Is Madeira Airport the Beginning of a Tourism Experience on the Island?

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Air transport is the main mode of transport used when traveling to the Autonomous Region of Madeira (ARM), Portugal. The airport and the entire airport infrastructure are essential for tourists to access the island. It is therefore important to assess their importance in the tourism development of the region and, to what extent, being the first and last experience with the destination, they impact the image and perception of passengers about the destination and their future desire to return. The present investigation, being exploratory, intends to evaluate the relationship between passenger satisfaction with airport services and its role in the tourist experience of visitors to the ARM. As observation instruments, surveys were used and they concluded that the airport is not just the place of arrival and departure, but the beginning and the end of the tourist experience at the destination. For that reason, it is essential to have a greater articulation between the policies of transport and tourism in the region, in order to enhance the image and notoriety of the destination.
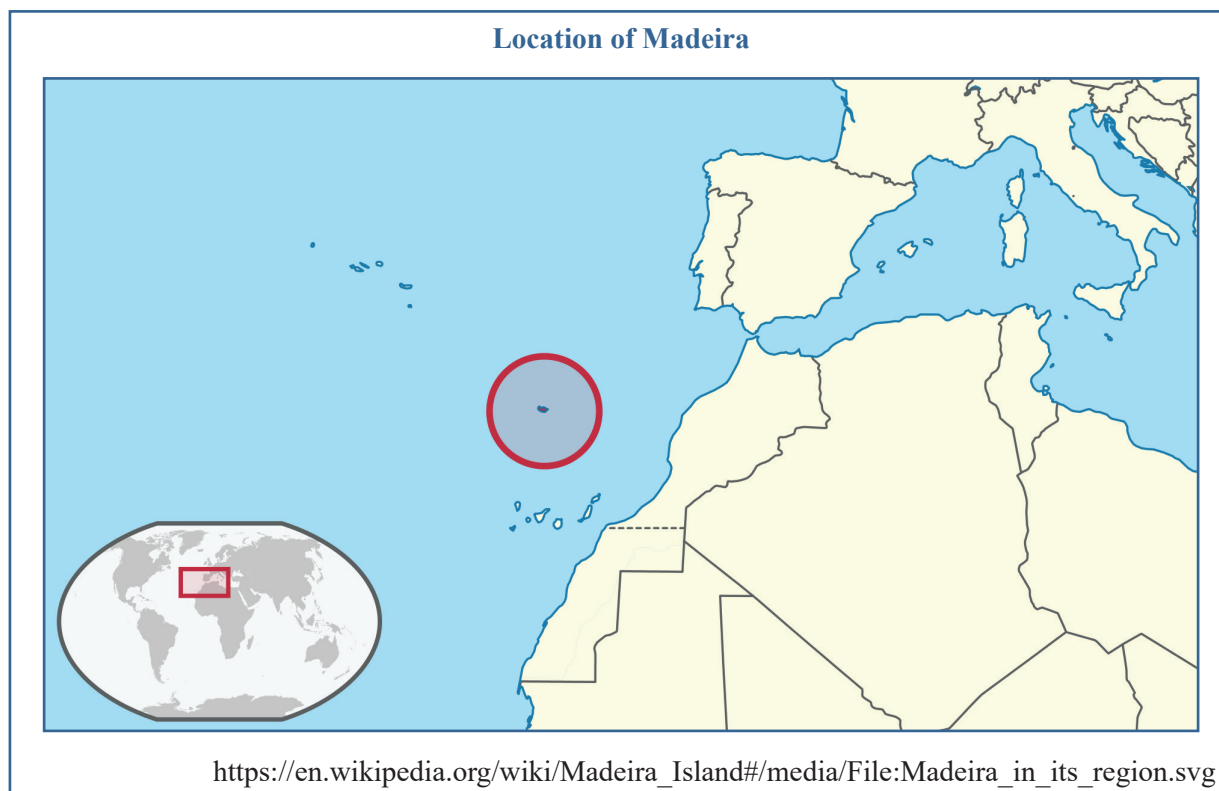
Key Words: tourist experience, quality of services, Autonomous Region of Madeira, airport services, tourism and transport

Introduction

Air transport to island destinations is a vital way of arriving, so its importance and catalyst contribution to the economy and development of these destinations and their tourism are recognised (Spasojevic, Lohmann & Scott, 2017). Similarly, airports are fundamental infrastructures for the movement of people and goods functioning as instruments that enhance tourism development (Bezerra & Gomes, 2015).

Innovation processes in transport have brought greater convenience, connectivity, and accessibility to destinations, with an impact on quality, comfort and travel time (Duval, 2020). International deregulation processes, and larger and more efficient planes led to a reduction in the unit price of travel, to the emergence of tourist packages and charter flights and the development of new business models that decisively contributed to the growth of international tourism and the opening of new markets (Bieger & Wittmer, 2006; Almeida, Costa & Abrantes, 2020).

Data from the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2021) show that 59% of international tourist arrivals in 2019 were made by air, out of a total of 1.5 billion international tourist arrivals (+4% year-on-year). In terms of world commercial aviation, in 2019, 4.5 billion passengers were transported worldwide (ICAO, 2020). The growth of the tourist phenomenon and air transport has, necessarily, impacts on the airport infrastructure. In 2019, 9.1 billion passengers were registered at world airports (+3.5% compared to the previous year) (ACI, 2020). However, the COVID-19 pandemic has completely changed the paradigm of growth in tourism and air transport at a global and regional level, with significant losses in 2020 and 2021 and with some recovery throughout 2022. Globally, world-scheduled passenger traffic for the year 2020 shows a reduction of 50% of seats offered by airlines when compared to 2019, a reduction of 60.2% in passengers and a loss of USD 372 billion in airline passenger revenues (ICAO, 2022). In terms of tourism, UNWTO (2022) estimates that international tourism fell by 72.3% in 2020 (405 million in 2020 versus 1,466 million in 2019), with revenues dropping by 63.2% in the same period.

Location of Madeira

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madeira_Island#/media/File:Madeira_in_its_region.svg

Madeira is an Autonomous Region of Portugal and is located on the African Plate in the Atlantic Ocean at about 1000 km southwest of Lisbon (capital of Portugal), approximately 500 km west of the African coast, and 450 km north of the Canary Islands.

For ARM, tourism has been the main and most relevant economic activity in the region, being the main structuring factor and catalyst of the regional economy. The contribution of the tourism sector to the regional GDP is between 25% and 30%, with an equally essential contribution in terms of job creation, accounting for around 12% to 15% of jobs created in the region (ARDITI, 2015).

Due to the characteristics inherent to its insularity, 'Cristiano Ronaldo Airport' has been a facilitator in increasing tourism, wealth and employment. The renovation works completed in 2000 provided greater capacity and accessibility for national and international tourists to access the island, with the airport reaching 3 million passengers for the first time in 2017; in 2019 this figure exceeded 3.2 million passengers (ANA, 2017; DREM, 2020). Cruise activity has also increased its presence on the island, registering a total of 585,800 passengers in transit in 2019, an increase of 9.5%

compared with 2018 (DREM, 2020). The effects of the pandemic had negative impacts on tourism and air activity in ARM. Data for 2020 show that Madeira recorded -66.2% in overnight stays and -65.2% in air passengers when compared with 2019 (DREM, 2020).

This article aims to evaluate the relationship between airport services, their performance, and the tourist experience. The main objective will therefore be to understand the contribution which the quality of airport infrastructure can have in the satisfaction of tourists when they pass through the airport and how it can impact the tourist experience of the passenger, in terms of image, their perception of the destination and future desire to return.

Literature Review

Being an integral part of the air transport system, along with airlines and air navigation, airports have evolved from an infrastructure with a basic objective of transporting people and goods to greater complexity where various businesses intersect and develop. Even if it brings together different entities with different needs and different operational or support services, the airport corresponds to the point of arrival and departure

of tourists, so their experiences with each of these entities will contribute to modulating their perceptions of the quality of airport services and their impact on the destination image (Prentice, Wang & Manhas, 2021). Currently, airports are more than a mere infrastructure to support air transport, functioning as centres of national and regional development and decisively contributing to increasing the attractiveness of destinations (Graham, 2019b).

Destination Image

The image of destinations assumes strong relevance in the tourist development process of these destinations, as tools that promote the passage of tourists through the territory. So, it is important to evaluate how the individuals' experience develops before, during and after the trip (Bezerra & Silva, 2016) and how the construction of a good image is crucial, in order to generate trust and facilitate the consumption process (Almeida, 2020).

Regarding the image of destinations and the tourist imaginary, Urry (1990) and Jenkins (1999) stand out, considering that the tourist's view of places is not universal. For the construction of this imagery when choosing a destination, tourist's expectations and fantasies must be taken into account, which involves different pleasures and feelings, according to their social experiences. As mentioned by Gastal and Castrogiovanni (2003:57), cited in Silva, Bezerra and Nóbrega (2019)

> *we do not travel to know the places, but to confirm the imaginary we have of them* [so that] *the image of tourist destinations it is fundamental for the choice and for the motivation to consume. The image that is created in the mind of a tourist is a reflection of the supply capacity of a tourist destination* (Almeida, 2020:14).

The image of a destination will thus, be one of the main factors that explains tourists' intention to visit / revisit (Qu, Kim & Im, 2011) and in their recommendations to others (Baloglu, Henthorne & Sahin, 2014), since it is the image that differentiates tourist destinations (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991).

The internet and social networks have introduced new realities in the image of destinations by providing an experience even before the trip takes place. This new reality, along with comments and recommendations, can influence the imagination of places and destinations and travel (Barbas & Graburn, 2012). In this sense, Ferreira *et al.* (2022) evaluated the islands of Madeira and Bermuda based on reviews on social network platforms, having identified a higher level of satisfaction in Madeira (90% of positive responses), with the restaurant data showing positive sentiments, while cultural activities registered less positive sentiments.

Airport Experience

As in air transport, liberalisation processes, privatisation, competitiveness and increased commercial intensity in airport businesses have led many airports to adopt business models that also guarantee levels of return in the non-aeronautical market. This commitment has led passengers to be at the centre of revenue generation capacity, so it is essential to increase their satisfaction and experience in passing through the airport infrastructure (Graham, 2019a; Duval, 2020).

More effective than price, product and / or service quality, the customer experience, since it is built on perceptions and attitudes towards the service and influencing purchase and loyalty, can be an important competitive advantage for companies (Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman, 1996; Prentice, Wang & Loureiro, 2019; Godovykh & Tasci, 2020). Taking as a starting point the models developed by Killion (1992) and Craig-Smith and French (1994), both cited in Prebensen *et al.* (2012), Laws (1995) considers that the tourist experience must pay attention to a sequence of phases: *pre-travel*, starting with the intention to visit a certain destination; *journey and arrival*, which is the inherent experience of passing through a variety of services to the destination; *destination stay*, that is, the experience during your stay; ending with memories of the destination when you return to the origin (*after return home*).

Sun Tung and Ritchie (2011), Pezzi and Vianna (2015), as well as Cutler and Carmichael (2010), following Uriely (2005), developed conceptual models of the tourist experience, where the tourist experience is everything that happens with a tourist impact, from the trip to the tourist destination (*pre-experience*), the activities at the destination (*experience*) and the return to the destination origin (*recall or memory*). Even so,

these authors consider that it will be important to take into account all motivations and expectations in the pre-experience, as well as all memories whether satisfactory or unsatisfactory, experiences that can last longer through photos, memories, and conversations with friends, among others. Kim, Ritchie and McCormick (2012) exploring tourism and memorable experiences, reinforce the role of the individual evaluation of this experience and, mainly, what is positively remembered after the occurrence of a certain event.

Kim (2010) considers that it is unlikely that satisfactory tourism experiences will not be remembered in the post-experience phase without any positive impact on the destination, because the greater the degree of satisfaction, the greater the tourist's memorisation of this destination.

For Marujo (2016:2):

> the tourist travels to consume experiences [so] everything tourists visit, experience or consume in a destination can be considered an experience,

This validates the position taken by Pine and Gilmore (1998), which advocate that tourists want to be the actor of their own experience and dreams in the chosen destination.

Aho (2001) goes further by extending the traditional concept of three stages in the tourism experience (pre-experience, experience and post-experience) to seven stages:

1) orientation;

2) involvement;

3) visit;

4) evaluation;

5) recollection (or memory);

6) reflection and;

7) enrichment.

For the author, these stages are dynamic with new experiences taking place, in the same way that old experiences are updated and modified. Likewise, Prebensen *et al.* (2012) concluded that travel motivation can condition what tourist's value differently throughout the various stages of the tourist experience.

Passenger Experience at Airports

The study of passenger experience at airports has also been investigated and applied. Popovic, Kraal and Kirk (2010) highlight the complexity of an airport, emphasising the different stages and points of contact of a passenger at the airport from the moment of leaving home to arriving home after the trip. According to these authors, passenger activities at an airport can be of two natures: procedural activities, related to the legal and regulatory aspects of boarding / disembarkation of an aircraft, and discretionary activities, which include all others. Their research made it possible to verify the interdependence between activities and passengers' experience, and in all activities, passengers mostly interact with processes, technology, services, personnel and products.

Likewise, Barich, Ruiz and Miller (2015) identified *21 Passenger Journey Points* (up to the airport exit), an evolution of the *14-step Passenger Process* defined by the International Air Transport Association (IATA, n.d.). The integration of the multiple systems in an airport benefit passengers and improve the overall experience through the airport, and consequently generate more commercial opportunities for the airport operator, airlines and concessionaires.

Tuchen, Arora and Blessing (2020:7) consider a 9-step user journey for an arriving passenger from arrival to transport. The authors also point out that

> airport systems can be made more agile, flexible, and resilient by embedding an understanding of what has happened, is happening, and what might happen in the day-to-day reality into strategic decisions for the future.

This highlights the importance of system and connections as facilitators in the passenger experience through the airport infrastructure.

Graham (2019b) emphasises the concept of the *airport journey* where the offer of a range of services and options within the airport terminal has a high potential to improve the passenger experience and increase the attractiveness of the airport.

Sykes and Desai (2009) carried out an investigation at UK airports, with the purpose of evaluating and understanding

Figure 1: Mandatory Touchpoints in Airport Passenger Journey

| Arrive at airport | Security | Customs | Boarding |

| Airport Exit | Customs | Disembark |
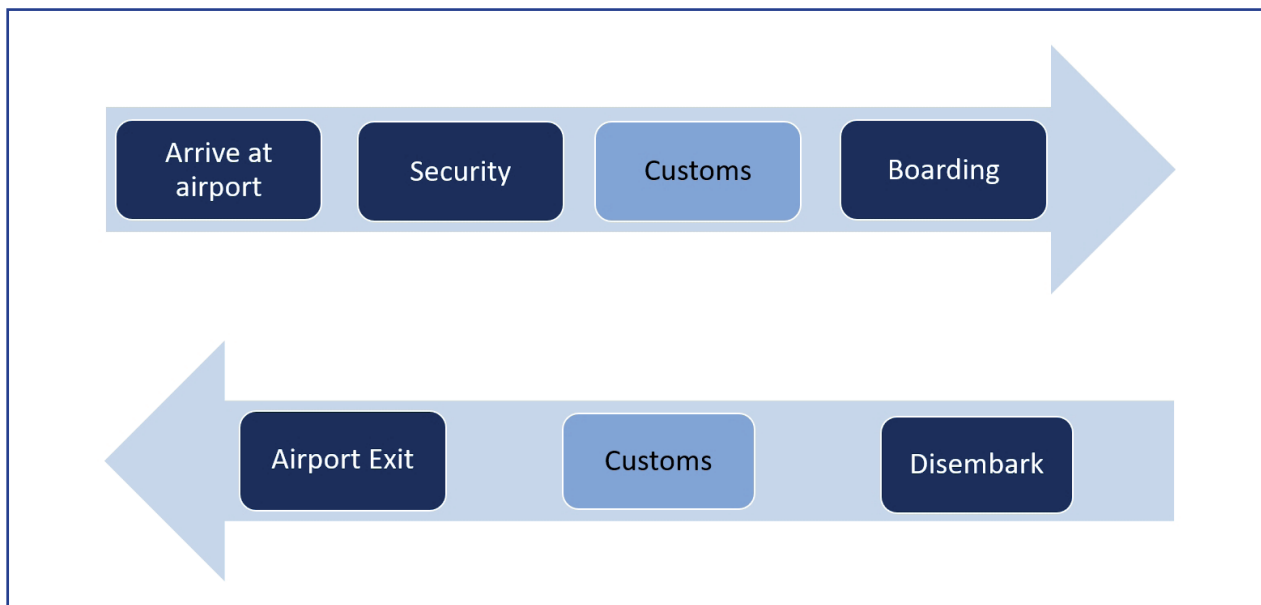
Source: Own elaboration based on Popovic, Kraal & Kirk (2010), Barich, Ruiz & Miller (2015), Inversini (2019), Mariani *et al.* (2019), Wiredja, Popovic & Blackler (2019), IATA & ACI (2020), Tuchen, Arora & Blessing (2020), Halpern (2022)

the main factors that can affect the passenger experience at an airport, from their arrival at the airport to their arrival home or in transit to another destination. The main factors which they identified are more linked to the airlines than to the airport infrastructure itself, highlighting reliability and efficiency in terms of the punctuality of flights. They also noted that information and communication, customer service, infrastructure and entertainment and even design and maintenance of airports are important aspects to have in mind for airport managers.

Kiliç and Çadirci (2022) carried out an analysis of passenger perception of the airport experience based on ten topics, consisting of baggage claim, immigration process, access gates, procedures at the airport, leisure activities, employee service, transfer / transit amenities, terminal facilities, passport control, and ambient conditions. Their conclusions indicate that the airport sentiments are positive, but there is room for improvement mainly in baggage claim, employee services, immigration process, passport control, and airport procedures.

Coll (2020) emphasises what he calls,

airport global customer experience, based on 'one experience – one brand – one airport',

The emphasis for this author is what the customer 'lives' while traveling through the airport. The provision of services at an airport, from check-in to boarding, represents a multiplicity of contacts along the *airport passenger journey*, increasing the complexity of passenger experience assessment (Fodness & Murray, 2007; Bogicevic *et al.*, 2013; Bezerra & Gomez, 2016).

Although several models of airport passenger journey detail many of the contact points when passing through the airport, technology is reducing these mandatory touchpoints, giving passengers more time for other types of commercial activities and entertainment in the infrastructure. The scheme in Figure 1 aims to present the mandatory points of contact which any passenger has to comply with either upon departure or arrival at an airport.

Seamless technology allows check-in to be done online and the subsequent boarding pass to be shown at the gate on a mobile device, while traveling with hand luggage or trolleys avoids baggage-drop at departure and baggage collection at arrival. This situation means that many passengers after arrival at the airport can go directly to security. Likewise, not all passengers have to comply with customs and can go directly to the aircraft boarding (European Schengen countries agreed to remove many controls at their borders permitting free movement between these 33 European countries (Eur-Lex, n.d.)).

After disembarking, many passengers can go directly to the airport exit.

Airport Council International (ACI) in its *Smart Security Vision 2040*, has defined their hopes for a future pathway to achieve a seamless airport security screening experience. As noted by Gittens (2020), this will represent a

> ... *more ambitious objective to deliver a walking-pace, seamless passenger experience at airport screening checkpoints and moving away from a one-size-fits-all approach to airport security.*

This means that in the future passengers can go directly to the gate to embark and can have a similar experience as they disembark.

However, among all these mandatory touchpoints passengers must respect when passing through the airport, there is a multitude of spaces at their convenience, such as shops, banks, restaurants, and others that aim to improve the passenger's experience at the airport.

Airports and Destinations

Given the growing importance of the relationship between the airport infrastructure and the passenger, airports have invested in a concept of '*sense of place*' inside terminals and in their design, they are aiming to improve the experiential and emotional connection of passengers and airports and, consequently, develop connection with destinations (Wattanacharoensil, Schuckert & Graham, 2016; Holland, 2017; Masjutina, 2017; Kaduoka, 2019). By allowing the airport to introduce the identity of a destination, creating a sense of being in that place ('*sense of place*'), it is intended, above all, to psychologically stimulate passengers in this connection between themselves, the destination and the airport (Wattanacharoensil, Fakfare & Graham, 2022).

Batouei *et al.* (2020) extending the model proposed by Wattanacharoensil, Schuckert and Graham (2016) based on sociological, psychological and services marketing management perspectives, has introduced the variables of passenger satisfaction and passenger behavioural intentions. The conclusions of this work indicate that satisfaction plays a critical role in shaping travellers' intention to revisit and spread positive words.

This new vision of the relationship between airports and destinations has led to major changes in some airports which have become tourist destinations in their own right. The article '*Airports Are Becoming More like Tourist Destinations*' (Simple Flying, 2020) highlights some examples of the actions that airports have taken to attract tourists and visitors. Hong Kong airport organises a four-month cultural event, with music and art, Schiphol airport in Amsterdam (Netherlands) includes two museums and a bookstore in its infrastructure, while Vancouver airport (Canada) offers dental services, a spa and an aquarium.

A much broader concept has to do with the notion of *aerotropolis*, with the expansion of airports beyond the boundaries of the traditional aeronautical business, using their adjacent land for a series of additional activities, including housing and offices, shops, events, conferences or leisure which can all attract visitors. As defined by Kasarda (2011:3),

> *the shapes and fates of cities have always been defined by transportation. Today, this means air travel.*

Graham (2019b) considers that London's airports can be defined as destinations in themselves, where people do more than simply use the infrastructure. They are gateways to the City of London. Other examples presented by Agraval (2018) include Incheon International Airport (Seoul, South Korea), Schiphol International Airport (Amsterdam, Netherlands) and Memphis International Airport (Memphis, USA).

The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC, 2018) recognises that some cities with important airport hubs were able to extend the stays of visitors in transit into overnight stays of several days, encouraging them to visit the destination. By developing vertically integrated strategies including airlines, airports, hotels, tourism companies and authorities, countries such as Singapore and Dubai have been able to encourage passengers to visit and stay overnight at the destination (Lohmann *et al.*, 2009; Yas *et al.*, 2020). In an innovative developmenet to promote tourism, TAP Air Portugal allows passengers to stay in Portugal - Lisbon or Porto - for one to five nights for free at through its *Stopover* program (Singh, 2021).

Wattanacharoensil *et al.* (2017) reinforce the importance of the affective and cognitive dimension of passenger experience at airports, as this represents the first and last contact with it. For Chao, Lin and Chen (2013) international travellers' impressions of a particular country are frequently affected by their first and last encounters at the gateway airport. The airport experience has thus become a crucial factor in airport management, as a positive experience at the airport can increase the potential for future visits to the destination, due to increased passenger satisfaction. On the other hand, positive airport experiences, especially when there is strong competition between airports, can be an important differentiating factor and help increase an airport's non-aeronautical revenue (Wattanacharoensil, Schuckert & Graham, 2016; WTTC, 2018).

Airport Service Quality

This need for differentiation along with the necessary standardisation of information led the Airports Council International (ACI, 2021) to develop a questionnaire – *Airport Service Quality* (ASQ) – to assess the quality of service at airports. For Fodness and Murray (2007) the Dimensions of the Quality of Airport Services should be based in three vectors (*Servicescape*, *Service Personnel* and *Services*). The perception of passengers about the quality of airport service is directly influenced by expectations of how airport services are provided during the time that these passengers are physically present during their passage through the airport. In the same way, the importance of information regarding ASQ is essential for airports to develop strategies and marketing plans capable of differentiate them from each other.

Bezerra and Gomes (2019) concluded that the quality of airport service and the airport image are two of the main factors that contribute to passenger loyalty towards an airport. However, in the research carried out by Sykes and Desai (2009), these authors consider that the factors with the greatest impact on the choice of an airport are almost always outside the control of airports, focusing on the offer of destinations and flights and on the air ticket prices. In this sense, Seetanah, Teeroovengandum and Nunkoo (2020) evaluated the relationship between tourists' satisfaction and airport services, and their intention to revisit a destination, in this case, applied to an equally insular context in Mauritius. They concluded

that tourists' satisfaction with the destination has a statistically significant effect on their likelihood to revisit the destination (with a coefficient of determination (R^2) of 64%). As they stated,

> the quality of airport services does matter in fostering positive tourists' behaviors, since the more satisfied the latter are with airport services the more likely they are to come back (Seetanah, Teeroovengandum & Nunkoo, 2020:145).

Portuguese Airports

At Portuguese airports, the quality of service has been regularly monitored. The questionnaire which is administered aims to assess four key aspects, focusing primarily on the overall experience of passengers in the three main stages of their passage through the airport (arrivals, shopping area and departures). Table 1 presents an assessment of certain selected indicators for three observation periods: the last quarter of 2019 (last quarter not influenced by the effects of the pandemic); the last quarter of 2021 (in order to allow a 'post-pandemic' comparison) and; the first quarter of 2022 (allowing an evolutionary assessment of these two quarters) (ANA, 2022).

Despite the atypical moments experienced in recent years, Madeira Airport managed to show a good performance, with high levels of satisfaction, being surpassed only by Porto airport and, in this last quarter, also by Ponta Delgada airport (Azores):

Overall, Madeira Airport improved its satisfaction rates between 2019 and 2021, except for *Cleanliness of the toilet facilities* (4.01 in 2021 compared to 4.03 in 2019), *Comfort in waiting areas* (3.64 versus 3.82, the lowest values of all indicators presented for this airport) and *Waiting time at security control* (3.97 and 4.04 in 2019 and 2021 respectively). Madeira Airport showed the best levels of satisfaction in the Portuguese network in relation to *Waiting time at border / passport control* (with a level of 4.46 in both years, being the one that fell the most in the 1st quarter of 2022 (the level of 4.22 only surpassing Lisbon airport). In 2022, *Comfort in waiting areas* was the highest of all airports (4.36 when all other airports remained below 4.0). *Cleanliness* has been seen a decrease in level of satisfaction over time, an aspect that airport authorities must take into account.

		A) Ease of wayfinding in the airport	B) Cleanliness of the airport	C) Availability of baggage trolleys	D) Cleanliness of the toilet facilities	E) Flight information screens	F) Courtesy and helpfulness of airport staff	G) Comfort in waiting areas	H) Waiting time in check-in queue	I) Waiting time at security control	J) Waiting time at border/passport control	K) Overall satisfaction with the airport
Indicators	**Location**											
4th quarter 2019	**LIS**	3.81	3.69	3.52	3.11	3.87	3.89	3.2	3.18	3.66	3.88	3.68
	OPO	4.5	4.5	4.2	3.95	4.52	4.43	3.78	3.9	4.24	4.14	4.34
	FAO	4.09	3.99	4.06	3.51	4.14	4.16	3.39	4.04	3.99	4.12	3.95
	PDL	4.28	4.19	3.86	3.72	4.07	4.21	3.66	4.04	4.19	4.21	4.07
	FNC	4.11	4.17	4.15	4.03	4.11	4.15	3.82	4.04	4.14	4.46	4.15
4th quarter 2021	**LIS**	3.82	3.92	3.73	3.64	3.95	3.97	3.5	3.69	3.77	3.92	3.85
	OPO	4.47	4.45	4.29	4.1	4.49	4.4	4	3.95	4.29	4.16	4.37
	FAO	4.16	3.97	4.09	3.59	4.13	4.19	3.52	3.81	3.9	4.11	4
	PDL	4.36	4.25	4.11	3.9	4.24	4.31	3.66	4.08	4.16	4.24	4.17
	FNC	4.25	4.32	4.26	4.01	4.33	4.38	3.64	3.97	4.31	4.46	4.2
1st quarter 2022	**LIS**	3.85	3.79	3.73	3.64	3.76	3.92	3.41	3.89	3.88	4.13	3.89
	OPO	4.42	4.33	4.15	4.08	4.36	4.35	3.91	4.14	4.37	4.46	4.41
	FAO	3.94	3.94	3.9	3.69	3.93	4.06	3.53	3.85	4.07	4.46	4.04
	PDL	4.19	4.1	3.73	3.88	4.09	4.18	3.76	4.04	4.24	4.33	4.27
	FNC	4.1	4.08	4.1	3.91	4.08	4.09	4.36	3.94	4.26	4.22	4.18

Table 1: Assessment of Passenger Satisfaction at Portuguese Airports

Note: LIS - Lisbon; OPO - Porto; FAO - Faro; PDL - Ponta Delgada (Azores); FNC - Funchal (Madeira)

Source: Own elaboration based on ANA (2022)

Since the airport is an integral part of the tourist destination, the quality of the airport service has direct effects on the passenger, positively or negatively influencing them to return to the destination in the future (Kirk *et al.*, 2014; Prentice & Kadan, 2019). Thus, measures and incentives must be developed, involving airports, tourism and airlines that contribute to regional and local strategic development, allowing for the strengthening of the tourist function of these destinations (Fernández, Coto-Millán & Díaz-Medina, 2018).

Routes an international aviation conference and networking event has been taking place since 1995, which aims to capture routes to airports, as well as to promote their infrastructure with various airlines while promoting tourist destinations. *Routes* was held in Las Vegas (USA) in 2022 and had 702 organisations, including Madeira Airport. This event confirms the strategic alliance between tourism and airports, where, together with destination, the airports can promote their reputation while attracting new routes and new airlines (Robertson, 2019; Routes, 2022).

Madeira Airport with Extended Runway

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madeira_Airport#/media/File:Madeira_(2).jpg

Airports have long ceased to be mere arrival and / or departure platforms for a given destination. Since the technical and operational aspects are fundamental, its services and the offer of quality service in the airport infrastructure (even due to the importance of the generated income) is today an integral part of its business model, along with its contribution to the chain of tourism value.

The increase in competition and competitiveness between markets, airports and tourist destinations means the evaluation and satisfaction of passengers with regard to the services provided must be a priority. Airport managers need to understand how their service is being perceived by passengers. As the trip begins and ends in the services provided in the airport infrastructure, the recognition of quality often is vital as it seriously impacts on the tourist experience of the visitor, causing positive effects on the destination, which reinforces the nature of their satisfaction.

Methodology

Air transport is the main mean of transport used by tourists to access the Madeira region and considering the growth in demand over the last few years (influenced by the pandemic effects), the objective of the investigation is to evaluate the impact that the quality of airport services can have on the tourist experience of the visitor to the island of Madeira. How these services are perceived by the passengers is the core of this research. Thus, it will be important to know how visitors evaluate the main airport aspects and how they impact on the destination image, in order to facilitate a future return of these tourists to the region and to attract new ones.

In methodological terms, the research considers the conceptual quality of airport services model proposed by Fodness and Murray (2007), based on the quality of airport services and the expectations of passengers in relation to them. The model seeks to evaluate the quality factors expected by passengers and the importance of these expectations, based on three aspects in the provision of airport services and their quality:

1) *servicescape*, based on the physical environment and the processing of services;

2) s*ervice personnel*, in terms of attitudes, behaviour and experience, and;

3) *services*, in terms of productivity, maintenance and leisure.

The means of data collection was questionnaires, carried out between October and December 2020, a time with strong pandemic restrictions. That situation affected the number of answers, due to fear of the participation of many potential respondents. Furthermore, many of the hotels were closed due to lower tourist mobility in the region as a consequence of the limited number of flights to / from ARM.

Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, there was no possibility to undertake the questionnaires at Madeira Airport, or the possibility for expert interviews. This resulted in serious limitations to the investigation and forced the identification of valid alternatives. In the end, 104 valid survey responses were obtained, mostly through personal interviews in the Lavradores market, an important point of tourist any visit to Madeira (82 responses). The remaining responses were obtained online. Non-probabilistic convenience sampling was chosen, since elements are chosen arbitrarily, bearing in mind that the results and conclusions are limited to the sample and cannot be extrapolated with confidence to the universe. Non-probability techniques have to be used whenever there is no available and complete list of the population under investigation (Galloway, 2005). Researchers choose these samples because they were easy to recruit, and thus, the researcher did not consider selecting a sample that represents the entire population. In the same way, researchers use this method in studies where it is impossible to draw random probability sampling due to time or cost considerations (Fleetwood, n.d.).

The questionnaire consisted of 21 questions, only two of which were open-ended, in order to facilitate their completion. Furthermore, it was necessary not to impact too greatly on tourists' time during their visit to the market and above all to avoid prolonged social contact due to COVID-19 guidelines. The main focus of the questions is the airport services and their quality, not forgetting the sociodemographic characterisation of the respondents and their assessment of the destination. The open questions aimed at a better understanding of the potential aspects of improvement to be implemented at the airport. The combination of the two types of questions allows for quantitative and qualitative approaches in the treatment of data, giving greater scientific relevance to the investigation.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of the data collected, according to the questions of the surveys, considers a sociodemographic characterisation of the respondents, the main motivations for their trip to the destination and, finally, an appreciation of the attributes and degree of satisfaction in the use of Madeira Airport. The data obtained were processed through the use of descriptive statistical analysis techniques (mean, mode and standard deviation), and content analysis was undertaken in the open-answer questions.

The characterisation of the selected passengers who visited Madeira shows that:

- Most respondents are German (25%), followed by Portuguese (21.2%) and English (12.5%). In total, 23 different nationalities were surveyed, mostly European.

- The most representative age groups are young people. The group between 18 and 28 is the largest (34.6%).

- Overall, 75% of respondents are active in the labour market.

- Females were the majority of the participants (60.58%).

With regard to the reasons for the trip and the airline used, it appears that:

- The vast majority travelled for leisure reasons (78.8%), while others mentioned visiting family and friends or even business (4.8% each).

- The majority of passengers travel regularly, with 47.1% of respondents claiming to have visited 16 or more countries.

- Most were visiting Madeira for the first time (65.4%). Among those who have already visited the destination, the degree of loyalty is high, with 36.1% having visited Madeira 7 or more times.

Table 2: List of Attributes in an Airport and their Degree of Importance Versus their Degree of Satisfaction

Attributes	Airports in General					Madeira Airport in Particular					
	Degree of importance (1 to 5)	Number of mentions (n=104)	Degree of Satisfaction (Mean)	Rank (to Mean)	Standard deviation	Degree of importance (1 to 5)	Number of mentions	Number of answers	Degree of Satisfaction (Mean)	Rank (to Mean)	Standard deviation
Staff: Efficiency	5	65	4.5	1º	0.8	5	25	35	4.66	2º	0.63
Staff: Professionalism	5	61	4.42	2º	0.84	5	7	11	4.64	3º	0.5
Cleanliness	5	60	4.41	3º	0.87	5	30	52	4.44	4º	0.82
Orientation Signs	5	60	4.36	4º	0.91	5	15	18	4.78	1º	0.54
Speed of Security Control	5	48	4.15	5º	0.89	5	16	28	4.39	5º	0.78
Transport Options	4-5	42	4.13	6º	0.94	5	15	31	4.19	12º	0.98
Punctuality of Services	4	41	4.07	7º	0.92	5	7	18	4	13º	1.02
Staff: Sympathy	4	43	4.06	8º	0.99	5	8	15	4.33	8º	0.9
Accessibilities	4	39	3.91	9º	1.02	5	7	13	4.38	6º	0.76
Fast Baggage Delivery Service	4	44	3.87	10º	1.07	5	20	43	4.23	11º	0.86
Check-in Service	4	36	3.84	11º	1.08	4	6	12	4.33	9º	0.65
Free Wi-Fi	5	28	3.38	12º	1.37	4	5	8	4.38	7º	0.51
Existence of Information Desk	3	33	3.36	13º	1.24	5	4	8	4.25	10º	1.03
Comfort and Leisure Facilities	4	29	3.2	14º	1.29	4	2	5	3.2	15º	1.64
Restaurant Service	3	30	3.01	15º	1.29	3-4	2	6	2.83	16º	1.16
Decoration	3	40	2.69	16º	1.18	4	2	3	3.33	14º	1.15
Sales (Duty Free / Other shops)	1	34	2.44	17º	1.33	2	2	3	2.67	17º	1.15

Source: Own elaboration based on data obtained in the questionnaires

- The main motivation for the choice was the climate (30.4%) and contact with nature (23.4%).

- There is a balance between the use of low-cost airlines (50.9%) and traditional airlines (49.1%).

Almost all respondents (99%) said they had a good experience at Madeira Airport. When asked if a bad experience at Madeira Airport could change their perception of the destination, 51% of the respondents said yes, and for 39.4% a bad experience could jeopardise future trips to ARM, going in line with the conclusions of Bezerra and Gomes (2019) regarding the quality of airport infrastructure and Seetanah, Teeroovengendum and Nunkoo (2020) regarding the intention to revisit the destination. As mentioned by one of the respondents, the airport

is the first and last experience in the destination. Bad experiences at the airport will always be associated with the destination.

In the analysis and valuation of the different attributes in general in airports the respondents were asked to indicate what degree of importance they give to various attributes. For this purpose, a 5-point Likert scale was used, with 1 meaning little importance / satisfaction and 5 indicating high importance / satisfaction. They were then asked about the degree of importance they would give to these attributes in relation to Madeira Airport.

In relation to all airports, information was requested on all of the attributes in this second question. Respondents were then asked to be more focused in relation to Madeira Airport and identify a maximum of five attributes and to identify which ones are the most important. In both cases, they were also asked to consider the level of satisfaction (between 1 and 5) related to attributes.

Table 2 shows the most popular score for each of the attributes, as well as the mean score and standard deviation for the level of satisfaction of that attribute. The results are presented as a function of the mean for General Airports, ranked from the highest to the lowest mean value. The shaded cells indicate the highest degree of satisfaction at Madeira airport or at airports in general. With the exception of punctuality and restaurant services (in comfort and leisure services, the degree of satisfaction is the same) all attributes of Madeira airport surpass those of airports in general.

The most valued attributes are at the level of staff (in terms of their efficiency and professionalism), speed in accessing security controls, along with other services intrinsic to the airport (free Wi-Fi, signage and cleaning). Except for Wi-Fi, where the standard deviation shows a greater amplitude of results (the valuation of 4 had 26 responses, very close to the 28 obtained for the valuation of 5), there is a correspondence between the mentioned attributes and the averages obtained.

It can be noticed that the first five attributes display an importance in general for airports, but, also for Madeira Airport, although respondents gave greater preponderance to signage at Madeira Airport.

Likewise, there is a correlation between the least valued attributes at airports and Madeira Airport, with the last four positions coinciding in both analyses. Sales are the least valued attribute (certainly due to its lower importance given the elimination of duty-free sales for EU flights) (2.67 in Madeira, compared to 2.44 in general terms).

The results obtained, even with differences in their categorisation, are in line with the results in the evaluation of passenger satisfaction carried out by ANA - Aeroportos de Portugal (ANA, 2022).

This appreciation of Madeira Airport and its importance in the tourist experience led many respondents to give their opinion on various aspects that need to be improved. Despite the diversity of responses and contributions, the areas that were highlighted for repair were decorations, lounge, restaurant services, retail services (specifically the limited variety and limited hours - often closed), luggage delivery services, signage especially for rent-a-car services and, the friendliness and sensitivity of the staff (some of these are curious as they displayed high levels of satisfaction - as previously reported).

The data collected and analysed are important and highlight that Madeira Airport is the main gateway for those who travel to the region, being an integral part of tourism in ARM. The recognised quality of airport services and the high level of passenger satisfaction are a positive contribution to strengthening ARM's image and increasing the destination's reputation.

Conclusions

The Autonomous Region of Madeira has increasingly presented itself as a destination of tourism excellence. Its scenic beauty and orography, its mild climate and gastronomy and the hospitality of its inhabitants have led Madeira to be internationally recognised by the World Travel Awards as the Best Island Destination in the World (8 consecutive times between 2015 and 2022).

Madeira airport infrastructure contributes to this success, responding to the tourist needs of the region and serving those who visit it, with high levels of quality and satisfaction among tourists in terms of the image that the region intends to convey as a tourist destination. The investigation in this paper led to the conclusion that Madeira Airport has attracted new airlines and new passenger flows, contributing decisively to the development of ARMs tourism.

As the first point of entry to the island and the last to be visited by tourists, it is essential that the tourist experience managers, recognise the importance of airport services, in order to contribute to the positive experience of the destination.

The fieldwork carried out shows a high degree of satisfaction by respondents with the airport services in

Madeira Airport Check-in Desks

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madeira_Airport#/media/File:Funchal_airport,_July_13,_2011_(5939423495).jpg

Madeira. The efficiency and professionalism of *staff*, the importance of signage and the infrastructure itself (*servicescape*), along with the services provided in terms of speed in security control (*services*), are in line with the model proposed by Fodness and Murray (2007), highlighting the importance of the quality of airport services and their contribution to a positive perception of the destination to be visited.

The present investigation has some limitations. The refusal of Madeira Airport to participate in the survey process or to give access to interviews in relation to its infrastructure restricted the objectives initially outlined for the work. However, it is believed that this limitation did not detract from the scientific relevance of the work. Likewise, the closure of many hotel units on the island made it difficult to obtain a wider number of questionnaires. Furthermore, the sample had a high female representation - this may also cause bias in some of the conclusions obtained.

Being innovative in its application to Madeira Airport, this investigation opens up new opportunities for scientific work. In a post-COVID-19 environment, it will

be interesting to repeat the study in order to validate the information collected in the pandemic environment. In this context, it would also be important to carry out research both at the airport and at the Mercado dos Lavradores, in Funchal, in order to assess any potential differences between samples and between the responses obtained. Extending the investigation to the island airports of Porto Santo (Madeira's smaller island neighbour) and / or the Autonomous Region of the Azores, or even the Canary Islands, would help to validate the information collected and allow a comparative analysis between airports of an island nature located in Macaronesia (Macaronesia is a collective term for Portugal's Azores and Madeira, and Spain's Canary Islands). The application to other airports in mainland Portugal, such as Porto and Faro, would also help to understand the potential differences between airports and their regions.

Finally, it would be important to establish a greater connection and more visible and productive joint work between the objectives and competitive strategies developed by regional tourism entities and the airport infrastructure within their territories, in order to further develop tourism in these island regions.

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