**The Effect of Distance, Expenditure and Culture on the Expression of Social Status through Tourism**

ABSTRACT *Tourists view tourism not only as an opportunity for recreation, relaxation and a way to visit other places, but also as a means of expressing their social status, using their travel as a pathway to reconfirm their social positioning to friends, relatives and colleagues. A stratified sample of tourists from three different nationalities was used in this research. The study examines the factors of distance, trip cost and origin versus destination, similarities in culture and human behaviour, and tourists’ expression of perceived social status, whilst it also evaluates the influence of nationality, age and level of education on the examined factors. Findings reveal that distance is the fundamental factor expressing social status, followed by expenditure and culture. These factors also present an almost equal moderating effect upon each other. The article proposes an explanatory model for tourism dealing with the expression of social status through distance, expenditure and culture.*

**Introduction**

It is essential for governments, tourism organisations and tourism operators to understand the processes that determine tourists’ destination choices, whilst competition for economic gains and tourist numbers increases (Ng *et al.*, 2007). Destination image has become a very important issue in the tourism industry’s marketing research, since many countries use promotion and global marketing to support their image, and to gain competitive advantage over other destinations (Lin and Huang, 2009). Thus, image making significantly influences destination tourism development (Kokkranikal *et al.*, 2011). Such research is increasingly important because a destination’s image is an essential factor in influencing tourist satisfaction and choices (Castro *et al.*, 2007), whilst a sufficient image management is the pathway for destination success (Croy, 2010). Thus, destination image influences and being influenced by aspects such as the perceived expression of visitors’ social status from visiting a destination and the factors affecting destination selection.

Through a literature review and primary research, this article aims to propose a model dealing with the expression of social status through tourism travel. The study describes and examines the importance of social status to tourism. Aside from filling a literature gap, its contribution to the body of knowledge lies in the examination of distance, expenditure and culture as factors influencing the intention to travel to destinations for the expression of social status. In addition, it visualises the perception of social status achieved through tourism in an explanatory model. Finally, the study results provide destination decision makers on a national and international level with a better understanding of the contribution of the examined factors to the attainment of social status.

**Literature Review and Hypothesis Development**

The literature on destination choice centres on the direct impact of destination attributes such as distance and price. The underlying logic is that tourist motivations can become the main generators of utility when visiting distant or expensive destinations (Nicolau and Mas, 2006). As Kim and Lee (2002) state, tourist motivations are characteristics of individuals that influence their destination choice, since they act as push factors leading to the realisation of tourist travel.

In tourism research, numerous studies have focused on prestige motivations (Riley, 1995; Sørensen, 2003; O’Reiley, 2006). **According to Correia and Moital (2009, p.18), in tourism the motivation of prestige is defined as “the motivational process by which individuals strive to improve their regard or honour through the consumption of tourism experiences that confer and symbolise the prestige both for individuals and surrounding others”. People can use tourism as a means of increasing their self-esteem, at least in the medium term (Minnaret *et al*., 2009). Mathieson and Wall (1982) suggest that prestige is a very important factor for tourists as a motivation for travelling. In addition, previous research indicates that social status and prestige assume particular relevance, whilst social status is an important condition influencing destination selection (Correia and Kozak, 2012). Increasing social status is a very important and oft-cited reason for travel and tourists accomplish this status by fostering associations with people, places or events. Social status enhancement may be through the pursuit of hobbies, continuing education, ego enhancement and even sexual indulgence (Tiefenbacher *et al.*, 2000).**

McIndosh and Goeldner (1984) classify motivations into four kinds according to the following typology: physical (e.g. relaxation); cultural (e.g. discovering new geographical areas); interpersonal (e.g. socialising and meeting new people); and prestige (e.g. self-esteem and self actualisation). Scholars such as Bansal and Eiselt (2004), and Swanson and Horridge (2006) have examined and studied parts of these motivations.

*The Expression of Social Status through Tourism*

According to Fodness (1994), one of the five reasons for travel is the “value-expressive function” which has to do with self-esteem and ego-enhancement (or social status). (The other reasons are the “knowledge function”, the “utilitarian function”, “punishment minimisation” and “reward maximisation”). Compared to regular leisure activities, leisure travel has greater prestige potential because it is not “sandwiched” between the ever-present necessities of day-to-day living (Riley, 1995). The decision to travel to exotic destinations arises from the desire for knowledge, and social status (Correia *et al.*, 2007). Weissinger and Bandalos (1995) state that self-determination is characterised by awareness of internal needs and a strong desire to make free choices based on these needs. Since emotional and experiential needs are relevant in pleasure-seeking and choice behaviour (Goossens, 2000), the perceived expression of social status throughout tourism is actually a very important factor for destination selection. Nonetheless, the promotion of social status through tourism is a process which tourists adopt to enhance their social standing (Correia and Kozak, 2012). All of the above bring out the significance of exploring social status achieved through tourism with reference to the accessibility and travel distance, expenditure and cultural differences in destinations.

*Hypothetical Constructs*

*Accessibility and travel distance*: Almost always, the behavioural and perceptional patterns differ for groups of tourists from different origins and with varying levels of familiarity with the destination (Hwang *et al.*, 2006). The perceived accessibility has a substantial impact on destination behaviour. Accessibility has been a well-known concept in the transportation planning field since the 1950s when scholars defined it as the ease of reaching desirable destinations (Hansen, 1959). Since distance and mobility are two of the major limitations to tourism (Tiefenbacher *et al.*, 2000), access to destinations is critically important because they strongly influence various dimensions of travel behaviour such as trip frequency, destination choice, mode choice and trip or tour complexity (Iacono *et al.*, 2010). The actual and perceived distance from the country of origin to the destination affects the likelihood of tourist behaviour (Hwang *et al.*, 2006). Moreover, the extraordinary experiences gained in long-haul destinations are able to confer status on tourists (Correia and Kozak, 2012). As Oppermann (1995) states, the effect of distance decay, which describes people’s tendency to visit more places within the destination as they travel further, is known to exist, especially for pleasure trips. In addition, the trip itself can be a motivational factor because it has a “trophy value” which implies that it provides a long-lasting positive reinforcement, an element that adds to travellers’ motivational value (Shinew and Backman, 1995). Based on the empirical findings discussed in the literature, this study has developed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: *There is a direct relationship between travel distance and the expression of social status.*

The importance of accessibility in decisions dealing with multi-destinations is directly related to the idea of economic rationalism and actually explains tourists’ choices as a strategy for minimising cost. But the further people travel the more likely is for travel costs to increase. Thus, it is essential to also examine aspects connected with travel expenditure.

*Expenditure*: When the accessibility is higher to one location, it is less likely to lead to multi-destination tourism because opportunity costs associated with postponing visits to additional ones are smaller than in the case of poor accessibility (Hwang *et al.*, 2006). According to Bornhorst *et al.*, (2010), a destination’s location and accessibility play a unique and important role in its success, and travellers usually associate greater geographical distances, longer trips, and hence higher expenditure with desirable destinations. Greater costs decrease perceptions of accessibility and also represent fixed costs that travellers can better leverage by visiting multiple destinations (Hwang *et al.*, 2006). On the other hand, income is the most significant factor influencing both travel expenditure (Jang and Ham, 2009) and the expression of social status (Jin *et al.*, 2011). Thus, travel expenditure is an important factor that needs to be considered in order to examine the extent of the expression of social status through travel. The discussion has led to the development of the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: *There is a direct relationship between expenditure and the expression of social status.*

Still, accessibility, travel distance and expenditure issues are not the only ones associated with the expression of the perceived social status. The extent of similarities in the way of thinking from origin to destination and the overall cultural differences also seem to affect tourists’ decision making.

*Destination culture*: Every tourist has different behaviours which are associated with their national culture. This also includes their travel patterns (Cho, 1991; Dybka, 1988). There is also evidence to suggest that internalised cultural values may influence a tourist’s destination choices. In terms of culture, tourists derive motivations to travel from curiosity about unusual places and the interaction with foreign local communities (Tiefenbacher *et al.*, 2000), whilst their involvement with culture creates them a unique profile (Boukas, 2013). Richards (2002, p.1048) perceives that culture and cultural attractions “are often the reason for visiting a particular destination, providing activities and experiences and a means of collecting the signs of consumption”. Kolar and Zabkar (2010, p.661) suggest that “culture must be conceived from the consumers’ standpoint and consequently offered in a way which satisfies their needs and expectations”. Whilst tourism researchers have not specifically measured individuals’ internalisation of culture, they have measured tourists’ values for segmentation purposes (Ng *et al.*, 2007). O’Leary and Deegan (2003) studied culture as a destination attitude, and McKercher and Cross (2003) as an important reason for travelling to a destination, indicating that cultural differences might be a driver of tourism destination choice. Furthermore, the majority of cultural tourists make the decision to travel based on generating markets (Richards, 2002). The dynamic nature of culture, along with the process of its fabrication and verification (i.e., authentication), is particularly important (Kolar and Zabkar, 2010). Note that the cultural distance concept can be utilised in order to explain how culture affects tourist perceptions of a destination (San Martin and Rodriguez del Bosque, 2008). In the international business context, scholars have conceptualised cultural distance as the extent to which several cultures are similar or different (Shenkar, 2001).

Within this framework, culture can be defined as a destination’s heritage (tangible and intangible), which includes its music, museums, historical places and traditional richness. As a result, cultural distance and differences influence travellers’ decisions for destination selection. In addition, culture and cultural distance are also means of expressing a specific prestige and status (Yildiz, 2013). Thus, whilst a destination’s image includes such dimensions as local attractions, climate and scenery, it also has a cultural aspect that can influence people’s choice to visit (O’Leary and Deegan, 2003). These findings lead to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: *There is a direct relationship between culture and the expression of social status.*

The distance from the origin to the destination is likely to affect tourism behaviour and purchasing since it usually influences travel expenditure (Hwang *et al.*, 2006). The cultural differentiations and similarities also influence intentions to visit destinations (Ng *et al.*, 2007), whilst their extent is likely to be dependent on the actual distance between origin and destination (Gelbman and Timothy, 2011). From this perspective the expenditure is likely to be higher for tourists who pursue greater cultural differences in the destinations they visit during their leisure trips. These findings lead to the development of the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 4: *There is a direct interrelationship between distance and expenditure.*

Hypothesis 5: *There is a direct interrelationship between distance and culture.*

Hypothesis 6: *There is a direct interrelationship between expenditure and culture.*

**The Proposed Model**

In tourism research destination image is one of the most explored fields (Tapachai and Waryszak, 2000), since researchers perceive it as a very important factor in destination selection (Bansal and Eiselt, 2004). The competition between destinations is mainly based on tourists’ relative perception of the images in the marketplace (Baloglu and Mangaloglu, 2001). An exotic destination fulfils an important function with strong, positive, discriminatory and recognisable images (Beerli and Martin, 2004). Destinations try to attract tourists through a promise that they will fulfil their expectations, both emotional and experiential, whilst their aim is to manipulate the individual’s feelings, to influence their decision making and behaviour processes (Decrop, 1999). Actually, the cognitive component of destination image is related to the individual’s beliefs about a tourist destination, whilst tourism research has suggested a relationship between psychological motivations and affective image (Baloglu, 1997). As O’Reilly (2006) suggests, lengthy trips are something which can help the tourist to maintain a certain degree of mystique as well as social status. Moreover, a destination’s prestige plays a role in attracting people and encouraging their return (Tiefenbacher *et al.*, 2000).

The expression of social status through tourism is associated with the effort tourists make to achieve recognition and the desire to attract attention from others (Kim *et al.*, 2009). Travel distance, the presumed rarity and difficulty of the trip, and the generated experience are perceived as factors that increase prestige and ultimately confer a higher social status on the traveller (Laing and Crouch, 2005). In addition, travel expenditure and destination costs can categorise a leisure activity as ‘prestige worthy’ since they are considered to be important factors in the identification and expression of the participants’ social status (Swarbrooke *et al.*, 2003). Moreover, the extent of the variation between the origin and destination cultures plays a significant role in influencing people’s holiday decision-making processes (Iwashita, 2006).

Figure 1 presents this study’s test model. It suggests that the expression of social status is influenced by the distance between origin and destination, the expenditure involved in the trip, and the extent of the cultural differences between the tourists and the locals. The model further indicates that all three factors (distance; expenditure; culture) can operate as moderators upon each other. Furthermore, it takes into consideration the influence of three socio-demographic variables (nationality; age; level of education) on distance, expenditure and culture.

Please input Figure 1

**Methodology**

*Aim and Objectives*

The research aims to investigate the impact of distance, expenditure and culture to the expression of social status through the creation of a model focusing on tourism travel. The study’s objectives are to examine:

* The interaction between the attributes of different destinations (travel price and distance);
* The desire to discover different ways of thinking (culture) in different parts of the world; and
* The fulfilment of social status (prestige) that a destination can promote.

*Research Characteristics*

The study data was collected from tourists in July and August 2012, at Heraklion’s N. Kazantzakis International Airport, Crete. According to the Association of Greek Tourist Enterprises (AGTE, 2012), Heraklion International Airport is the main entrance gateway for tourists to Crete, receiving approximately 80% of the island’s tourist arrivals and nearly 40% of all charter flights to Greece. More than one-third of foreign tourists coming to Crete and consequently to its airports are from Germany, whilst Americans comprise most of the non-European visitors (Civil Aviation Authority, 2012).

This study selected structured personal interviews with structured questionnaires as the most appropriate method to obtain the primary data. Personal interviews were the best method of achieving the study’s objectives since they are the most versatile and productive method of communication. They facilitate spontaneity, and also provide the potential to guide the discussion back to the outlined topic when discussions are unfruitful (Sekaran and Bougie, 2009). **In order to select a sample frame, a random starting method was adapted in order to reach the respondents. Every fifth passenger passing from a flight’s check in was selected to participate in the sampling frame.** The selected passengers had to be permanent residents of Germany, Greece or the United States. Their selection was made through the usage of an exclusion question at the beginning of the interview concerning their permanent residence. These nationalities were selected because Greek travellers were visitors who originated from the same country (domestic – local travellers), German visitors represented tourists from another country but not from overseas whose trips originated in Europe (continental – international travellers), and Americans represented overseas tourists (overseas – trans-continental travellers) to the island. All respondents had to be adults coming into Crete for tourism. The research sample is stratified since an equal number of passengers per nationality were selected.

*Sample Size Determination*

The need to take a representative sample was fundamental to determination of the sample size and research time period. From more than four million tourists that visit Crete every year, the vast majority visit the island during the summer (Greek National Tourist Organisation, 2012). According to Sevgin *et al.* (1996), when there are unknown population proportions, the researcher should assume a conservative 50 / 50 response format (meaning that 50% of the respondents have negative perceptions, and 50% do not) to determine the sample size. As Sekaran and Bougie (2009) suggest the sampling efficiency is attained when for a given level of precision (sampling error) the size of the sample reduces or increased, meaning that the confidence interval radius is directly related with the sampling error. The author chose to work with a confidence limit of at least 95% and a sampling error of 5%. The sample size was:



**Rounded to 400**

The calculation of the sampling size is independent of the total population size, hence the sampling size determines the error (Aaker and Day, 1990). Due to the usage of an exclusion factor (nationality) and the unwillingness of some respondents to partially or fully participate on the research, the overall amount of interviews has reached 1107. From each nationality 200 usable interviews were conducted. The total usable sample of interviews was 600. The response rate of the research was 54.2%. The statistical errors for the total sample and per nationality were 4% and 6.9% respectively.

*Selection of Variables*

The dependent variables were drawn from the examination of numerous studies. More specifically, those variables examining perceived social status were adopted from O’Reilly (2006), Riley (1995), and Tiefenbacher *et al.* (2000). The travel variables were taken from Bansal and Eiselt (2004), and Shinew and Backman (1995). Variables examining exotic destinations came from Beerli and Martin (2004) and Correia *et al.*, (2007). The expenditure variables were taken from Hwang *et al.* (2006), and Shinew and Backman, (1995), and the ones focusing on culture were from Kolar and Zabkar (2010) and Richards (2002).

The research also selected the grouping variables based on their importance in previous studies. Hough and Hassanien (2010) and Lynch *et al.* (2011) state the importance of nationality for tourist decision making. Jang *et al.* (2004), Trethway and Mak (2005) and Rozier-Rich and Sandos (2011) suggest that age plays an important role in the formulation of tourist selection preferences, whilst Teye *et al.* (2002) and Petrosillo *et al.* (2007) indicate the significance of the level of education in tourist behaviour. This paper takes into consideration all three grouping variables.

*Data Collection and Analysis*

The questionnaire consisted of 25 questions and statements. These were 22 Likert scale (1: Strongly Agree – 5: Strongly Disagree) statements assessing passengers’ opinions regarding perceived social status achieved through tourism (five statements); destination cultural and behavioural differences and social status (six statements); trip distance and social status (five statements); and exotic destination perceptions (six statements). There were also three socio-demographic questions (nationality, age and level of education).

The elaboration on the collected data was made through descriptive statistics, T-test, ANOVA, factor analysis, multiple (factors) and probability (grouping variables) regression. The examination of the research and component validity was made using the X2, average inter-term correlation, discriminant validity, KMO-Bartlett test, varimax rotation loadings, and Chronbach’s A. For the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), the analysis was conducted using SEM (Mplus). The findings were significant at the 0.05 level of confidence.

***Research Limitations***

This study also has some limitations. The first is its static character, since the research was conducted over a specific period of time and not over a period of years. This does not allow the examination of different tourist perspectives through time. Another is the limited number of nationalities included in the sample since the study targeted only American, German and Greek tourists. Travellers with different cultural backgrounds might express varying perceptions for the research theme. A final limitation is the level of importance of the perceived social status conferred by tourism. Even though this importance is widely recognised, it may vary in relation to market segment, means of travel, cultural background and expenditure patterns.

**Obtained Results and Discussion**

*Sample Profile*

The sample consisted of 600 people. The sample was stratified by nationality (200 people per nationality; 33.3%). Two hundred and thirty-eight respondents (39.7%) were between 18 and 35 years old, 231 (38.5%) were between 36 and 50, and 131 (21.8%) were over 50. With regard to the level of education, 327 respondents (54.5%) were compulsory (high school) graduates and 273 (45.5%) had a higher education degree.

*Social Status through Tourism, Culture and Behaviour*

Concerning perceived social status through tourism (Table 1), most of the statistical significances were dealing with nationality. In general terms, the respondents agreed that international travel (trips to some other country within the same continent) conferred a higher status than a national one, whilst a transcontinental travel (trip to some other country situated on a different continent) were indicative of the highest social status. The statistics which support these findings are clear (4.17 for a national trip/ 2.20 for an international trip / 1.84 for a transcontinental trip). Looking at national trips, the overall agreement for Greeks and Germans was only 1% (two respondents each); whereas, no Americans agreed. On the other hand, regarding international travel, the overall agreement for Greeks was 71% (142 respondents), for Germans it was 81% (162 respondents), and for Americans, 81.5% (163 respondents). For transcontinental trips, the overall agreement for Greeks, Germans and Americans was 98%, 86.5% and 84%, respectively. Generally, the Americans seemed more familiar with transcontinental trips because of the geographical position of the United States. When they talked about an international trip, they actually referred to a transcontinental one. Perhaps that is why Americans showed the highest levels of agreement with regard to international trips, since their perceptions for those were almost equal to their perceptions for the transcontinental ones.

Dealing with nationality, the study also produced a series of statistical significances to do with the difference in the locals’ behaviour in a destination, cultural differences in neighbouring countries and the expressed status of the present trip (to or within Greece). In terms of the difference in locals’ behaviour, all nationalities were in agreement. The German responses seemed more in favour, followed by Greeks and finally Americans. The study participants also showed the same trends regarding the statements examining neighbouring countries. On the other hand, dealing with the perceived status value of the present trip (to or within Greece), Americans were most in agreement, followed by Germans and then Greeks, where their overall agreement responses were 94%, 56.5% and 0.5%, respectively. All of the above indicate that the distance from origin to a destination plays a crucial role in the perceived social status value of tourism. In addition, cultural and behavioural differences are also of importance in perceived status, but cannot be considered as variables with a high level of impact. In relation to age, most of the statistical significances were for statements which dealt with the locals’ culture and behaviour. Focusing on culture, the older age group (over 50-years-old) seemed less interested, with an overall agreement trend of 34% (68 respondents). However, this age group showed the highest levels of agreement concerning locals’ behaviour and their way of thinking, where the overall agreement for both was 59% (118 respondents). The expressed perspectives on the statement that dealt with the perceived social status of the present trip revealed that the younger the respondents, the less they focused on the status generated by the trip. This can be explained by the alteration of values and beliefs with age, where younger people seek out new challenges and opportunities but older ones focus more on the expression of their self esteem.

Please input Table 1

*Social Status through Leisure Trips and Perceived Exotic Destinations*

When asked about the social status value of a specific destination, the respondents’ answers varied depending on whether they were examining their own country or speaking about either of the other nationalities. Americans had the higher proportion on overall agreement for Germany and Greece (82.5% and 85%, respectively), whilst the highest agreement statistics of Germans and Greeks were for America (84.5% and 85%, respectively). The lowest levels of agreement for all respondents were obtained when referring to their own country (1.5% for both Germans and Greeks, where no Americans agreed). The results (Table 1) revealed an extraordinary significance with regard to trip destination and perceived social status. These findings were strengthened by the fact that for destinations like Africa and Australia, all respondents, regardless of nationality, agreed that they offer a high social status. All the respondents considered these destinations to be transcontinental.

Dealing with age, the younger the person, the more they perceived that transcontinental trips express a higher social status (Table 1). The statistical significances produced for Australia, Africa and America can be explained because most of the respondents were from Europe. America had a lower trend than Africa and Australia because one-third of the total sample perceived America to be their country of origin. With regard to education, the statistical significances related to statements that focused on Greece and America. Even if the findings for both countries were near to the neutral Likert scale (point 3), higher education graduates had a higher trend of agreements perceiving Greece as an exotic destination (50.2%), whilst compulsory education graduates appeared to have a higher trend of agreements for America (59.6%).

Looking at nationality, statistical significances appeared in all statements dealing with the ‘exotic destinations’ perspectives. Even if all the respondents expressed agreeable trends, German travellers seemed to give a higher priority to all variables, followed by Americans. The strongest agreement for Germans and Greeks was towards the combination of leisure cost and destinations’ cultural difference, where their overall agreements were 86% and 73.5%, respectively. Controversially, the highest trend for Americans was the differentiation of the locals’ behaviour, where their overall agreement reached 83.5%. The population responses actually revealed that except for cultural and behavioural destination differences, and trip length, the moderating factor of cost variation also plays a significant role for the expression of social status through leisure trips. Perhaps this can be used as evidence of a partial determination of social class (available income for leisure purposes), something which directly connects with social status and – as a result – its perceptual patterns.

The expressed responses of the sample on the perceived ‘exotic destinations’ have also created statistical significances in relation to age. Concerning cost, the overall agreements for people aged from 18 to 35, 36 to 50, and over 50 were 68.5%, 75.6% and 80.9%, respectively. It seems that, the older the respondents, the more they were affected by the cost variable when characterising a destination as exotic. For the same age groups under the comparative perspective of a trip distance and cultural differentiation, the overall agreements were 69.7%, 78.3% and 82.4%. Moreover, for the comparative perspective of cost and cultural differentiation, the age groups’ overall agreements were 72.3%, 79.2% and 83.2%. As the results indicate, the older people were more influenced by variables such as cost, a destination’s cultural differentiation and length of journey. As people grow older, they become more demanding and they may seek out higher added value from the experience that they intend to gain from a leisure trip.

*Factor and Regression Analysis*

The author wanted to provide an analysis able to describe the variability among the correlated, observed variables and potentially define a lower number of factors (unobserved variables). In order to do so, factor analysis had to be implemented. During factor analysis there was an effort to focus on the important components of the research. Thus, for higher coefficients, absolute values of less than .4 were suppressed. The correlation matrix revealed numbers larger than .4 over numerous statements. The KMO of Sampling Adequacy was 0.739 (higher than the minimum requested 0.6 for further analysis), whilst statistical significance also existed (.000).

To test the variables’ validity, the research also made an analysis using Cronbach’s Alpha (Table 2), whilst the overall reliability was .756 and all variables were over 7 (minimum value 7; Nunnally, 1978). For model fit, X2 was used since it is considered as a fundamental measure of fit. According the findings, X2=33.53. The author also performed exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation to establish validity in the examined variables. Most of the loadings were reasonably high.

Please Input Table 2

In terms of reliability the research has focused on its consistency through the calculation of the average inter-item correlation and computed the correlation between each pair of items (Distance, Expenditure, Culture, and Social Status). The four items have revealed six item pairings. The average inter-item correlation is .36, whilst the individual correlations rating from .29 to .45. According discriminant validity towards the examined factors of Distance (D), Expenditure (E) and Culture (C) the average inter-item correlation results are the following: D–D=.38; E–E=.45; C–C=.42; D–E=.32; D–C=.29; and E–C=.30.

The calculation of discriminant validity has revealed that:

 

The results indicate that in all components discriminant validity exists (in all cases it is less than 0.85).

Through factor analysis, four components emerged. These components dealt with:

* social status (from the “differences in social status” group – the 2nd, 4th, 5th and 6th statements);
* culture (from the “exotic destinations” group – the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 5th statements);
* expenditure (from the “perceived social status through tourism” group – the 1st and 2nd statements / from the “exotic destinations” group – the 4th and 6th statements); and
* distance (all the “social status through destinations” group).

The examination of the above components revealed that the total R2 = .531. The relatively high score indicates the importance of the research (Figure 2). Regression analysis was statistically significant according to ANOVA. All three variables also produced statistically significant results: distance (Sig. = .000), expenditure (Sig. = .001), and culture (Sig. = .008), something that reveals their importance for the expression of social status through tourism. The standardised coefficients indicated that the primary factor influencing the expression of social status is (H1) distance (β=.422; p<.01) followed by (H2) expenditure (β=.328; p<.01) and (H3) culture (β=.201; p<.05). Moreover, the research findings indicate a considerable moderating influence of the above components, relatively important for the expression of the perceived social status. All components as moderators have almost equal importance. The higher moderating influence is (H4) distance with expenditure (β = .265; p<.01), followed by (H6) expenditure with culture (β = .251; p<.05) and (H5) distance with culture (β = .249; p<.05). As a result, the research findings confirm all the hypotheses presented in Figure 1.

Please input Figure 2

The independent variables (nationality, age, level of education) also influence the factors of analysis. More specifically, nationality mainly influences culture (β = .328; p<.01) followed by distance (β = .252; p<.01) and expenditure (β = .109; p<.05). On the other hand, not all factors are influenced by age and level of education. Age influences expenditure (β = .314; p<.05) and culture (β = .285; p<.05), whilst education has an impact upon distance (β = .301; p<.05) and culture (β = .139; p<.01).

*Discussion and Implications*

As the research results indicated, in leisure trips the more distant a destination is from its origin, the higher the expressed social status for the travellers. Concerning trips, transcontinental trips seem to have the higher impact for the tourists’ expressed social status, followed by international ones. Even though the respondents originated from three different countries, their perspectives were similar under the variable of destination distance. This finding confirms the study of Correia and Kozak (2012) that the extraordinary experiences gained in long-haul destinations are able to confer status on tourists. Thus tourists seem to perceive that transcontinental trips have a high positive impact on their social status, whilst exactly the opposite occurs in domestic trips. The perspectives of the respondents also seem to confirm the study of Shinew and Backman (1995), meaning that long-haul trips can be considered as an element that add to travellers’ motivational value because they have a “trophy value” which implies that it provides a long-lasting positive reinforcement.

In addition, the examined population perceived that leisure cost is directly connected to the length of trip that they have to make in order to reach the desired destination. This finding confirms the research of Bornhorst *et al.*, (2010) suggesting that the location of a destination plays an important role in its success, and travellers usually associate greater geographical distances, longer trips, and hence higher expenditure with desirable destinations. Since income influences the expression of social status (Jin *et al.*, 2011) and as a result the likelihood to travel in long-haul destinations, the findings clearly associate the length of trip, the leisure costs, and the expression of social status.

Another expressed perspective was that the more distant a destination, the lower the potential similarities were likely to be between origin and destination in terms of culture and human behaviour. Since cultural differences may influence tourism destination choice (McKercher and Cross, 2003), the less culturally similar a destination is, the higher the impact is likely to be in destination selection. The respondents seemed to evaluate and define an exotic destination as a fairly distant (from their origin) area with low cultural and behavioural similarities. The importance of the dynamic nature of culture (Kolar and Zabkar, 2010) influences travel decisions (Richards, 2002), whilst exotic destinations become more appealing, with a higher “trophy value” and provide considerably more opportunities for travellers to express and strengthen their perceived social status.

*Social Status through Tourism*

The research findings also defined the hierarchy of factors for the expression of perceived social status. Travel distance is shown to be the most important variable, followed by expenditure and cultural differentiation between origin and destination. The importance of the findings is also revealed by the direct influence of those three characteristics (distance, expenditure and culture) on tourists’ decision making dealing with destination selection. Moreover, these characteristics can also have a considerable influence when one perceives them as moderators.

Please input Figure 3

Figure 3 above presents the expressed responses concerning travel, expenditure, exotic destinations and cultural and behavioural differences from origin to destination. Findings support the view that the longer the distance the higher the perceived social status. These findings are also in agreement with the outcomes of other studies such as Iacono *et al.* (2010) and Oppermann (1995). As Figure 3 illustrates, the expressed social status within the same country (national trip) is relatively low. When the trip is internationalised the expression of social status increases, whilst in trans-continental trips this expression reaches its full potential. In addition, the fewer the cultural and behavioural similarities between origin and destination and the longer the travel distance the more possible it is for tourists to perceive their destination as exotic. Even if a culturally similar destination is perceived from travellers as a more safe choice (Ng *et al.*, 2007) the exotic essence creates the perspective of travel as a “trophy value” (Shinew and Backman, 1995) and beneficially influences the willingness of tourists (especially cultural travellers) to participate in long-haul trips. International trips can somehow create the exotic perception and the appropriate cultural differentiation. The findings define the level of a perceived exotic destination by using the travel distance and the cultural differences. They also suggest that is unlikely to reach the perception of an exotic destination with a national (domestic) trip. However, transcontinental trips can establish this link and create the appropriate conditions for tourists to express their desirable social status. Individual characteristics of travellers such as nationality, age and level of education can influence the extent of the impact from one destination to another, but the overall rationale remains the same. That is why the visualisation Figure 3 offers has a significant value for destinations on a national and international level which seek to understand the contribution of the examined factors to the attainment of social status.

The contribution of the study is in both, theoretical and practical domain. Theoretically, it confirms a series of previous researches about the importance of travel distance, culture, and expenditure as important factors for destination selection. It also introduces the connection of social status with these factors. Thus the research has focused on the examination of a model of social status seeking the parameters that are able to provide conceptual evidence on the understanding of the role that social status plays in destination selection. Moreover, it fills in a gap in the literature by examining and comparing the perspectives of tourists travelling to all, short, middle and long-haul destinations and coming from different tourist generating countries in order to examine the expression of social status through travel. Practically, it provides information to tourism decision makers for the evaluation of their destination in different cultures and nationalities. Including the examination of the perceived social status on marketing reorientation, the decision makers can promote and advertise destinations more efficiently, be able to attract more market segments, and better understand the tourist market in national and international level.

**Conclusion and Future Research**

The understanding of a successful leisure trip is based on the perceived experience that tourists finally gain. It is also essential for tourists to have the opportunity to say that this trip really covered their emotional needs and wants; of these, their expression of social status as one of the most important. Thus, the selected destination, the local culture and behaviour that they expect to encounter, the overall cost, the journey that they are willing to undertake and the combination of all the above, are crucial factors in the final perception of their leisure trip. Regardless of the travellers’ nationality, age or education (or cultural background), these needs and wants actually stay the same.

The study has shown that tourists consider travel distance to be the most important factor in the expression of their social status. As a result, distance between origin and destination can primarily influence the decision making process for destination selection followed by travellers’ attitudes towards tourism behaviour. The level of tourist expenditure is another factor that influences consumers’ decisions. Expenditure is shrinking, especially during periods of economic recession. Finally, the differentiation between the culture of the country of origin and that of the destination also influences the expression of social status through tourism.

The main importance of this article for decision makers is that it enables them to predict the image of their destination to different tourist flows and to reform products and services (and the image itself) within a manner of delivering a better tourist experience. In addition, tourism and hospitality marketers can focus on different and diverse market segments having the opportunity to better comprehend tourists’ needs and ultimately promote destinations and hospitality firms more successfully. Within this frame they can attract more tourist flows, increase destination impact to more demanding tourists and finally succeed in generating a higher profit. Furthermore, the tourism and hospitality industry can better understand modern tourist needs, and within a range of necessary innovations, can succeed with a higher competitive advantage, and – especially for mass tourist destinations – minimise the market pressure and dependency on tour operators. All the above, combined, can finally give tourism an additional momentum for the 21st century.

Finally, the findings point out the necessity for further research in order to determine any other possible factors that influence the expression of the perceived social status conferred by tourism. Possible further research may focus on different geographical areas with different tourist products and characteristics. Different regions are likely to have different cultural aspects that need to take under consideration. Destination culture can influence the products (ie: cuisine, arts and crafts) and characteristics (ie: customs, habits, organised events) of the destination itself, thus it might create potential alterations to travellers’ behaviour about destination choice. The proposed model can also be used as a basis for further examination on different cultures, travellers’ nationalities and destinations. Under this basis the theoretical and practical importance of the model can be strengthened. This is something that would enable comparison of the findings and the alteration of perspectives through space and time, whilst there is also an opportunity for further model improvement.

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