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**Lisbon's unsustainable tourism intensification: Contributions from social representations  
to understanding a depoliticised press discourse and its consequences**

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## Abstract

Resistance to tourism intensification and its unsustainability has grown. However, decision-makers in many cities continue to present tourism and the political and legislative options supporting it as an inevitable and consensual path for economic growth, concealing competing choices, voices, and values. The media can follow, presenting the issue in a depoliticised way: i.e., by foregrounding undiscussed dominant discourses, leaving little space for debate of alternatives. Drawing from Social Representations Theory and the literature on depoliticisation, we offer an integrative theoretical and methodological proposal for analysing tourism discourses in the press, as a privileged arena where meanings are constructed and contested. Specifically, we explore if and to what extent the Portuguese press presenting Lisbon's tourism intensification (2011-2017) foregrounded undiscussed (depoliticised) and hegemonic representations. A content analysis (n= 247 articles; four newspapers) identifies signs of a hegemonic and depoliticised tourism's view, with low heterogeneity of voices and values. Second, a detailed discursive analysis (n=187; two newspapers) illustrates discursive strategies helping advance (propaganda and reification) or dispute (propagation and consensualization) this view. Contributions to the understanding of neoliberalism's discursive formations and its contestations made concrete around tourism are discussed, with implications for future tourism more attentive to justice and participation issues.

**Keywords:** Urban tourism, social representations, depoliticisation, neoliberalism, media discourse, community participation

Governments often foster tourism intensification as an obvious, fast, and consensual path towards urban regeneration and economic recovery, promoting it through market-oriented public policies and laws that privilege values like unlimited economic growth (Vives Miró, 2011). Linked with a neoliberal view of the city as a value-generating unit with legislative scaffolding supporting it (Harvey, 2005), the transformations triggered by tourism do not unfold without problems (Díaz-Parra and Jover, 2021). Worldwide, are emerging conflicts and new "forms of politicisation from below" that express local groups' rights claims, resistance, criticism of the unsustainability of unlimited intensification, and alternative values and city views (Colomb and Novy, 2016).

These double processes – social and spatial changes brought about by tourism policies prioritising neoliberal values and the emergence of local resistance to them – call for more attention from the social sciences. Namely, more attention is needed to understand how the policies implemented, the changes they support, and the resistance they encounter are made sense of and presented to the public in mediated discourses - e.g., through the press. In particular, it is important to see to what extent and how these mediated discourses privilege one (hegemonic) view of tourism and change in the city or offer space for a plurality of (more or less) conflicting ones. If systematically reproducing dominant opinions and hiding some voices and conflicts, the press's renderings of tourism can be conceived as depoliticised discourses (Maesele, 2015). The reproduction of dominant views also exemplifies how, as some scholars defend (Harvey, 2005; Wacquant, 2012), neoliberalism is now hegemonic in communication, incorporated into the shared common-sense with which "many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world" (Harvey, 2005, p.3) – and thus highly resistant to reflexive questioning.

This view of neoliberalism as a system in which the state, through new public policies and laws, is capable of changing meaning-making and shared representations, contributing to aligning them with market views and values (Wacquant, 2012), challenges social and political psychology to develop ways of better understanding the discursive strategies and meaning-making processes involved in accepting and resisting the changes – e.g., in laws, meaning-categories and practices – supporting the neoliberal project (Di Masso, Dixon, & Pol, 2011; Santos, Castro, & Guerra, 2020). However, little is yet known about the "discursive formations of neoliberalism, its contestations and alternatives" (Mosedale, 2016, p.19), specifically regarding (un)sustainable tourism and the role of the press in these formations (Pasquinelli and Trunfio, 2020).

The present study aims to address this lacuna, offering an integrative theoretical perspective and a methodological proposal for analysing discursive strategies in the press about the spatial and social changes brought about by processes of urban tourism intensification in neoliberal times. We draw on the Theory of Social Representations (TSR) for developing a socio-political psychology of tourism and of mediated communication, assuming the press plays a central role in (re)defining realities (Elchereth, Doise, & Reicher, 2011; Castro, Mouro, & Gouveia, 2012). The mediating role of the press contributes to the construction of shared meaning categories at the level of the nation (Moscovici, 1988), helping define whose voices, claims and concerns are considered legitimate and authoritative enough to enter the public debate (Castro, Seixas, Neca, & Bettencourt, 2018; Di Masso et al., 2011; Moscardo, 2011). Combining this approach with the (de)politicisation literature (Maesele, 2015), the present proposal assumes that press coverages have the power of helping hide political options and conflicts, legitimising certain voices, helping render certain values hegemonic and others

invisible (Santos et al., 2020). It also assumes that it is also in their power to, instead, make political options and the existence of alternative views visible, offering a more complex vision of reality, favouring a more reflexive public debate, and encouraging citizens' political engagement (Carvalho, Van Wessel, & Maesele, 2017; Castro et al., 2018).

The present study, focusing on the discursive strategies through which hegemonic neoliberal representations are advanced and challenged in mediated discourse (Fairclough, 2003), moves a step forward in understanding the psychosocial dynamics hindering such goals regarding tourism and a more just city governance. As it is known, currently, tourism is on hold or largely restricted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet the pandemic is bringing an economic crisis, and there are so far no indications that the tourism policies previously used will be changed. The global crisis can be an opportunity to gain further knowledge about tourism's social and environmental impacts and redefine its goals, offering a central place to local demands of rights and needs (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020). Therefore, the contribution of the present article is also towards a reflection on discursive and meaning-making barriers and drivers to be addressed for more sustainable and equitable policies and practices in future tourism decisions.

Using this proposal, we explore how the Portuguese press presents Lisbon's tourism intensification. First, we analyse (with a content analysis) to what extent and how the press favours a hegemonic and depoliticised representation, and second, we explore (through a discursive analysis) how (de)politicised representations of tourism are constructed and debated by different voices. In what follows, we will first discuss tourism as a process that supports and is supported by neoliberal processes of space and meaning production; then, we illustrate the potential contributions of conceptual and analytical tools from TSR in analysing a depoliticised press discourse; then, the method, analysis and results are presented and discussed.

## **The changing tourist cities: processes, actors, and discourses**

Factors such as global mobility (Urry, 2000) and a shift in boundaries between production and consumption processes (Williams and Hall, 2000), together with the endorsement of a neoliberal view of the city as a value-generating unit (Harvey, 2005), are all contributing to reshaping the places where we live, move and work. These global processes are frequently fueled at the local level by governments active in fostering the tourism industry (Gotham, 2005). Particularly in peripheral economies, decision-makers often rely on tourism as a fast post-crisis strategy for economic recovery (Díaz-Parra and Jover, 2021; Mendes, 2018). This is done by promoting cities as competing actors (*brands*) whose value depends on their ability to attract international investment, tourists, and new residents in a highly connected and competitive scenario, enhancing a marketing-based approach to urban development and providing new city meanings aimed at the creation of attractive urban narratives (Vives Miró, 2011). It is worth noting that these processes often result in an increasing professionalisation of the management of urban space, which tends to transfer visibility from the "political" to the technical sphere (Mansilla and Milano, 2019), hiding the values and representations of the "common good" that underlie political instruments and choices (Santos et al., 2020). Thus, decision-makers often sustain tourism as a natural and inevitable element of our cities and our times, rather than presenting it as supported by political options based on prioritising values such as unlimited economic (and consumption) growth (Mendes, 2018; Russo and Scarnato, 2018).

Yet, there is increasing evidence that significant tourism intensification is related to further spatial, economic, and social inequalities. Namely, it is linked to the financialisation of real estate markets (Cocola-Gant and Gago, 2019) and the acceleration of gentrification processes bringing displacements and place alienation (Gotham, 2005; Díaz-Parra and Jover,



2021) – processes enabled by legal instruments, thus involving (political) choices of prioritising certain values over others. In this context, in recent years, contestations and new forms of "politicisation from below" have risen (Colomb and Novy, 2016), with residents and social movements worldwide asking for stricter regulation of the industry and a decrease in tourism growth (Araya López, 2021; Gascón, 2019). Some scholars defend that such citizens' claims and alternative discourses expressing differing positions regarding, for example, the right to place, property, and mobility are pivotal factors for redefining tourism from a more inclusive and equitable point of view (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020). Yet, recent research investigating the visibility received by these claims in press coverages (Pasquinelli and Trunfio, 2020; Russo and Scarnato, 2018; Torkington and Ribeiro, 2020) illustrates how they are often underrepresented and reduced to sporadic and emotional reactions to change (Araya López, 2021).

Therefore, more attention is needed for a better understanding of (1) how the pro-tourism neoliberal discourse is constructed and contested by divergent actors in the press (Mosedale, 2016; Pasquinelli and Trunfio, 2020) and the extent to which there is a reflexive questioning of the values it supports; (2) which discourses, in a changing city, are considered legitimate and authoritative enough to enter the press – and thus the public debate (Castro et al., 2018; Di Masso et al., 2011). Addressing this lacuna means focusing on the role of the press in the construction of shared representations (Batel and Castro, 2018) and in the enactment and reconstruction of conflicts (Carvalho, 2008), topics under consideration in the next section.

### **Press representations of tourism and the hegemonic, depoliticised discourse**

Our understanding of the world is intertwined with relational and mediated communicative and discursive processes, which define and redefine realities (Batel and Castro,

2018), contributing to the construction and transformation of shared meanings systems: social representations (Moscovici, 1988). The press, presenting social and legal innovations to the public, has a central role in the process of meaning construction (Castro et al., 2012). The way it frames such innovations can contribute to either promoting the changes they imply or fueling resistance to them (Carvalho, 2008; Elchereth et al., 2011; Santos et al., 2020). Understanding change and resistance in society thus involve considering the press's role in constructing and perpetuating consensual meaning systems, or hegemonic representations (Moscovici, 1988). According to the Theory of Social Representations (TSR), these are dominant views about a phenomenon, with an implicit prescriptive character, supporting power relations, and hard to contest (Batel and Castro, 2018; Moscardo, 2011; Howarth, 2006; Moscovici, 1988). Taken as "the way the world is", hegemonic views often receive privileged attention in the press, influencing the way we construct identities and approach change (Negura, Plante, & Lévesque, 2020; Marková, 2003).

However, hegemonic representations can be – and are - constantly disputed (Castro et al., 2018; Gillespie, 2008; Howarth, 2006) in the "battles of ideas" (Moscovici and Marková, 2000) happening in and through self-other relations and communication (Marková, 2003). In these meaning-making battles, individuals and groups resort to different communicative strategies for justifying their positions and relating to the positions of the "other" – and these formats have more dialogical or more monological consequences (Moscovici and Marková, 2000; Batel and Castro, 2009; Castro and Santos, 2020; Gillespie, 2020). Moscovici's (1976) analysis of press discourses identified three Self-Other communication modalities: propaganda, a dichotomic form presenting just one view (that of the Self) as reliable and acceptable; propagation, an integrative

form reconciling some of the divergent views of Self and Other; and diffusion, a form disseminating a plurality of views in a way distanced from any (clearly defined) Self and Other.

Further research has highlighted how the propaganda form, generally supported by a "yes/no" discursive format, has monological consequences (Castro, 2006), as do other discursive formats also identified by TSR, such as the reification format, which accentuates power relations and prescribes the Others what to think (Batel and Castro, 2009), or strategically introduces the others' views only in order to delegitimise them (Gillespie, 2020). Other formats have, instead, more dialogical consequences such as the "yes... but..." discursive format characteristic of propagation that avoids direct/unqualified opposition to the other's views (Castro, 2006), or consensualization, a type of communication that acknowledges heterogeneity of views and values, adjusting to diversity and opening a non-confrontational space for the expression of alternative representations (Batel and Castro, 2009). In sum, the relational processes of meaning-making involve a reflexive capacity that can be strategically employed in communicative formats with both dialogical and monological consequences. This study will discuss these strategies and their potential contribution for analysing a discourse that tends to reproduce (with propaganda; reification) or dispute (with propagation; consensualization) hegemonic representations about tourism, thus contributing to (monologically) closing down or to dialogically opening up the public debate about the topic.

Looking closely at discourses that can contribute to closing down the space for debate, a recent corpus of studies (Carvalho et al., 2017; Maesele and Ræijmaekers, 2020; Santos et al., 2020) has focused on the discursive construction of neoliberalism in the press through a depoliticised discourse (Maesele, 2015; Santos et al., 2020). A depoliticised discourse "becomes technocratic, managerial, or disciplined towards a single goal" (Wood and Flinders, 2014, p.161),

hiding the existence of choices that are made among competing political values. Therefore, a process of discursive *politicisation* would "involve the promotion of a topic as a public issue where competing interpretations exist as choices" (Wood and Flinders, 2014, p.161). Besides hiding that representations and values – not just technocratic aspects - underlie the political and legal options supporting a social order, depoliticised discourses also conceal how social orders entail the existence of power relations, conflict, and antagonism (Kenis and Lievens, 2014). This is done by placing a sharper focus on consensus than on conflict (Carvalho et al., 2017). Thus, for instance, in justifying market-driven legal innovations and political choices, decision-makers defend them not only as natural and inevitable – i.e., as not resulting from certain choices of values, but from technical aspects - but also as consensual in society (Santos et al., 2020). The mediating systems, such as the press, can follow perpetuating these depoliticised discourses, foregrounding their logic and minimising the "battles of ideas" continuously ongoing in society. In this way, depoliticised press discourses contribute to hiding political conflict and contestation and alternative representations and values, thus discouraging their debate and advance (Carvalho, Van Wessel, & Maesele, 2017), hindering their potential for social transformation, and favouring the (re)production of dominant views in an unreflexive way.

Tourism studies employing a TSR approach have already shown the presence of a hegemonic tourism representation helping reproduce dominant power relations in governance and excluding residents' voices (Moscardo, 2011). They have also depicted the potential of alternative representations in advancing communities' empowerment strategies (Sarr, Sène-Harper, & Gonzalez-Hernandez, 2021). Yet, little is known about how these representations are discursively constructed and contested in the press, the role of dialogicality in these processes, and their function in advancing a (de)politicised tourism's view.

This work thus aims to offer an integrative theoretical and methodological perspective for analysing the press by reconciling notions and practical tools from different disciplinary traditions, investigating to what extent it reproduces a hegemonic (de)politicised discourse regarding Lisbon's tourism intensification, and exploring the discursive strategies that contribute to closing down or opening space for public debate.

### **Context and specific goals**

The intensification of tourism in Lisbon concurred with the government's efforts to cope with the 2008 economic crisis. The austerity measures that followed the crisis and the external bailout provided by the International Monetary Fund, the European Commission, and the European Central Bank in 2011 were accompanied by several neoliberal pro-tourism public policies and laws aimed to increase foreign investment and tourists' arrivals (Mendes, 2018; Santos et al., 2020). In this regard, the liberalisation of the housing market (in 2012, with the repealing of an old law of controlled rents for long-time residents in the centre of the city), the new investment-Visa legislation (in 2012), and the new short-term rentals law (in 2014), together with urban restructuring plans, helped to turn the city into one of Europe's most popular tourist destinations. In particular, the year 2014 was a "boom year", showing a strong increase in short-term rentals (Cocola-Gant and Gago, 2019) and tourists' arrivals (OECD, 2016). Problems such as increasing real estate market prices, displacements, and the overcrowding and privatisation of public spaces have followed. As mentioned, the situation is today largely on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, but there are so far no indications that the urban and tourism policies in place will be changed, and once restrictions are lifted, the situation may resume just where it stopped.

In recent years, the Portuguese mediated debate has given only some attention to emerging tourism-related problems (Torkington and Ribeiro, 2020). In this context, this study explores the press representations of tourism along the crucial years of its growth (2011-2017) to look at how the policies implemented, the consequent city transformation processes, and the resistance they encountered have been presented to the public. This is done through two specific goals and a two-step analysis:

1) a content analysis (following the methodology defined in Castro et al., 2018) with a temporal-comparative orientation, looks at the structure of the articles, voices and arguments made more or less visible, exploring whether the press favours a hegemonic and depoliticised view of tourism along the years and comparing periods before and after 2014 (2011-2014; 2015-2017).

2) a discursive analysis (Billig, 1987; Batel and Castro, 2018), exploring how tourism's representation is constructed and debated by different voices. In particular, we analyse how specific discursive strategies (propaganda and reification) support the presentation of hegemonic-depoliticised representations through dichotomic or monological discourses (Batel and Castro, 2009) and how the introduction of divergent communicative strategies (propagation and consensualization) can help to dispute them, presenting more dialogical discourses, and accommodating divergent voices and alternative views and values (Carvalho et al., 2017; Castro, 2006).

## **Methodology**

### **Sample**

Articles published from 2011 to 2017 and treating "tourism" and "Lisbon" as the main topic were collected from online and print versions of four national newspapers representative of

divergent audiences (APCT, 2018). Two were daily papers, the ones usually analysed in Portuguese press studies (Castro et al., 2018; Santos et al., 2020), none of them with declared political orientations: the most-read tabloid (Correio da Manhã), and the quality press with the largest online readership (Público). The other two were the widely-read quality weekly (Expresso) and the only online highly-read newspaper (APCT, 2018) with a declared (right-wing) political orientation (Observador). For the latter two, we collected articles published from 2014 onwards – because the Observador started only in 2014 – and applied a sampling criterion, including only one of every two articles published. The final corpus consists of n=247 articles.

### **Content Analysis: analytic procedure**

The first step was the development of a content analysis focusing on the entire period under study (2011-2017) and compared the periods before and after the "boom" year of 2014 (OECD, 2016). First, taking the article as the unit of analysis, structural and content categories (Lacy et al., 2015) were created by combining data-driven and theoretically based analytical strategies, following the methodological procedures used by Castro and colleagues (2018). The structural categories were: *length of the article* (short: up to 300 words, medium: 300-800 words or extensive: more than 800 words); *type of article* (notes, news or opinions/reportage); *author* (journalist, columnist, agency or not identified/others); *balance of the article* (predominance of positive aspects related to tourism, predominance of negative aspects, balanced positive and negative aspect or no evaluation); *voices mentioned or quoted* (government, tourism industry or estate market representatives, residents or their representative, or others).

The content categories were the following: a) *city promotion* (presenting the city as a competitive brand, e.g., through statistical and comparative data); b) *tourism impact* (presenting

tourism's consequences), c) *action for the development of tourism* (presenting plans or visions for its development); d) *action to manage the negative impact of tourism* (presenting plans for or claims of its restrictions). Furthermore, we analysed the presence or absence of references to *residents' rights and duties*.

Following the literature (Maesele and Raeijmaekers, 2020), a depoliticised discourse was considered to be present if: (1) the structural categories showed the prevalence of short, non-argumentative articles, a predominance of positive evaluations of tourism intensification, and/or low heterogeneity of voices; and (2) the content categories showed strong predominance references to tourism promotion and economic development and little reference to negative impacts and residents' rights claiming.

### **Discursive analysis: analytical procedure**

The second step explored the construction of the discourses about tourism in the articles collected, with a detailed discursive analysis integrating theoretical contributions from the depoliticisation literature (Maesele, 2015) with the analytical tools from the TSR previously introduced (Batel and Castro, 2009). Following Batel and Castro (2018), we first conducted a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) to identify themes and arguments recurrently used by journalists and by the different voices they allowed to enter the press (e.g., decision-makers, residents' representatives). Second, we analysed what functions they were performing supported by which discursive strategies – for instance, how monological "just one view" discourses were presented, or more dialogical ones developed (Castro and Santos, 2020; Gillespie, 2020). The analysis was performed on the *Correio da Manhã* and *Público* sample (n=187), the newspapers with the largest readerships. In the next section, results are presented and discussed.



## Results

### Content analysis

Results indicate growing attention to the phenomenon in the second period analysed: 75.7% of the collected articles were published after 2014, confirming this year as a turning point for Lisbon's tourism and sustaining the relevance of a comparative analysis capable of reporting differences before and after the tourist boom.

*Table 1.*

*Frequencies, residuals, and Chi-Square Test of structural categories per year of publication. Last column % of the total in parenthesis.*

Structure Categories		2011-2014	2015-2017	Total
Length*	Short	32 (+)	57 (-)	89 (36%)
	Medium	26 (-)	109 (+)	135 (54.7%)
	Extensive	2	21	23(9.3%)
Type*	Notes	14 (+)	13 (-)	27(10.9%)
	News	39	124	163 (66%)
	Opinion/Reportage	7 (-)	49 (+)	56 (23.1%)
Author*	Journalist	24	77	101 (40.9%)
	Columnist	3	25	28 (11.3%)
	Agency	7 (-)	50 (+)	57 (23.1%)
	No identified/others	26	35	61 (24.7%)
Balance	Predominance of positive aspects	42	99	141 (57.1)
	Predominance of negative aspects	3	29	32 (13%)
	Balanced positive and negative aspects	6	28	34 (13.8%)
	Without evaluation	9	31	40 (16.2%)
Cited Voice	Government	22	74	96 (53.3%)
	Tourism and estate market representatives	15	38	53 (29.4%)
	Tourists and Others	5	18	23 (12.8%)
	Residents and representatives	1	7	8 (4.4%)
Mentioned Voice	Tourists and Others	21	51	72 (37.3%)
	Residents and representatives	9	37	46 (23.8%)
	Tourism and estate market representatives	3	35	38 (19.7%)
	Government	10	27	37 (19.2%)
Total		60	187	247 (100%)

*Note.* Adjusted standardised residuals in parenthesis beside frequencies; \*p < .05

Regarding the structure categories (see Table 1), the majority of the articles published along the whole period analysed (2011-2017) was of medium (54.7%) or short (36%) length, and

the most frequent type of article published was news (66%). A comparison of trends between periods (2011-2014; 2015-2017) shows a decrease in short articles in favour of more extensive ones ( $\chi^2 (2) = 11,484$ ;  $p = .003$ ) in the second period, and an increase in opinion and reportage – i.e., of more argumentative articles ( $\chi^2 (2) = 15.634$ ;  $p = .001$ ) – in the same period. Nonetheless, articles signed by the Portuguese agency Lusa – i.e., descriptive (no-argumentative) pieces – also increased in the latter period. Thus, argumentative and in-depth articles remained a minority, despite an increased presence during the second period considered, revealing the first indicator of depoliticisation.

Articles with a predominance of positive appraisals of tourism were the most frequent along time (57.1%). No significant difference between periods was also found regarding the voices represented, with a low heterogeneity of voices always present.

*Table 2.*

Frequencies, Residuals, and Chi-Square Test of Content Categories per Years of publication.  
Last column % of total in parenthesis.

Content categories		2011-2014	2015-2017	Total
Central Theme*	City promotion	24 (+)	32 (-)	56 (22.7%)
	Tourism impact	11 (-)	74 (+)	85 (34.4%)
	Action for tourism development	21	45	66 (26.7%)
	Action to manage tourism negative impact	4 (-)	36 (+)	40 (16.2%)
	Rights and duties* of residents	0(-)	25(+)	25 (10.1%)
Total		57	190	247 (100%)

*Note.* Adjusted standardised residuals in parenthesis beside frequencies; \* $p < .05$

The most cited actors were the government (53.3%);, followed by representatives of the tourism industry and the real estate market (29.4%). Contrarily, residents and their

representatives – albeit not totally excluded from the debate – were not given a direct voice, appearing more as mentioned (23.8%) than cited actors (4.4%).

Concerning the content categories (see Table 2), references to residents' rights, absent in the first period, appeared modestly in the second one (10.1%). Thus, it was not just that residents had no direct voice, but their rights claims – at the individual or group level – found very little space and were thus poorly represented.

*Table 3.*

Frequencies of Central Theme (Impact of tourism) per balance of the article.

% of total per Years of publication in parenthesis

Central Theme	Balance	2011-2014	2015-2017	Total
Tourism impact	Predominance of positive aspects	3 (27.3%)	32 (43.2%)	35 (41.2%)
	Predominance of negative aspects	2 (18.2%)	15 (20.3%)	17 (20%)
	Balanced positive and negative aspects	4 (36.4%)	16 (21.6%)	20 (23.5%)
	Without evaluation	2 (18.2%)	11 (14.9%)	13 (15.3%)
Total		11	74	85 (100%)

Comparisons also showed that "city promotion" was the most frequent theme in the first period, with a proliferation of articles dedicated to statistics of tourism growth and Lisbon's post-crisis economic regeneration. In the second period, these themes gave away to articles talking about the "impact of tourism" and "action to manage the negative impact of tourism".

Nevertheless, articles on the "impact of tourism" (see Table 3) in the second period predominantly focused on the positive aspects of this impact (43.2%). Thus, despite a shift in the themes represented over the years, tourism's impact was mainly evaluated as positive, and residents' claims were poorly represented, both indicators of a depoliticised discourse.

In sum, comparisons between the two periods showed how the debate about tourism received more space (more attention and more in-depth articles) over time. Despite this, what emerged from the analysis of both structural and content categories was a positive, hegemonic,

and depoliticised representation of tourism: few argumentative pieces; the prevalence of positive evaluations of tourism intensification and its impacts; low heterogeneity of voices represented, and few references to residents' rights claims. Based on these findings, a more detailed discursive analysis was conducted to explore how this representation was constructed by divergent actors entering the press.

### **Discourse analysis**

The following analysis is organised into two parts. We first illustrate with five extracts how the use of recurrent arguments advancing specific monological discursive strategies (propaganda and reification) contributes to supporting a hegemonic and depoliticised tourism's representation. The second part, with three extracts, depicts discursive strategies (propagation and consensualization) helping advance alternative views that acknowledge the existence of conflicts and contribute to opening the public debate.

#### *Supporting a hegemonic and depoliticised representation*

The analysis shows recurrent arguments and discursive strategies that support the construction of tourism as a positive and consensual phenomenon. In Extracts 1 and 2, this view is supported by a dichotomic representation of the city's life that emphasises the positive impacts of present-day tourism by calling on a negative image of the past city. The past is evoked as a threat through the image of an empty, decadent, lifeless city. By contrast, present-day tourism is delineated as a positive but vulnerable reality. Thus, both extracts rely on a contrasting "yes/no" discursive strategy (Castro, 2006) that constructs one version of reality as desirable and the other as entirely negative, performing the function of presenting tourism as the (only) positive and consensual solution for urban regeneration and economic recovery.

Extract 1 is from the last year analysed (2017): tourism was already a massive – and contested – phenomenon in the city, and the President of the APAVT was questioned about the introduction of tourism restrictive policies. The discourse resorts to strong images of insecurity (*"afraid of being assaulted, of drugs and prostitution"*) and to the recurrent use of the personal pronoun *"we"*. This use is strategic (Billig, 1987) in presenting forms of legitimacy based on the expertise of professionals actively engaged in the tourism industry *"we are working with"* and to appeal to the credibility of the discourse *"believe it"*. Later, the discourse fades towards a more generic *"we'll come back to"* until including the whole city where *"no one wishes to return"*. Through the strategic use of the pronoun *"we"*, the reader (the resident) is neither included in the debate (she/he is not an expert) nor completely excluded from it (nobody wants to come back). Thus, a hierarchy of relationships accentuating power relations and legitimacy based on expertise, typical of reified discourse (Batel and Castro, 2009), was advanced.

#### Extract 1

*"We are working on realities that have grown a lot, but which remain, believe it, fragile. If we are not careful, we'll come back to having quiet in the streets of Lisbon. But a terrifying quietness, which accompanies those who cannot go out in the streets, afraid of being assaulted, of drugs and prostitution", stressed Pedro Costa Ferreira. "Believe it, however great the success, inadequate policies can take the streets of Lisbon back to recent times, to which no one wishes to return".*

(President of the Portuguese Association of Travel Agencies and Tourism APAVT, quoted in *Correio da Manhã*, November 2017)

In Extract 2, the expert refers to a problem of *"too many tourists"*, refuting it. In this case, the reified and the yes/no formats allowed the speaker to introduce a conflicting view with the strategic aim of neutralising it (Gillespie, 2020), denying legitimacy to alternative voices. It is

worth noting that the recurrent argument of "too many tourists" (see also Extracts 3 and 4) is not consonant with one of the pillars of the neoliberal project: the right to mobility and consumer choice (Gascón, 2019), although these dominant neoliberal values were not made explicit in discourse. Thus, the debate on "tourists' impact" is a two-fold strategy as it denies conflictual visions while also performing the defensive communicative function of making the position of the Self more difficult to challenge than, for example, debating the wider "impact of the tourism industry".

#### Extract 2

*"I don't think it's possible to say that there are too many tourists seriously. This is forgetting a not so remote past when, particularly in city centres, there was desertification and economic decay. Tourism has enabled us to make an important recovery and regeneration," he said.*

(President of Tourism of Portugal, quoted in Público, June 2015)

#### Extract 3

*"It's false that there are too many tourists in the country. It's false that there are too many tourists in Lisbon. It's false that there are too many tourists in the centre of Lisbon", emphasised the chief of national diplomacy, who denies that tourism "can be a threat, whatever its size."*

(Minister of foreigner affairs, quoted in Público, November 2017)

#### Extract 4

*"We must continue to ensure that we do not strangle the demand. Sometimes I hear that very interesting question that is about finding out whether Portugal, Lisbon in particular, already has too many tourists. Personally, I have to say that I don't know what that concept is, I don't know what it is to have too many tourists", declared the socialist Mayor, during the opening session of the third meeting of Portuguese tourism, in the*

*Oriente Museum. Insisting that "this concept does not exist, and makes no sense", Fernando Medina admits that he would not know how to manage this issue.*  
(Mayor of Lisbon, quoted in Público, September 2016)

Extract 5

*"I do not grant a millimetre (of reason) to the voices that appeal for some restrictions related to tourism. A city lucky enough to have an economic engine that generates work, economic activity and recovery of the city, can not afford the luxury [...] of thinking that it has many other alternatives", declared Fernando Medina.*  
(Mayor of Lisbon, quoted in Correio da Manhã, December 2016)

For instance, in Extract 4, the argument of "too many tourists" is strategically advanced by the Mayor of Lisbon to minimise and delegitimise alternative visions by introducing them in an ironic and non-detailed way: *"Sometimes I hear that very interesting question"*. Thus, through a reified discourse emphasising an unequal power relationship, he presented only his version as reliable and true, strategically closing down space for debate. In this monological discourse, the political and conflictual character of the debate about the negative impacts of tourism is concealed: there is no need to argue or negotiate about it. Besides, the Mayor *"admits that he would not know how to manage this issue"*.

Similarly, in Extract 5, the Mayor of Lisbon supports a yes/no dichotomic, depoliticised and reified discourse presenting, on the one hand, the legitimacy of government and, on the other, a not well-specified claim by a not well-identified actor. In detail, through a spatial image – *"I do not grant a millimetre"* – the Mayor of Lisbon strongly affirms his unwillingness to legitimate *"critical voices"* and to implement policies aimed to restrict tourism intensification. Moreover, tourism is described as *"luck"*, a blessing that arrived to save the city. This construction depicts tourism as a kind of economic miracle instead of as a political (thus,

controversial) issue supported by political and legal choices. As a consequence, no political choices are deeply analysed, and the economic/market values appear as unquestionable and self-explanatory. In this context, thinking about alternatives (Gillespie, 2008; Sarr et al., 2021) appears as a luxury, a whim not allowed, a prohibited and unaffordable thought.

Summing up, the analysis shows how recurrent arguments evoking the past as a threat, talking about tourists' impacts instead of tourism's impact, and presenting tourism as a blessing were used to advance a simplified, non-problematised view of the issue (Araya López, 2021; Wood and Flinders, 2014). It illustrates how propaganda and reification helped support a positive and hegemonic representation of tourism (Moscardo, 2011), outlining what can and cannot be said about it. The analysis shows the subtle details of how the discursive formats were strategically used to 1) present government and experts' discourses as more legitimate, informed and reliable than others; 2) present alternative views in an indirect, non-detailed way, thus, as not legitimate enough to enter the debate; 3) disregard political and alternative choices appealing to an emphasis on consensus, forms of technocracy, and undiscussed neoliberal economic values. In sum, the hegemonic view was presented through dichotomic and monological discourses, and a more in-depth, heterogeneous, and politicised debate was avoided, defending that there is no (valid) alternative to tourism.

#### *Advancing alternative representations*

In the face of a positive, simplified, and hegemonic representation of tourism, how can the debate about its negative impacts be made? How can alternative voices, visions and values find visibility and legitimacy in the press? The analysis shows how specific arguments and



discursive strategies enable the accommodation of conflictual views and values, advancing alternative representations.

In Extract 6, the organiser of a public debate about tourism's impacts uses a propagation form: a general (concessive) agreement ("yes..."), seeking common ground with the hegemonic positive representation "*the debate has nothing against tourism*", is followed by a divergent view ("*but...*"). This discursive strategy allows opening a non-confrontational space of debate (Castro and Santos, 2020) to introduce residents' rights claims and to strategically re-present tourism as an industry "*just like any other*", thus as a political and legislative issue.

#### Extract 6

*Catarina Botelho did not want to miss underlining that the organisation of the debate has nothing against tourism but that people must have the right to housing. "The sector must be regulated for the advantage of the inhabitants, just like any other activity".*

(Resident, organiser of a public debate, quoted in Público, June 2016)

#### Extract 7

*"We are not against tourism, but we have to give the opportunity to those who want to live in the neighbourhood", says Maria de Lurdes Pinheiro at the beginning of the debate. "Someday, tourists will be neighbours to each other". She defends that the APPA has no solution for the situation and can only ask for political measures: "we don't want to end up with a neighbourhood without people when the touristic boom will be over."*

(The representative of the association of residents of the neighbourhood of Alfama APPA, quoted in Público, June 2016)

Extract 7 illustrates another example of the "yes...but..." discursive form (i.e., "*we are not against tourism, but...*"). Here, the press quotes part of another public debate about tourism impact. It is worth noting how the quoted speaker, the residents' representative of an inner-city

neighbourhood deeply affected by tourism intensification, depicts tourism as a fragile reality, similarly as done in Extract 1, analysed above. However, the collective threat is here situated in an imagined future rather than in a decadent past. Focusing on a future scenario permitted the speaker to accommodate agreement and disagreement with present-day tourism and its representation, reconciling a heterogeneity of meanings; thus, through consensualization (Batel and Castro, 2009), space was made for current problems to be stated (i.e., residents' displacements). Furthermore, residents were not referenced as a bounded and territorialised group, but through an open and inclusive category "*who wants to live in the neighbourhood*". This open category (referring to current or future residents, thus to all of "us") evades falling into the representation of a closed neighbourhood and strategically advocates both the rights to tourism and mobility as well as to the right to stay put (Díaz-Parra and Jover, 2021; Gascón, 2019) and openly calls for political measures to manage negative tourism impacts.

#### Extract 8

*Nelson is one of the residents who opposes the tendency to leave the area due to the growing number of short-term rentals and one of the residents who preserves the area, the authenticity of the neighbourhood. (...) The pressure to evict elderly people allows very peculiar people, who "transmit the magic of the neighbourhood", to be removed from their homes. This initiative aims to give warning about the problem. "Tourism can bring good things; it cannot be permitted to take people's houses away," adds Miguel Coelho.*

(President of the Parish Council of Santa Maria Maior, Público, December 2017)

Differently, in the last extract (see Extract 8), residents are presented as spatially bounded and linked to the authenticity of the place. The extract pertains to an article introducing a cultural street exhibition that aims to "*honour historical residents, those who are still the essence of the*

*neighbourhood but who are in extinction*" (title of the article), and residents are here strategically depicted as "*peculiar*" people, as actors preserving neighbourhood authenticity, an important dimension for tourism promotion. Thus, displacements as a consequence of tourism intensification are here presented as triggering a vicious circle that threatens tourism itself, and a divergent strategy of seeking common ground with the hegemonic representation is advanced. While defending a consensus on the benefits of tourism - it "*can bring good things*" – the local governmental voice presents a vision of what tourism can and cannot do in the neighbourhood: it cannot displace residents because they are part of tourism's success.

Summarising, the analysis shows how the reference to recurrent arguments – i.e., to evoking the future as a threat and defending residents as actors preserving the city's authenticity – was strategically employed to advance negative impacts, residents' claims and divergent city views. Furthermore, it illustrates how propagation and consensualization as communicative formats allowed acknowledgement of heterogeneity of meanings and gave voice to divergent kinds of expertise. These communicative strategies are useful in disputing hegemonic values and representations through dialogical discourses that open the space for alternative representations and more controversial (thus, politicised) discourses.

## **Conclusion and discussion**

This study seeks to take a step forward in understanding the discursive forms in which the values and representations supporting tourism-related neoliberal spatial and legal transformations are advanced, incorporated, and challenged in mediated discourses, delaying or favouring social change (Fairclough, 2003). We offer an integrative theoretical, methodological and analytic proposal that combines concepts and practical tools from the TSR (Moscovici, 1988; Moscardo, 2011) with the (de)politicisation literature (Maesele, 2015) to analyse to what

extent the press contributes to constructing and perpetuating a hegemonic and non-problematised (thus, depoliticised) version of reality (Wood and Flinders, 2014); or instead, it gives visibility to heterogeneous voices and visions, thus searching for the complexity of reality, enacting and reconstructing existing conflicts in its outlets (Carvalho, 2008). Specifically, we present a two-step analysis to investigate whether the press favours a depoliticised representation and, later, how the analysis of the use of propaganda-reification and propagation-consensualization communicative forms can help to better elucidate how the hegemonic representation is produced and perpetuated, or disputed and re-signified. Thus, how the (de)politicised discourse is strategically (re)constructed to conceal or advance alternative views.

This methodology was illustrated by analysing how the national widely-read Portuguese press has presented tourism in Lisbon over the seven crucial years of its intensification (2011-2017). First, a temporal content analysis comparing two periods (2011-2014; 2015-2017) detected indicators of a depoliticised representation: 1) the prevalence of short or medium length descriptive articles instead of more argumentative ones; 2) a predominance of positive aspects related to tourism intensification rather than more balanced or heterogenic evaluations; 3) a low heterogeneity of voices represented, with a predominance of decision-makers voices over others and few references to residents' rights claims.

Next, a detailed discursive analysis depicted how a simplified-depoliticised discourse was supported by dichotomic and monological discursive strategies (propaganda and reification; Batel and Castro, 2009; Castro, 2006; Gillespie, 2008) that tended to delineate the boundaries of what can and cannot be said about tourism, and to hide competing views and values through recourse to recurrent arguments that strategically 1) presented decision-makers voices as more legitimate, informed and reliable than others; 2) referred to alternative views in an indirect, non-

detailed way 3) focused on a non-problematized consensus based on forms of technocracy and undisputed neo-liberal economic values. However, the analysis also revealed how the use of propagation and consensualization permitted the advance of alternative views and values, opening a more dialogical self-other communication that granted 1) some visibility of conflicting visions; and 2) legitimacy of different types of expertise. Alternative views were advanced using discourses that, without direct criticism of the dominant representation ("tourism is good, but..."), worked to dispute it. These discursive strategies accommodate competing opinions, allowing to present tourism's negative impacts and residents' claims, thus tending to delineate what tourism can and cannot do in and for the city and leaving space for more controversial and politicised discourses.

Overall, the analysis shows detailed evidence of how, in presenting new phenomena and policies to the public, the press – and the actors allowed to enter it – can resort to divergent discursive strategies and purposes, with divergent psychosocial and political consequences. In particular, the study contributes to a better understanding of how tourism-related transformations are represented and contested by divergent actors in the press. In this way, it has highlighted how the press is not fully contributing to represent tourism as an issue regarding which there are plural and conflicting views. Hiding the competing values behind political and legislative transformations, the press works in discouraging public debate and citizens' political engagement in the struggle for social justice (Carvalho, 2017), crucial drivers to be addressed in avoiding policies and solutions based on "false promises" of tourism sustainability (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020) and social equity.

Broadly, the study provides an innovative mixed methodology to analyse depoliticised discourses, capable of addressing both the structural dimensions and the discursive strategies that

contribute to the construction of a simplified view of the world that conceals the political from the debate and the debate of the political, where the political is "a discourse that acknowledges the existence of conflict, power, and division" (Wood and Flinders, 2014, p. 535). Likewise, it outlines the relevance of exploring how more plural views can find legitimacy in the press, providing insights for the study of a (re)politicised discourse and everyday practices of resistance against the dominant neoliberal discourse. Thus, the study underlines the importance of taking into consideration the reciprocal role of hegemonic and alternative representations in the analysis of mediated meaning-making processes and in questioning existing power dynamics (Negura et al., 2020; Sarr et al., 2021). In doing this, the study emphasises (1) how the "other" view continuously influences our communication, even when it is an absent, not-detailed or silenced other (Castro and Santos, 2020); and (2) how the "battles of ideas" about meanings in society are also and above all played on the level of the visibility and legitimacy of divergent actors and visions, showing how these are an open field of dispute along the self-other communication process (Castro et al., 2018; Howarth, 2006).

It is worth pointing out that this research has focused on the mainstream press only. For a more integrated view of the questions it approaches, it is now important to extend it also to the local and independent presses (Maesele and Raeijmaekers, 2020) and social media related user-generated comments (Torkington and Ribeiro, 2020). Moreover, we were unable to verify the accuracy of the search engines used to collect online content, and it was not possible to collect articles from all the newspapers analysed along with the same temporal frame (since one newspaper started only in 2014) constituting a limitation of the study. Besides this, we looked at the case of Lisbon, a city that has experienced recent and fast growth in tourism, and we have analysed the early years of its tourism boom and the consequent emerging debate. Places with a

longer experience with massive tourism, where therefore it is long since debated and contested, can present a more heterogeneous and politicised mediated discourse (Russo and Scarnato, 2018) or can allow depicting divergent media communicative modalities contributing to delegitimise alternative views and more radical forms of political contestation (Araya López, 2021). Moreover, future and longitudinal studies could investigate changes in the debate over longer periods or specific "critical discourse moments" (Carvalho, 2008), such as the one resulting from the Covid-19 crisis.

Despite this, and summing up, the article contributes to the study of the psychosocial discursive formations of the neoliberal system and of the way its hegemonic discourse influences our identities, values and representations (Harvey, 2005; Wacquant, 2012). Its integrative theoretical and methodological proposal has shown how a social representations approach with a focus on discourse and communication (Howarth, 2006; Batel and Castro, 2018) can play a central role in revealing how neoliberal values are entering our meaning-making processes, demonstrating how, as they become increasingly dominant in today's common sense, they acquire the power of entering press coverages and worldviews as "evidence" about which reflexion is not necessary. Moreover, in illustrating the discursive strategies employed by alternative views to gain visibility, this study also offers some suggestions about the role of minorities in disputing hegemonic representations (Moscovici, 1976). It highlights how the framing and presentation of political choices to the public can open up or close down space for citizens and groups with more or less radical discursive strategies (Araya López, 2021) to enter the public debate and play an active role in redefining it (Van Dijk, 2013). The recognition of these dynamics opens new paths towards critical studies of urban tourism more attentive to psychosocial processes and the role of self-other communication. If we are to redefine tourism as

incorporating and meeting local claims reorienting it to the public good (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020), it is indispensable to consider the micro-level of psychosocial dimensions, such as the role of interpersonal and mediated communication processes in affecting and re-signifying our worldviews and our practices of resistance in the face of the production of unsustainable global forces and globalised meanings.



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