standardized scales and allow respondents to use free form of descriptions, aimed to catch the richness and complexity of an image (Bovin, 1986). However, provided information may be highly heterogeneous, because it depends on the communication skills of the respondents, their ability to give detailed answers and the knowledge that they already have about a destination (McDougall & Fry, 1974). Echtner and Ritchie (1993) suggested that in order to omit fallacies of these two approaches and strengthen their advantages, both open-ended questions and standardized scales should be used in a measurement of a destination image.

3. RUSSIA AS A TOURISM DESTINATION

The number of international tourists' arrivals on the territory of the Russian Federation from 2005 to 2014 fluctuated until the downturn in 2009, when it reached the minimum of 2,100,000 international tourists per year. Since 2010 there has been a steady increase with a repeated decline in 2013. These fluctuations can be explained by the fact that international tourism is believed to be a subject to change due to political and economic factors (RosTourUnion - Russian Union of Travel Industry, 2015). However, 2015 is expected to show an upward trend, as according to the official statistics of Russia (Rostourism, 2015), in the first six months of 2015 the number of international tourists' arrivals to Russia increased by 4.6% - to 1,096,700 people, compare to the same period of the previous year.

The growth is mainly caused by tourists from Asia, while almost all countries of Europe and North America showing a negative trend. In the first half of 2015, the largest number of tourists came from China (204.5 thousand) and Germany (128.6 thousand). The third place, with a considerable gap, is occupied by Turkey (69 thousand), followed by the US (63.7 thousand). Israel closes the top-five with 50.5 thousand people. The top-ten also includes the United Kingdom, South Korea, France, Italy, and Finland. Dozens of changes took place inside the top, however, overall the list of traditional leaders has not changed considerably.

The highest growth was shown by Iran with an increase of 100%. In absolute figures, tourist flow from this country to Russia is low (5.6 thousand), but this is one of the few countries that sets up charter flights to Russia. The second place in the dynamics of growth is China (51.6%), the third is India (50.7%), followed by Thailand (44.3%), South Korea (27.3%), Israel (23.2%), and Turkey (17.3%) - all Eastern and Asian countries.

Almost all places in the top-ten of countries that significantly reduced the number of tourists to Russia are European countries: Sweden (-49.3%), Poland (-41%), the Netherlands (-34.7%), Denmark (-23.7%), the UK (-20.4%), France (-18.7%), Finland (-17%), Norway (-14.5%). Two places in the ranking are occupied by Australia (-21%), and Canada (-24.5%). During the period of 2011 - 2015, the number of Portuguese travelers to Russia hasn't experienced any dramatic downturn or increase, remaining around the same number of 15.000 visitors per year.

Slowdown in Russian economy is believed to be the most important factor that will influence the development of tourism sector in the country in the nearest future. The outflow of international financial investments that has started at the end of 2013, already had consequences in tourism area: for instance, some of international hotel chains cancelled or postponed their previously announced expansion plans in the Russian market (Ernst & Young, 2014).

The decline in value of Russian currency against euro and dollar, which started in the beginning of 2014, has affected the Russian economy - in the summer of the same year a number of major Russian tour operators became bankrupt. These companies were not able to settle their affairs, so more than 10 thousand of tourists were left abroad. This led to the reduction of consumers' trust to tour operators (Russia beyond the headlines, 2014). Together with the decline in consumers' disposable incomes, this has caused a stagnation in the travel and tourism industry in Russia.

Given the recent economic slowdown and fluctuations of Russian ruble, it has become more affordable to travel to domestic destinations, instead of going abroad. Newly issued Federal program "Domestic and Inbound Tourism Development 2011-2018" is targeting to increase the number of domestic trips by 150%.

Despite all the issues that Russian economy faces, tourism and travel in the country are still expected to perform positively: the same as with Sochi Olympic Games that attracted millions of visitors from all over the world, the incoming tourism in Russia is expected to be boosted with 2018' FIFA Football World Cup.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research tool design

The research tool was an online questionnaire, consisted of four parts. The first section contained three open-ended questions, as suggested by Echtner and Ritchie (1993), and aimed to evaluate the stereotypical, affective, and unique components of Russia's destination image. The respondents were asked to refer to three words or expressions for each question. The second section included two 7-points Likert scales (1- "unpleasant – pleasant", 2- "sleepy-dynamic") to assess the affective component of the image, as suggested by Russel and Pratt (1981). The 14 attributes were withdrawn from the literature (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Stepchenkova & Morrison, 2008) and applied to assess Portuguese people' perceptions of Russia's destination attributes. The third part consisted of questions related to visit/non-visit to the country, reasons for visiting, frequency of travel per year, and the most important attributes for respondents in a choice of a travel destination. The question with respect to what sources of information played a role in shaping Portuguese people' views of Russia was added to assess the organic image of Russia.

The questionnaire was created in Google Forms – free online service that allows to design surveys with different types of questions. The questionnaire was made in English and further translated into the Portuguese language in order to distribute it among Portuguese respondents.

4.2 Data collection and respondents' profile

At the beginning of April 2016 a link to the questionnaire was posted on different Portuguese web-sites and forums related to tourism and, in particular, related to travel to Russia, taking into consideration the idea that to attract people to fill out the questionnaire it should be posted on the thematic web-sites. However, the response rate on the public posts were negligible, and starting from the middle of April personal messages with the request to complete the questionnaire were sent to Portuguese individuals on such social networks as vk.com and couchsurfing.com. These social networks were chosen based on a few reasons: 1) they allow to find necessary sample of respondents (based on nationality, language, age, gender, etc.); 2) they allow to send private messages to random people freely.

During 2 weeks-period personal messages with the link to the questionnaire were sent out, and the survey resulted in a final convenience sample of 132 respondents appropriate for analysis. Table 1 displays the profile of the respondents.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	43	32,6
	Male	89	67,4
Age	Less than 25	30	22,7
	26-35	53	40,2
	36-45	25	18,9
	46-55	18	13,6
	56-65	5	3,8
	More than 65	1	0,8
Education	Basic	1	0,8
	Secondary	15	11,4
	Higher	116	87,9
Gross monthly income	Less than €500	27	20,5
	€501 - €1000	34	25,8
	€1001 - €1500	27	20,5
	€1501 - €2000	22	16,7
	More than €2000	22	16,7
Marital status	Married/civil union	18	13,6
	Divorced	14	10,6
	Single	100	75,8

Source: Own elaboration

4.3 Data analysis methods

With respect to the three open-ended questions, the answers have been reviewed and translated from Portuguese to English. The qualitative data was analyzed with the help of NVivo with the purpose of performing content-analysis. To make the responses applicable for the analysis, several changes were made, such as: multi-word concepts were merged into a one-word format (e.g., “Red Square”, “Saint-Petersburg” to “RedSquare”, “SaintPetersburg”, etc.); some words were changed to synonyms and single form to plural (for example, “wide” “big”, “huge”, “huge territory”, “largest country in the world” were grouped together under the most frequent name, in this case “big country”, further e.g “palace” was counted as “palaces”, “cathedral” as “cathedrals”, and so on); main ideas, keywords and phrases have been allocated instead of complex sentences, which some respondents used, as the request was to write maximum 3 words to each question.

The responses to closed questions were entered into IBM SPSS Statistics 21 program for further analysis. At first, descriptive statistics of socio-demographic variables, travel motivations, organic image, perceptions of Russia as a tourism destination (cognitive image) were analyzed and transferred into tables and charts. Further, differences between visitors/non-visitors of the country regarding perceptions of Russia as a tourism destination (cognitive image) were computed using “compare means” function and assessed with the Mann-Whiney test.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Open-ended questions

Out of 132 total survey responses, the number of valid responses for open-ended questions was the following:

Question 1: What images or characteristics come to your mind when you think of Russia as a travel destination - 128;

Question 2: How would you describe the atmosphere or mood that you would expect to experience while visiting Russia – 106;

Question 3: Please list up to three distinctive or unique tourist attractions that you can think of in Russia – 118.

Answers such as “I don’t know” or “Nothing” were excluded from the analysis. In addition, despite that respondents were requested to write maximum three words to each question, some of them used complex sentences, and it have been allocated with keywords and phrases.

5.1.1 Question 1 - stereotypical holistic component of the image

To find out what stereotypical mental images Portuguese people associate with Russia, responses to the survey Question 1 (“What images or characteristics come to your mind when you think of Russia as a travel destination?”) were analyzed. By following procedures of corrections described in subsection 4.2, a list of 16 most frequent meaningful words was obtained using NVivo software. The frequencies were 4 or higher. Table 2 contains overall frequencies of Russia’s stereotypical image variables.

Table 2. Russia’s stereotypical image variables

Word	Count	Weighted %	Word	Count	Weighted %
<i>Cold</i>	54	13,53	<i>Culture</i>	9	2,26
<i>Vodka</i>	39	9,77	<i>Putin</i>	9	2,26
<i>Kremlin</i>	19	4,76	<i>Red Square</i>	8	2,01
<i>Snow</i>	16	4,01	<i>Communism</i>	7	1,75
<i>Moscow</i>	14	3,51	<i>Matriosca</i>	6	1,50
<i>Big country</i>	13	3,25	<i>Transsiberian</i>	5	1,25
<i>Beautiful women</i>	12	3,01	<i>Beautiful</i>	4	1,00
<i>Saint-Petersburg</i>	12	3,01	<i>“Nazdorovie!”* (the meaning is close to Portuguese “Saúde!”)</i>	4	1,00
Total				399	100%

Source: Own elaboration

As it can be observed in Table 3, most frequently the respondents mentioned the following words while describing characteristics of Russia: “cold” – in 13,5% of cases; “vodka” – in almost 10%; and “Kremlin” – 4,7%.

5.1.2 Question 2 – affective component of the image

To find what affective images Russia as a travel destination evokes, the responses to the survey item Question 2 (“How would you describe the atmosphere or mood that you would expect to experience while visiting Russia?”) were analyzed using NVivo Program.

Around 260 evaluative descriptions were obtained. The final set of image variables contained descriptive words (e.g. “beautiful”, “welcoming”, “spectacular”), as they create an atmosphere, and evaluation phrases (e.g., “cold people”, “little hospitable”). Table 3 provides the total frequencies of Russia’s affective image variables.

Table 3. Russia’s affective image variables

Word	Count	Weighted %	Word	Count	Weighted %
<i>Cold</i>	48	18,39	<i>Closed people</i>	5	1,92
<i>Cold people</i>	8	3,07	<i>Difficult communication</i>	4	1,53
<i>Beautiful</i>	7	2,68	<i>Little hospitable</i>	4	1,53
<i>Different</i>	7	2,68	<i>Spectacular</i>	4	1,53
<i>Snow</i>	6	2,30	<i>Tension</i>	4	1,53
<i>Welcoming</i>	6	2,30	<i>Unfriendly people</i>	4	1,53
Total				261	100%

Source: Own elaboration

Similarly to the previous question, the word “cold” is the most frequently used by respondents – around 18 % of cases. In addition, the word was also used to describe Russian people.

5.1.3 Question 3 – unique component of the image

To find what unique places and features Portuguese people associate with Russia, the responses to the Question 3 (“Please list up to three distinctive or unique tourism attractions that you can think of in Russia”) were analyzed. The results are given in Table 4.

Table 4. Russia’s unique image variables

Word	Count	Weighted %	Word	Count	Weighted %
<i>Red Square</i>	59	18,10	<i>Siberia</i>	11	3,37
<i>Kremlin</i>	52	15,95	<i>Lake Baikal</i>	8	2,45
<i>Saint - Petersburg</i>	32	9,82	<i>Peterhof</i>	8	2,45
<i>St. Basil Cathedral</i>	24	7,36	<i>Cathedrals</i>	5	1,51
<i>Moscow</i>	17	5,21	<i>Bolshoi Theatre</i>	4	1,23
<i>Hermitage/Winter Palace</i>	17	5,21	<i>Moscow metro</i>	4	1,23
<i>Transsiberian</i>	14	4,29			
Total				331	100%

Source: Own elaboration

5.2 Closed questions

5.2.1 Visit to Russia and travel motivations

Out of all respondents, only 19 people (14.4%) have visited Russia before. Those who have already visited Russia, were asked to state what was the reason(s) for visiting. The most

frequent reason was “leisure” (42.1%), followed by “family/friends” (26.3%), and “business” (10.5%). Among “other” reasons “study” and “crossing from China to Portugal” were stated.

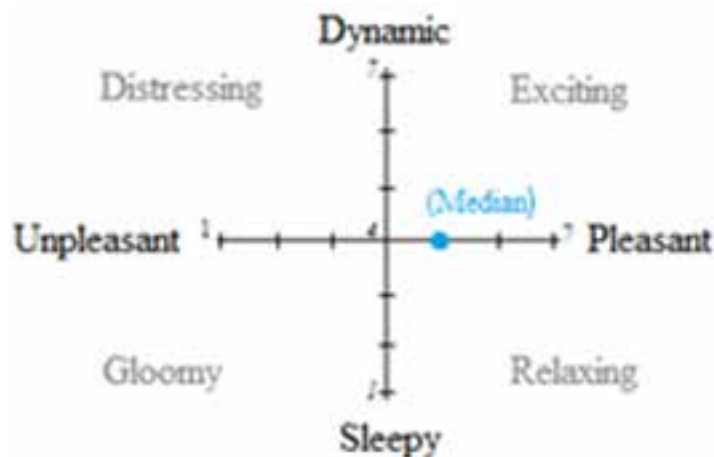
Regarding travel frequency, the majority of respondents (55.3%) travels 1 or 2 times a year, 21.2% - 3-4 times, 20.5 % - more than 4 times a year, and 3% of the sample represents those who never travel.

Regarding the question “What do you consider to be the most important elements that attract you to a destination?” the most frequent answer was “cost” (20.4%); “cultural attractions” (19.8%); “safety” (15.5%); “choice of activities” (13.3%); “good weather” (9.5%); “beaches and relaxed atmosphere” (7.3%); “distance” (5.5%); and “night life” (4.9%). As for “other” important elements, respondents specified “nature”, “people”, “culture”, and “history”.

5.2.2 Affective image

Assessing the affective image of Russia, the most frequent values chosen by the respondents on the semantic differential “unpleasant/ pleasant” were the points 4 and 5 (both 31.8%). On the semantic differential “sleepy/dynamic” - points 4 (26.5%) and 5 (21.2%). In addition, calculation of medians resulted in 5 for the differential “unpleasant/ pleasant” and 4 for “sleepy/dynamic” (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Affective image dimensions



Source: Adapted from Russel *et al.* (1981)

5.2.3 Cognitive image

The cognitive image of Russia was measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1- strongly disagree; 2- disagree; 3 - not agree, not disagree; 4- agree; 5- strongly agree). “Comparing means analysis” were conducted for attribute values and can be observed in Table 5. Attributes are considered positively or negatively evaluated if their mean is below or above the neutral “3.00” value, respectively, and arranged from the most to the least favorable. The most favorable views are held in relation to Russia’s cultural and historical attractions, its natural landscape, night life and entertainment. The most unfavorable perceptions relate to issues of safety, political stability and entry formalities, such as visas and border crossings.

Table 5. Perceptions of Russia as a tourism destination

Items	Mean ^a	Std.deviation
Interesting cultural and historical attractions	4,30	0,750
Attractive natural landscape	3,97	0,886
Good nightlife and entertainment	3,36	0,918
Opportunity for adventure	3,34	0,864
Good local food	3,22	0,737
Good offer of accommodation for tourists	3,13	0,576
High standards of cleanliness and hygiene	3,07	0,787
Convenient local transport	3,04	0,708
Friendly and hospitable people	2,99	0,961
Good relationship quality / price	2,91	0,856
Safe destination	2,74	0,954
Political stability	2,65	1,075
Entry formalities (visas, border crossings) are simple	2,35	0,892
Good weather	2,19	0,842
<i>Summary variable – image of Russia^b</i>	<i>3,09</i>	<i>0,843</i>

Notes: ^a 1 – Least favorable; 5 – Most favorable; ^b The summary variable was derived by averaging all the items in the scale

Source: Adapted from IBM SPSS Statistics 21

5.2.4 Organic image

The acknowledgment about different sources of information that have been used by the respondents to learn about Russia is displayed in Table 6. According to the results, the most important source is media, used by 53% of the respondents. Personal experience is the second and school is the third most important source to learn about Russia.

Table 6. Things that played role in shaping views of Russia

	Frequency	%
Things I learned from the media (TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, etc.)	113	53,3
My personal experience	32	15,1
Things I learned in school	29	13,7
Other	29	13,7
I have family roots in Russia (immigrated from there, or have relatives who live there)	9	4,2
Total	212	100,0

Source: Own elaboration

Among “other” the respondents mentioned: “Russian friends”, “Relatives or friends, who visited Russia”, “Personal research”, and “Literature and cinema”.

5.2.5 Relationship between variables

It was also tested if there is any relationship between the variable “visit” and “perceptions of Russia as a tourism destination”. People who have visited Russia showed more favorable attitude towards this destination in relation to such attributes as ($p < 0.1$): “natural landscape”, “cultural and historical attractions”, “local transport”, “local food”, “weather”, “friendliness and hospitality of local people” and “good relationship quality/price”. In opposite, the attribute “entry formalities (visas, border crossings)” was evaluated more negative by visitors than non-visitors (Table 7).

Table 7. Relationship between visit and perceptions of Russia as a tourism destination

	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Asymp.Sig. (2-tailed)
Attractive natural landscape	686,000	7127,000	-2,742	,006
Interesting cultural and historical attractions	619,500	7060,500	-3,225	,001
Good offer of accommodation for tourists	920,500	1110,500	-1,229	,219
Convenient local transport	825,500	7266,500	-1,911	,056
Good local food	785,500	7226,500	-2,092	,036
Good weather	830,000	7271,000	-1,774	,076
Safe destination	1034,000	1224,000	-,269	,788
Good nightlife and entertainment	1034,500	1224,500	-,274	,784
High standards of cleanliness and hygiene	1027,000	7468,000	-,339	,734
Entry formalities (visas, border crossings) are simple	742,500	932,500	-2,271	,023
Political stability	1026,000	1216,000	-,319	,750
Opportunity for adventure	960,000	7401,000	-,788	,431
Friendly and hospitable people	634,000	7075,000	-3,021	,003
Good relationship quality / price	844,000	7285,000	-1,650	,099
a. Grouping Variable: Visit				

Source: Adapted from IBM SPSS Statistics 21

6. CONCLUSION

According to the analysis of the open-ended Question 1, which was set to identify the stereotypical holistic component of the image, our findings stand in line with the previous research results of Stepchenkova & Morrison (2008) on the tourism destination image of Russia, where the most frequent words used by Americans to describe Russia were also “cold”, “vodka” and “snow”. Further in our study these words were frequently mentioned in the Question 2, which was designed to assess affective image that Portuguese people held towards Russia. Many answers (18.3%) contained the word “cold” to describe the atmosphere people would expect to experience in Russia. It is worth noting that many respondents employed this word to describe Russian people, therefore the expression “cold people” was mentioned often as well, along with “closed people”, “little hospitable” and “unfriendly people”. It can be suggested that a part of the atmosphere of a particular destination is formed by

local population, what has been also confirmed by the other studies (Stepchenkova, 2005; Alvarez & Korzay, 2008).

Moreover, the Portuguese respondents' perceptions of Russia were mainly favorable, since words such as "beautiful", "welcoming", and "spectacular" were presented often. Furthermore, according to the scale suggested by Russel *et al.* (1981) and used in this study, the affective image of Russia was also perceived by Portuguese respondents as overall "pleasant".

The analysis of the Question 3 revealed that Portuguese people have a high awareness about Russia's tourist features – only 11% stated "I don't know" as an answer. Along with common touristic places such as Moscow, Saint-Petersburg and Siberia, more specific sites like Red Square, Kremlin, St. Basil Cathedral, Hermitage (Winter Palace), Peterhof, Transsiberian railway and Lake Baikal were mentioned.

The most positive views are held in relation to Russia's cultural and historical attractions, its natural landscape, night life and entertainment. In opposite, the most unfavorable perceptions relate to issues of safety, political stability and entry formalities (visas and border crossings). These findings indicate the main areas that Russia needs to deal with in relation to its destination image.

The attributes "cultural and historical attractions", "natural landscape", "local transport", "local food", "weather", "friendliness and hospitality of local people" and "good relationship quality/price" were also evaluated more favorably by visitors than by those who have not visited the country. On the other hand, visitors provided less favorable scores to the variable "entry formalities (visas, border crossings)". Thus, complicated visa procedures may be a significant barrier in the formation of a favorable tourism destination image, as "a country cannot be perceived as hospitable if getting a visa takes much effort on the part of a traveler" (Stepchenkova, 2005: 61).

The analysis of the organic image of Russia showed that the most important informational agent in its formation is media - TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, etc. These findings support the results of some other studies (Stepchenkova, 2005, Alvarez & Korzay, 2008), which showed that media may have a great impact on tourism destination image.

The research findings may be used by managers in Russia's tourism industry in order to improve the destination image of the country, with a view to attract Portuguese tourists to Russia.

This research is not exempt from limitations. First of all, it was not easy to reach individuals of Portuguese nationality, who have already visited Russia, to be able to perform more comparisons between visitors and non-visitors regarding their perceptions of the destination. The other significant limitation is the use of a small and convenience sample, as public posts and requests on the travel web-sites had a low rate of responses while sending private messages on the social networks provided the majority of respondents.

Further research could investigate tourism destination image of Russia applying different research methods, such as content-analysis, focus-groups, etc. in the perspectives of different nationalities. Determination if the informational sources (media, books, personal experience, folklore, movies, etc.) and other factors (economic, sociocultural, psychographics, etc.) impact on a destination image could also be a focus for further studies.

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