

# Cultural Identity: A study of the Representative Elements of the Tourist Destination Natal (RN) From the Perspective of its Residents

Identidade Cultural: Um estudo dos Elementos Representativos do Destino Turístico Natal (RN) Sob a Ótica de seus Residentes

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## RESUMO

A identidade cultural de um local é o conjunto de aspectos como crenças, costumes e tradições, que geram um sentimento de pertencimento de um povo e o diferencia dos demais. O presente estudo teve como objetivo analisar os elementos representativos da identidade cultural do Natal (Rio Grande do Norte, Brasil). Para isso, adotou-se um estudo bibliográfico, exploratório e descritivo, com abordagem quantitativa. Foram selecionadas quatro categorias de análise que envolviam aspectos do patrimônio cultural material e imaterial da cidade, sendo elas: Patrimônio Arquitetônico Urbanístico e Paisagístico; Gastronomia; Eventos; e Manifestações Culturais. Foram aplicados questionários com 707 residentes da cidade. Para análise dos dados, utilizou-se o *software* SPSS e adotou-se as técnicas de estatística descritiva; teste de confiabilidade do questionário e de comparação de médias. Como resultados, o estudo demonstrou que os elementos se destacaram com médias quase máximas em algumas categorias, enquanto em outras, foram menos expressivas. A dimensão Gastronomia foi a que obteve maior média como representativa da cultura da cidade, enquanto que as Manifestações Culturais ocuparam a última posição. Apesar de haver pequenas oscilações nas médias obtidas nas quatro categorias, o teste de comparação de médias revelou que não houve diferença

significativa entre as notas atribuídas por residentes das diferentes áreas da cidade. Por fim, conclui-se que ao fomentar a promoção turística, é importante que o poder público considere os elementos significativos para os residentes, de modo que estes se sintam representados na cultura que é perpetuada durante as práticas turísticas.

**Palavras-chave:** Identidade cultural, Turismo cultural, Residentes. Natal.

## ABSTRACT

The cultural identity of a place is the set of aspects such as beliefs, customs and traditions, which generate a feeling of belonging for a people and differentiate them from others. The present study aimed to analyze the representative elements of the cultural identity of Natal (Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil). For this, a bibliographic, exploratory and descriptive study was adopted, with a quantitative approach. Four categories of analysis were selected that involved aspects of the city's material and intangible cultural heritage, namely: Urban and Landscape Architectural Heritage; Gastronomy; Events; and Cultural Manifestations. Questionnaires were administered to 707 city residents. For data analysis, SPSS software was used and descriptive statistics techniques were adopted; questionnaire reliability test and comparison of means. As a result, the study demonstrated that the elements stood out with almost maximum averages in some categories, while in others they were less expressive. The Gastronomy dimension was the one with the highest average as a representative of the city's culture, while Cultural Manifestations occupied the last position. Despite there being small fluctuations in the means obtained in the four categories, the mean comparison test revealed that there was no significant difference between the scores given by residents of different areas of the city. Finally, it is concluded that when promoting tourism promotion, it is important that public authorities consider the elements that are significant to residents, so that they feel represented in the culture that is perpetuated during tourist practices.

**Keywords:** Cultural identity, Cultural tourism, Residents. Natal.

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a phenomenon linked to culture, once one of the main motivations to travel is the search for experiences in new locations (Amaral *et al.*, 2012). Within such sense, the cultural tourism gains relevance since according to the research performed by the Ministry of Tourism (2022) in partnership with the



Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics - IBGE, 12.3 million of trips were performed by Brazilians in the last years and, among the motivations, the cultural and gastronomical tourism, with access to historical heritage, was the third most looked for segment by tourists in 2021.

The cultural tourism appropriates itself from the concept of cultural identity, which represents the determinant characteristics of a region (Palacios *et al.*, 2023). When live and well-structured it creates a feeling of belonging by part of the population, which aims at protecting and nurturing of what is considered a common good (Amaral, Silva, & Teixeira, 2008). Within such perspective, the tourism enters as a way to preserve the culture and let it highlighted by their visitors, since it is through the memory and construction of the identity reflected in the heritage, that the cultural tourism emerges in the intention of transforming it into a touristic product (Batista, 2005; Tadesse, 2023).

By being a segment that may be practiced at any time of the year the destinations that promote the cultural tourism suffer less with seasonality (Araújo, Posenatto, & Nascimento, 2010). Hence, the heritage elements of the population are considered the key to reach the sustainable cultural tourism (Tadesse, 2023; Mandandola & Bolssaa, 2023; Leoti, Anjos, & Costa, 2023).

However, not all destinations have a well-established cultural identity and end up focusing on one type of segment, becoming a destination with little diversity of attractions. This is the case of the city of Natal (Rio Grande do Norte, Brasil), which has been focusing on the segment of sun and sea tourism. According to Farias, Gonçalves & Medeiros (2013) such reality has perpetuated, whether for the lack of interest by businessmen or even due to the public management of the city.

On the other hand, the city of Mossoró located in the same state as Natal, has an established cultural identity to portrait its history, attracting people every year to promote the spectacle "Bullet rain in the country of Mossoró" that happens during the event "Mossoró June City", provoking in its locals the feeling



of belonging to that culture and the desire to protect it and to boost it (Amaral, Silva, & Teixeira, 2008).

The city of Natal has as one of its main attractions the sun and sea tourism, also known as “the city of the sun” or “sun fiancée” due to its tropical weather. According to a research untitled *Traveler's Choice Awards*, performed by the platform *TripAdvisor*, the city appears in the world ranking as the eighth most searched city, highlighted by its natural attractions (Natal's City Hall, 2021). According to Brandão & Brandão (2016), that city has a meaningful historical and cultural heritage, still yet to be explored. Therefore, to be focused on the sun and sea segment, it may leave behind some other types of visitors who search for cultural attractions, in addition to shorten the period of permanence of tourists in the location.

Therefore, in face of the lack of knowledge related to the cultural identity of the location, the present study has as goal to understand: *what are the representative dimensions of the cultural identity of the city of Natal under the view of its residents?* With the central goal it is aimed at analyzing the representative elements of the cultural identity of the destination from four dimensions: Architectonic Urban and Landscape Heritage; Gastronomy; Events and Cultural Manifestations.

Natal is a tropical and by the sea capital with a population estimated in 803.739 people. Capital of the state of Rio Grande do Norte, it is located in the Brazilian Northeast. It is an urban city with 67.401 Km<sup>2</sup> of territorial extension (IBGE, s.d.). It is composed by 36 neighborhoods, located in the four geographic areas politically divided: North zone, South zone, East zone and West zone. In addition to the public service and commerce, the tourism is one of its main economical activities (UOL, s.d.).

The study is justified from the need for analysis regarding the perceptions on cultural identity of destinations from the view of their residents, specially, what concerns the destination of Natal that has limited literature. Studies such as the ones from Queiroz & Nóbrega (2014), Marques & Cordeiro (2015), Lima *et al.*



(2015), Amaral *et al.* (2012), Farias, Gonçalves & Medeiros (2013) and Cruz (2021) investigated elements from the culture of Natal, however, they have worked on specific cultural attractions. None of them performed a holistic raise on the elements that compose the culture of Natal, constituting this, the main contribution of the present study.

In addition, it presents a social contribution, since to understand the representative elements of the culture, may promote a sense of belonging and local pride of the locals (Amaral, Silva, & Teixeira, 2008). It defends the relevance of this research, to rescue cultural elements that are implicit in the relations among the residents, but which are not always of easy identifications and are commonly forgotten when the city is only promoted as destination for sun and sea.

Next, the theoretical referential that approaches discussions on identity and cultural tourism as a factor for development in destinations will be presented. Posteriorly, the methodological procedures, the analysis, the discussions, final considerations, limitations and recommendations for future researches will be presented.

## **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### **Cultural Identity**

To speak about cultural identity, first, it is necessary to talk about memory. According to Batista (2005, p. 28) "memory means the ability to retain data from an experience or acquired knowledge and bring it to mind". Some memories are só strong for a population that even when not lived create a feeling of belonging.

According to Pollak (1992) the memory is built form the feeling of identity, since by being a built phenomenon, it is capable of reconstructing the identity of an individual or a population. It is about the image that one has of oneself, inherited throughout the life. The relation between the memory and the identity appears from the recognition of a group, when the members have gone through happenings and do not wish to forget their memories, but to perpetuate them (Batista, 2005). As exposed by Carneiro & Guimarães (2022, p. 5) "the memory is constituted by individuals in interactions or by social groups, resulting in the



individual memories of such process". Which means, the acquired memories in an individual form may not be unlinked from the collectivity, conditioning what it understood by cultural identity.

Silva (2014) defends that one of the identity's characteristic is that it exists from the recognition of the differences between "me" and "the other", seen from the moment that "the other" is identified, creating reference parameters that allow to identify differences and similarities between the individuals, feeding in a subtle form what each one is.

This resemblance among the individuals makes them to identify and to feel that they belong to that place. Mendes & Demczuk (2012) explain that when an asset has certain importance to a group and has similarities among itself, it creates an identity and feeling of belonging to something or somewhere.

Hall (2006) defends that the identity has gone through three types of subjects throughout the time: the Illuminist subject, an "individualistic" conception of the identity that only depends on oneself to exist. The Sociological subject that started to reflect on the complexity of the modern environment and to notice that one's identity are not totally auto enough, it was also formed by the environment and by the important people in it; and last, the Post-Modern subject that does not see the identity as stable and fixed and notices it as something in constant formation and transformation. Palacios *et al.* (2023) explains that such culture modification consists of a transcultural process.

Regarding the tourism destination, it is important to highlight that the cultural identity is strongly linked to the segment of cultural tourism, since without culture there is no tourism (Tadesse, 2023). Para Li *et al.* (2022, p. 1), "the intercultural exchanges between the local inhabitants and the tourists have been beneficial in terms of creating social value and sustainability". In China, for example, after being seen as a country with singular cultural identity, the govern started to articulate to promote and commercialize each day more the cultural tourism through its heritage (Ma & Mohame, 2023).



According to Leoti, Anjos & Costa (2023) the cultural practices encompass values and identity traditions and have symbolism that characterize and individualize social groups. For Matteucci *et al.* (2022), the cultural and creative industries have gained a great impact in the last years, specially after the arrival of the pandemic caused by the outbreak of Covid-19.

Within such context, through the cultural tourism the identity may be preserved and influences its residents, that before were not able to see that culture as an attraction, but when observe the interest of tourism start to want to take care of it and preserve it (Lavandoski, Tonini, & Barretto, 2012). Therefore, the heritage resources that compose the identity of the population are boosters of the impacts of life in the community, whether in economical, social or environmental order, promoting and developing tourism (Tadesse, 2023). It still needs to be communicated effectively, since the communication on the identity of a destination and its heritage elements is what it will make its recognition become viable (Amaral & Tricárico, 2023).

## **Cultural Tourism**

One of the existing points in the relation between identity and cultural tourism is when, from such, the identity of a location starts to become appreciated, both by its locals that feel pride in having the identity disseminated, as well as tourists who go to the location with the purpose of meeting new cultures (Amaral, Silva, & Teixeira, 2008).

The cultural tourism is formed by cultural heritage that are divided into materials, such as historical monuments, regional food and touchable artifacts; and the immaterial, which are the traditions, customs and beliefs (Ferreira, Aguiar, & Pinto, 2012). In addition, there are several elements that compose the culture, such as gastronomy, events, arts and crafts, religious interests, among others, favoring the intellectual contact and the exchange among the individuals (Flores & Bem, 2021).

According to Pérez (2009, p. 116) "the cultural tourism is a form of tourism with the central purpose of knowing the monuments, historical and artistic sites or



any other element of cultural heritage". Brandão & Brandão (2016) state that such segment when values the local cultures, mainly for its particularities, stimulates a process of recuperation and revitalization of material and immaterial heritage. Still, according to them, when a destination has its cultural tourism well-planned by its managers, this type of tourism may generate greater economic income in the cities, once it also has a role in the creation of social value and environmental sustainability for the tourism destinations Li *et al.* (2022).

Under the perspective of Brito, Araújo & Silva (2022), the cultural tourism happens through cultural narratives, in which, such narratives constitute an immaterial heritage that is manifested through oralities, narratives of a people summarizing the cultural life and the symbolic relations. Complementing such thought, Maia, Lanzarini & Brussio (2023, p. 119) argument that "to cherish and to think in a sensible way about the various forms of cultural conception are pressing attitudes for the construction of a perception regarding the valuation of popular cultures". The authors still complement the need of cultures to be always cherished and valued, regardless of where such manifestations come from.

The study of Ma & Mohame (2023) identified that in such type of tourism, the travelers report that they feel psychologically better after participating in heritage tourism activities since they are motivated by feelings of nostalgia and by a sense of cultural connection.

Within such perspective of protection and valuation of cultural heritage, in 1937 the Institute of National Historical and Artistic Heritage – IPHAN, appears, through the Law nº 378. It has as purpose the protection and promotion of material and immaterial assets of the national culture (Ministry of Tourism, 2020). The institute aims at the protection through the state protection of heritage, which generates recognition and protection of such cultural assets.

On the other hand, when it comes to tourism and culture, it can be observed that such relation is even stronger. According to Pérez (2009), tourism without culture can not exist, once in one way or another, all tourism practices are cultural. Therefore, the cultural tourism has as purpose the valuation and





sharing of the local culture through cultural aspects of the destination (Araújo, Posenatto, & Nascimento, 2010).

According to Richards (2009), the cultural tourism may be practiced even when the main motivation of the traveler is not getting to know the culture, however, it appears as secondary motivation. Under such perspective, the development of cultural tourism in destinations that already have the sun and sea established and well-explored, comes as a differential, enabling the increase of the range of options regarding the tourism attractions. In addition, by not suffering climate interference, it is the tourism segment that less suffers with the season changes, may be practiced during the low season in the sun and sea destinations. (Araújo, Posenatto, & Nascimento, 2010).

For Barbosa *et al.* (2004), the incentive to the culture is an excellent opportunity for the sun and sea destinations, once it will attract new segments and increase the options of attractions, leading to extend the permanence of their visitors. The author uses as example the city of Natal (Rio Grande do Norte), which has as main attraction the sea beaches, however, by not worrying so much with the cultural bias, tends to diminish the permanence of its visitors in the city.

Such tourism segment is also capable of giving identity to the destinations and attracting new capitals, at the same time that it gives the local community something to identify itself. The culture is, from such mode, used for the economical development of the city, creating a new image and a new symbolism, just as an economy of services, attracting capital and external investment at the same time that tries to contribute to a cohesion of the community (Pérez, 2009).

In addition to being a form of incentive to the identification of the local population with the destination, the cultural tourism is one of the main strategies of development of a sustainable cultural tourism (Tadesse, 2023; Mandandola & Bolssaa, 2023; Leoti, Anjos, & Costa, 2023). It postpones the strategic planning with the infrastructure developing the economy and aiming at protecting the natural



and cultural resources, so that they may continue to exist to future generations (Menezes, 2003).

In face of the exposed, the study of Li *et al.* (2022) pointed out that there is a significant relation between cultural tourism, environment, sustainability and creation of social value in the destinations, which indicates the cultural segment as a potential path of tourism heading to sustainability. For Matteucci *et al.* (2022), there are many strengths that mold the social and global trends of cultural tourism, but without any doubts, the discussion anthropocenes the period in which the industrial activities started to impact the planet Earth in an unregulated form and guided by profit, is a useful step. As follows, the methodological procedures adopted in the present research are presented.

## METHODOLOGY

The present study is a bibliographic type, once it starts from the information available in the literature, such as books, articles, news and important institutional websites (Veal, 2011). The bibliographic review was performed for two purposes, being them: to verify the gap of research on studies regarding the cultural identity of Natal; and to perform a raise of the representative cultural elements of the city, enabling, therefore, the construction of the instrument of data gathering.

The research presents quantitative approach, from the exploratory and descriptive type since in addition to enabling a close view from the phenomenon, it describes the characteristics of a population, raising their beliefs and opinions (Gil, 1999). The quantitative research was applied to the population of Natal, which means, to the residents of the city, obtaining 707 valid questionnaires. To the identification of the number of participants, a formula to calculate the sample for finite populations was used as base, according to Martins (1994), represented by the expression:

Figure 1: Formula to calculate the sample.



$$n = \frac{N \cdot \hat{p} \cdot \hat{q} \cdot (Z_{\alpha/2})^2}{\hat{p} \cdot \hat{q} \cdot (Z_{\alpha/2})^2 + (N - 1) \cdot E^2}$$

Source: Martins (1994).

In face of the exposed and the correspondent calculations, a number of the sample was obtained of 269 residents in the city. Therefore, the research reached 707 answers, which means that it represents a good level of trust.

The questionnaire was elaborated and divided into four categories of analysis defined from the review of the literature, and that meant the representative dimensions of the groups of material and immaterial elements which compose the cultural identity of Natal – Chart 1.

Chart 1: Categories of analysis of the study.

<b>Architectonic, Urban and Landscape Heritage</b>	It refers to the material or heritage assets, important to the culture of Natal, regarding, not only the significant and protected constructions in the city but the landscape formed by such elements, whether it has been constructed or natural (IPHAN, 2022a).
<b>Gastronomy</b>	The food, according to Castro, Maciel & Maciel (2016) is culture, and all human groups have their culture which is manifested by what is eaten and how it is eaten. Therefore, such category involves all the dishes and in some cases, typical food from the city, which are “rooted” in the food culture of the population, constituting part of its history and heritage.
<b>Events</b>	The events also represent the culture of a people and according to Serrão & Costa (2020), they are constituent part of the cultural heritage of a people. Therefore, when it becomes tradition, they start to be a part of history and of the memory of the population, translating the lifestyle of the place and helping in the development of destinations.
<b>Cultural Manifestations</b>	These are all the popular manifestations, being them: dances, arts, costumes, knowledge and doings of a people; which means, they are all the historical, artistic ad cultural practices which reflect the traditional aspects of the destination, establishing a relation between the present and the past (Caxile, 2019).

Source: Own elaboration based on the literature (2022).



It is highlighted that despite the gastronomy and some events be also interpreted as cultural manifestations, due to the elevated number of elements and complexity of such assets to the cultural of Natal, it is understood that both deserve the treatment as isolated categories.

To validate the instrument of data gathering from the review of the literature, it was also performed an online focal group which has the purpose of “identifying perceptions, feeling, attitudes and ideas of the participants regarding a certain subject, product or activity” (Dias, 2000, p. 3). The focal group was performed with the intention of validating the elements raised in the literature as representative form Natal’s culture. To do so, seven residents from the city were chosen, being six egresses or students from the tourism course of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN) – Campus Natal; Dias (2000) indicates a minimum number of six and maximum number of ten participants to a focal group, which means that the number of people used is within the criteria specified by the author.

The reason for the choice was in addition to the residents, these people have within their program the formation of the course, mandatory and optative disciplines, relating the themes Cultural Tourism and Historical, Artistic and Cultural Brazilian Heritage; therefore, they posses certain knowledge on the theme, in addition to being residents in the city. The selection of the participants in the focal group occurred by convenience and access, within the great amount of students from the course, searching for, always when possible, profiles that lived in different areas of the city.

In addition, the instrument still was submitted to the evaluation of three people with elevated knowledge on the matter, being one a professor of cultural tourism from UFRN and two researchers at doctorate level who study Northeastern gastronomy and Historical and Cultural Centers in Natal. Both the participants from the focal group as well as the specialists in the area had the opportunity to analyze the questionnaire previously and, in a following moment, a conversation by videoconferencing was scheduled in which the participants could suggest



some additions or disagree of the already present elements in the instrument of research. Chart 2 presents the amount of items raised before and after the validation of the instrument with members from the focal group and specialists from the area.

Chart 2: Amount of items raised during the steps of elaboration of the instrument of the research.

	Raised based on the review of the literature and institutional websites	Final raise after the focal group and validation from the specialists
<b>Architectonic, Urban and Landscape Heritage</b>	23 items	44 items
<b>Gastronomy</b>	12 items	25 items
<b>Events</b>	12 items	17 items
<b>Cultural Manifestations</b>	5 items	9 items

Source: Own elaboration (2022).

After the methodological procedures, the questionnaire resulted in a total of 95 items, being the category Architectonic, Urban and Landscape Heritage counted with 44 items representative of the culture; Gastronomy had 25 items representative of the culture; Events had 17 items representative of the culture; and Cultural Manifestations had 9 items representative of the culture. Chart 3 presents the final items included in the questionnaire of the research and its respective theoretical base.

Quadro 3: Indicadores da cultura natalense expostos no questionário de pesquisa.

<b>Architectonic, Urban and Landscape Heritage</b>		<b>Raise sources</b>
Fort of the Magi	Landmark of Bulls and 16th century landmark	⇒ Natal (2008);
Dunes Park	Historical and Geographical Institute of RN	⇒ Nesi (2000);
Potengi River	Natal's Monumental Portico	⇒ Araújo, Possenato & Nascimento (2010);
Alberto Maranhão Theater	Bela Vista Solar	⇒ Araújo (2016);
Museum Câmara Cascudo	Fish Market	⇒ Barbosa (2004);
Memorial Câmara Cascudo	André de Albuquerque Square	⇒ Brandão & Brandão (2016);
Newton Navarro Bridge	September 7 Square	⇒ Cruz (2021);
Pedro Velho – Civic Square	Museum of Popular Culture Djalma Maranhão	⇒ IPHAN (2014a);
Mud Alley	Catita Hole	⇒ IPHAN (2014b);
Santo Antônio Church – Rooster church	City Theater Sandoval Wanderley	⇒ Lei Nº 10.481, de 30 de janeiro de 2019 (2019);
Mercado da Redinha	Museum Café Filho	⇒ Lima et al. (2016);
Cathedral	Old Great Hotel	⇒ Law Project Nº
City Park	Museum of sacred art	
Christmas Tree	House of Priest João Maria	
Tourism Center of Natal	Sea Museum Onofre Lopes	



Captaincy of the arts Natal's City Hall Building Chile Street Potengi Palace Art Gallery Old Industrial Lyceum – Current IFRN Church of Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Pretos Natal's Ground Zero	Dr. Barata Street Royal Warehouse of the Superintendency Captaincy of IPHAN Santa Cruz da Bica Square Quarantine Lane Bride's Veil or Sobradinho Augusto Severo Square Rosário Stone	302/2020 (2020) ⇒ Interview with specialists; ⇒ Focal group with residents.
<b>Gastronomy</b>		
Ginga with tapioca Shrimp Cuscuz Sun meat Paçoca Sun meat I Green beans Crab Manioc Butter cheese Coalho cheese Rapadura Manioc flour Cocada	Canjica Milk rice Escondidinho Grude Charque meat Bobó de camarão Lamb meat Baião de dois Cartola Cangulo fish Chouriço Charia fish	
<b>Events</b>		
Christmas in Natal Carnatal June Festival of Quadrilhas São João Party International Fair of Crafts FIART Santos Reis Party MADA Festival Multicultural Carnival of Natal	Sun Festival Forró with the tourist Auto of Natal Historical walk of Natal Nossa Senhora Aparecida Party Thursday at the alley Nossa Senhora dos Navegantes Party Religious walk of Natal Halleluya Natal	
<b>Cultural Manifestations</b>		
Crafts June Quadrilha Rendeiras de Ponta Negra Popular Theater of Dolls Pastoril	Boi Calemba Araruna Dance Fandango Congos de Calçola	

Source: Own elaboration (2022).

It is highlighted that the theoretical base served as initial source to the raise of a group of representative items of the culture. However, other items present in



the above chart were not present in the literature, but were raised through the initial procedure of conversation with specialists and focal group with locals.

The questionnaire was divided into five parts, where four represented the items linked to the four categories of analysis and were shown in *likert* scale to indicate the level of agreement with the affirmations from 0 to 7 points. The last step of the questionnaire presented questions related to the social-economical profile of the respondents of the research.

The data gathering was performed in an online form through social media from the sending of the questionnaire from person to person in the "snow ball" strategy. In addition, it was also asked the disclosure through the Information System of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte (SINFO), which enabled the sharing of the link with all the workers and students from the university, who were residents in the city of Natal.

For the data analysis, descriptive analysis of the average, reliability analysis of the questionnaire and the test of average comparison were applied. Regarding the average, it is, according to Corrar, Paulo & Dias Filho (2007) the center of data distribution. On the other hand, the Alfa of *Cronbach* is a reliability measure to validate the questionnaire and it is obtained through an average correlation between the questions. Such coefficient varies from 0 to 1, being values of 0.6 acceptable in exploratory researches (Hair, Anderson, & Black, 2007).

At last, the average comparison test was also used to compare the averages between the groups by the city zones. *Tukey* test was used, which according (2008, p. 782), "it may be used to compare each and any contrast between two averages of treatments". To help the statistical procedures, the software *Statistical Package for the Social Science – SPSS* which enabled the tests used in the data analysis. As follows, the results obtained from the research are presented.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Profile of the Respondents



By analyzing the gender of the participants, it was verified that the majority (58.8%) were from the female gender, followed by the male gender (40.7%). Regarding the age range, it is noticed that the percentage of people who are until 40 years of age is of 61.5%. The majority of the respondents was single (60.3%), followed by married (29.6%). Table 1:

Table 1: Profile of the respondents.

Gender	Age range	Marital status	Schooling	Family Income
58.8% Female	9.8% younger than 20	66.3% Single	36.6% Complete Post-Graduation	27.9% 1 to 3 minimum wages.
40.7% Male	38.3% - 21 to 30	29.6 % Married	32.8% Incomplete College	18.8% above 9 minimum wages.
4% Other	23.2% 31 to 40	6.2% Other	14.1% Complete College	17.4% 3 to 5 minimum wages.
	14.9% 41 to 50	3% Separated	8.2% Incomplete Post-Graduation	12.6% Up to 1 minimum wage.
	13.9 over fifty 50	1% Widow	6.7% Complete High School	10.5% 5 to 6 minimum wages.
	38.3% - 21 to 30		1.1 % Incomplete High School	7.2% 7 to 9 minimum wages.
			0.4% Elementary School	5.7% 6 to 7 minimum wages.

Source: Data from the research (2022).

Analyzing the level of schooling, it was verified that 91.7% are at least enrolled in college, being able to infer that the majority has an elevated level of schooling. However, by counterpoising the general data of the population of Natal, it is highlighted that the average of the population who are 25 or older and who has completed college is of 25.8%, according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics - IBGE (Tribuna do Norte, 2020). Such distortion among the data may be associated to the form of disclosure of the questionnaire, occurred mainly through the official channels of UFRN, with students and workers from the institution.

Another data possibly influenced by the channel of disclosure of the questionnaire was the item family income. Therefore, 18.8% of the respondents had income above the nine minimum wages, losing space only to the people that received between one to three minimum wages (27.9%).

In face of the presented data, it is noticed that the greater part of the respondents are single women, with elevated level of schooling and with monthly income between one to three minimum wages.





## Representative dimensions of the cultural identity of Natal

In this topic, the data obtained through the application of the questionnaire to the population will be presented. The purpose was that the respondents from the four areas of Natal (North, South, East and West) identified the more representative items. In the overall, 861 answers (100%) were obtained, from which 707 people (82.6%) were residents in the city, fit to answer the research. From the obtained answers, it was verified that the highest number was of locals from the South zone of Natal (55% of the answers); followed by 14.6% of the North zone; 16.5% of the East zone and 13.9% of the West zone.

As follows, the obtained results will be presented considering the level of agreement from the representative elements of the culture from Natal in a scale from 0 to 7, being: 0 = do not recognize; 1= much disagree; 2= more or less disagree; 3= little disagree; 4= neutral; 5= agree a little; 6= agree more or less and 7= deeply agree.

After the sum of the individual averages from the distributed items between the four categories, a general average with the sum of all the items from each one of the studied categories was calculated. Such analysis was performed to verify the representativeness of the four dimensions in the analyzed culture. In addition, it was calculated the Alpha of Cronbach ( $\alpha$ ), which is a measure of reliability, to evaluate the level of internal consistence in the answers from the participants to a group of items exposed in a questionnaire or scale. After verifying the value of  $\alpha$  in the four dimensions of the study, it was considered that they vary from 0.892 to 0.969, considered reliable, since the minimum accepted value in the area of Social Sciences is of 0.6 (Hair, Anderson, & Black, 2009). Table 2 presents the obtained values.

Table 2: Representative cultural dimensions from the culture of Natal.

	Average	Alpha of Cronbach
Gastronomy	5.4623	0.969
Events	4.8975	0.921
Urban and Landscape Architecton Heritage	4.7001	0.904
Cultural Manifestations	4.4009	0.892



Source: Data from the research (2022).

With the general average, it has become evident that, among the four categories, Gastronomy is the cultural dimension that the locals from Natal consider the most representative, by having a higher average (5.46). With such result, it is inferred that it is about a strong and very important dimension to the identity of the city. Ferro (2013) defends that gastronomy, just as tourism, have always been present in the human life. This way, gastronomy from Natal has an elevated potential to be promoted as a tourism attraction. Hence, the segment of gastronomic tourism promoter of the gastronomic identity of Natal should be an alternative to the development of tourism and promotion of the local economy.

Among some important gastronomic elements of the city of Natal, it can be quoted the *Ginga with Tapioca*, a typical and historically born dish from the city, recognized by the Law N° 10.481 (2019) as immaterial heritage of the state and commercialized on the beaches of Natal. According to Lima *et al.* (2015), the dish may be recognized as an original element of gastronomy and its creation has occurred from the complementary between fishing (mainly masculine activity) and handy crafts (typically female). Another gastronomic element of major important to the culture of Natal is the shrimp and its derived dishes. It is relevant to clarify that the individual who is born in the state is called “potiguar”, which already bring the shrimp as reference, since that in tupi-guarani it means “shrimp eater”. According to the Brazilian Association of Shrimp Eaters (2022), through a census study of the eaters of shrimp in the states of Ceará, Piauí and Rio Grande do Norte, this is the second largest state producer of national shrimp.

As runner-up was the category of Events (4.89) indicating its importance to the cultural identity of the city. According to Araújo (2016), the events contribute to the preservation and disclosure of the intangible culture of a location, being relevant to the city of Natal and needing to be planned and organized in a way to promote the cultural identity of its residents. They occur to sensitize the participants regarding the identity representations of the location's heritage. The



events are mixed up with the cultural tourism, since at the same time that they express the culture, they attract tourists to the location where they are held (Queiroz & Nóbrega, 2014).

Just as the gastronomy, the events are important to the strengthening of a cultural identity for the destination. In addition, both categories may be developed in harmony having at sight that an event may also be of gastronomic purpose. In such sense, Luderer (2019) emphasizes that the gastronomic events are highlighted throughout the time and have contributed to social and cultural scenarios. Still according to the authors, the events may work as a device that contributes to the social agents of gastronomy to be bonded, promoting the economic and social-cultural development of the location.

In the third position of the dimensions, the category Architectonic, Urban and Landscape Heritage appeared (4,7). This shows that in the matter of valuating the material heritage, this is not an asset recognized by the local population. The study of Cruz (2021) concluded that despite some actions, the historical center of the city still remains in a secondary position in the local political options. The Institute Câmara Cascudo, for instance, reunites important information on Luiz da Câmara Cascudo, who to Amaral et al. (2012) is one of the most important characters of the Brazilian culture. Even being the memorial and the institute Câmara Cascudo present among the representative elements of the material heritage of the city, this has not been enough for the category Architectonic Urban and Landscape Heritage category to be one of the most representative to the culture of Natal.

This might be a problem, since as exposed by Marques & Cordeiro (2015, p. 234), it is "of great importance that there is responsibility and historical consciousness to maintain the urban particularities and the memory present in the architecture of each time". In addition, the authors quote the case of the neighborhood of Ribeira in Natal, which has been the social-economical center of the city in its formation process, but it lost its social functions, resulting in a



process of segregation from the society and of deterioration of the built environments.

Thus, such lack of recognition also ends up reflecting on tourism, since when tourists visit Natal and get to know its beaches, there is not much else to do to extend their permanence. If precisely the architectonic, urban and landscape heritage are not promoted among the residents, it would hardly be promoted among tourists.

Such reality is preoccupying from the touristic point of view, since Natal has landmarks and important historical elements to be shown and counted through its monuments. The city had an important role in World War II due to its strategic location, giving the district of Parnamirim (next to Natal), the name of “Trampoline of the Victory”, since it received the American soldiers and the installation of two American basis. Natal was one of the first Brazilian capitals to receive the company of the brand Coca-Cola. Which means, the city has significant historical heritage, sadly, little valued and disclosed by its population. In addition, it is characterized as a historical center of the country and it holds protected urban groups, by IPHAN, which are national urban references, where it is possible to live the process of transformation from representations of each historical period (IPHAN, 2014b).

At last, the category Cultural Manifestations appeared in the last position as a representative element of the Natal's culture. As defended by Caxile (2019) the popular manifestations are based on costumes, knowledge and traditional do's and establish a relation between the present and the past. According to the average of such category (4.4) it is verified that such activities were not well represented, showing a certain level of neutrality of the participants regarding their importance.

In face of the exposed, it is noticed that Natal has representative elements of culture in the four investigated cultural dimensions, with highlight to gastronomy. As emphasized by Castro, Maciel & Maciel (2016), food is culture and all cultural groups have their culture manifested by food. Soon, it is noticed



that in Natal such cultural gastronomic identity is so expressive that it surpasses other relevant cultural dimensions in the culture of Natal. Such aspect may be used with touristic purpose, as defended by Ferro (2013, p. 45) “analyzing only the first relation of the tourist with food, it is a fact the ability of touristic attraction that gastronomy has, even more when regionalized, where a greater authenticity is focused in its social construction of taste”. It is noticed that the promotion of the gastronomic identity from Natal may boost the identity feeling of the local population in synchrony with tourism practices.

In a complementary form, it is also important for the public power not to dis-consider other alternatives to revitalize the cultural aisle of the city of Natal. This is highlighted in the study of Farias, Gonçalves & Medeiros (2013) in which the authors suggest that an articulation between the different actors of the cultural spheres of the city is important to revitalize and promote assets and cultural attractions. However, in a group and integrated work, the public power, private power and third sector may be united in a search for a re-structure of the cultural product of the city.

### Comparison of the averages by zone of the city

As follows, the analysis of comparison of averages by zones of the city will be presented, starting with the descriptive analysis of each zone by analyzed category, followed by the analysis of comparison of averages through *Tukey* test. For the interpretation of the table, one must consider the *n* value *n* (sample of respondents by zone) and the Average (within the analyzed zone) – Table 3.

Table 3: Descriptive analysis of comparison of averages by zones of the city.

		N	Average
Architectonic, Urban, Landscape Heritage	South	389	4,58
	North	101	4,77
	East	122	4,95
	West	95	4,79
	Total	707	4,70
Gastronomy	South	389	5,42
	North	101	5,62
	East	122	5,38



	West	95	5,60
	Total	707	5,46
Events	South	389	4,72
	North	101	5,20
	East	122	5,07
	West	95	5,09
	Total	707	4,90
Cultural Manifestations	South	389	4,34
	North	101	4,60
	East	122	4,35
	West	95	4,51
	Total	707	4,40

Source: Data from the research (2022).

Regarding specifically about the averages, it is verified that in all the zones, Gastronomy presented values above 5,0, which means that all the population in a balanced form considers it as the most representative category. In a similar form, the category Events presented the second overall average, with values above 5,0 in all the groups, with the exception of the South zone (4,7).

On the other hand, the categories Architectonic, Urban and Landscape Heritage, and Cultural Manifestations had similar averages within each zone, thus, with values above 4,0 and lower than 5,0. This means that both had a tendency to a position of neutrality by part of the respondents in all the groups.

Such results highlight that again Gastronomy with Events are the categories with greater highlight and the ones that present a balanced scenario. In addition, it is verified that Gastronomy, just as Events, are considered intangible cultural elements which are "rooted" in the traditions of the population from Natal. As exposed by Ferreira, Aguiar & Pinto (2012), the immaterial heritage are all the costumes, beliefs and traditions of a people.

Observing the data by zone, in the category Architectonic, Urban and Landscape Heritage, it is verified that despite all of them presenting averages close to 4,0, the East zone had better displacement to a higher grade that would be 5,0, meaning that the participant agrees that the item was representative of the culture. It is worth highlighting that the majority of the elements from Architectonic, Urban and Landscape is located in the East zone, where the



historical neighborhoods of Natal are found, as Ribeira, Alecrim and Cidade Alta. It is highlighted that Natal is considered by the IPHAN (2014b) as a historical Brazilian nucleus, being the referred neighborhoods a “nursery” of the city, the oldest neighborhoods and with a significant number of protected assets as cultural heritage.

The factor proximity of residence from the respondents of the East zone has possibly influenced the notes from such region, since by living in the location, they may have more easiness in getting to know the heritage and feeling represented by the elements of such category. Meeting such point of view Hall (2006) explains that the environment that the individuals live also influences their identity. This way, due to the proximity with the elements of such category and relation of living in the everyday life, the locals of the East zone may feel more represented when compared to the residents from other regions of the city.

Within the dimension Gastronomy, the North zone was the one which showed higher grading. Followed by the West zone. Specifically, the North zone is the area of the city where the Mercado da Redinha is located, which is the place of origin of Ginga with Tapioca, immaterial heritage of the city. Such result may demonstrate the potentiation of the North zone as an area of interest to promote the gastronomic tourism of the city. Such result is still even more interesting since the North and West zones are the places with the lowest rates of social-economical development. According to Barbosa, Gonçalves & Santana (2019) from an analysis of rates of social vulnerability of the city, it has become evident a reality of social inequality of the social-economical conditions of the population from Natal. In addition, it was verified that there are critical areas in the North and West zones, in counter-position to the East and South areas of the city.

This way, it is noticed that bonding tourism to the gastronomic identity of the North zone may contribute to the social-economical development of the region, through the elements of the local cultural heritage, making the touristic activity of the city more inclusive and sustainable. Pérez (2009, p. 294) defines that



“culture is used for the economical development of the city, creating a new image and a new symbolism, just as an economy of the services, attracting capital and investments”.

Once again, the North zone was attributed the highest averages, this time in the category Events. Such elevated average may be related to the fact that the North zone has several events that frequently occur in the Giumnasium Nélio Dias, place where the Festival of Quadrilhas Juninas from Great Natal occurs performed by the City Hall of Natal, which occurs every year. According to Morigi (2005), the June party gathers a series of elements from the local and regional culture, being part of the Northeast tradition: to congregate values in a form of cultural syncretism of different procedures and contexts. However, the occurrence of June and traditional events in areas such as the North zone, may increase the greater participation of the population in such area, and consequently, strengthen its identity potential.

At last, in the category of Cultural Manifestations, the North zone attributed the best evaluations. In counter-position, the South zone, which is the place where the Rendeiras de Bilros da Vila de Ponta Negra are found, recognized as immaterial heritage of Natal through the Law Project 302/2020 (2020), was the area with less highlight. Such result may highlight a possible lack of knowledge and/or recognition of the population regarding such art as an expression and manifestation of the popular culture.

To better verify the level of significance regarding the averages of the zones of the city, the *Tukey* was performed, which enables the comparison between the averages of the groups. To interpret such test it is important to analyze the level of significance (Sig.), since to exist a significant statistical difference between the average, the value of Sig. Should be lower than 0,05. Table 4.

Table 4: Comparison test of averages between the groups/zones of the city (Tukey).

Dependent variable	(I) Residence zone	(J) Residence zone	Sig.





Architectonic Urban and Landscape Heritage	South	North	,716
		East	,115
		West	,680
	North	South	,716
		East	,833
		West	1,000
	East	South	,115
		North	,833
		West	,872
	West	South	,680
		North	1,000
		West	,872
Gastronomy	South	North	,317
		East	,989
		West	,423
	North	South	,317
		East	,341
		West	,999
	East	South	,989
		North	,341
		West	,427
	West	South	,423
		North	,999
		East	,427
Events	South	North	,019
		East	,106
		West	,131
	North	South	,019
		East	,906
		West	,949
	East	South	,106
		North	,906
		West	1,000
	West	South	,131
		North	,949
		East	1,000
Cultural Manifestations	South	North	,558
		East	1,000
		West	,834
	North	South	,558
		East	,740
		West	,986
	East	South	1,000
		North	,740
		West	,920
	West	South	,834
		North	,986
		East	,920



Source: Data from the research (2022).

By analyzing the table, it is verified that the values were higher than 0,05, which highlights that, despite having little distortions of the averages between the four areas of the city, such values did not present great discrepancies. Such result may reveal a more homogeneous perception of the population regarding the elements which really may be configured as representative of the culture of Natal. Nonetheless, there may be a greater support to strengthen the cultural identity of the city and to promote the city as an important destination to the practice of cultural tourism.

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The present study had the purpose of analyzing the representative elements of the cultural identity from the city of Natal (RN) from the point of view of their residents. It starts with the argument that the understanding of a cultural identity in a touristic destination is important, both to making it more attractive broadening the range of segmentation of the cultural tourism; as well as to making it recognized by its residents. In Natal, such identity is still little disclosed, and despite having a significant historical heritage, the cultural tourism is still seldom explored (Brandão & Brandão, 2016).

By analyzing the obtained results in the study, it is verified that the most significant cultural dimension and the one that best represents the cultural identity of the city is the Gastronomy. This shows that by promoting the gastronomic cultural tourism, the public organs of Natal are promoting an aspect of the culture that has strong representation among the population. In addition, this may elevate the feeling of belonging and, consequently, the valuation of typical gastronomic elements from Natal.

By comparing the representativeness of the cultural dimensions by geographic zone, the study showed that despite having no statistically important differences, still, Natal presents some fluctuations regarding certain categories when analyzed within certain areas. Hence, it is inferred that such fluctuations



may be related to the factor of proximity; which means, the closer a certain element of the cultural heritage is geographically of a certain area, the more important and perceptible the respective cultural dimension will be firming with the population.

At last, the study contributed to the literature by statistically analyzing elements of the cultural identity of an important Brazilian tourism destination, having as foundation the perception of its own residents. By identifying elements of the culture that are presented as most representative, the study provides useful information to be worked on at tourism public management level in the city, in a way to promote tourism in tune with the identity and local pride.

As limitations, it is listed that despite corresponding to an important portion of the population, this study was not able to gather data from a homogeneous population of the four geographic zones of the city. In such sense, some locations as the South zone provided a higher number of answers, meanwhile other very populous zones such as the North and West zones, had less significant samples. Still, it is possible to make inferences with the gathered data, since even with a higher concentration in the South zone, all the zones were able to reach a high volume of data, once that in general the obtained sample had 707, which was very superior to the minimum stipulated of 269 answers.

As suggestion for future researches, it is recommended the replication of the study in a longitudinal form once the perception is something that is modified throughout the time, therefore the performance of the study in other time periods may show different results. Such new studies may encompass more homogeneous geographically samples with a similar number in all areas of the city, overcoming the limitation of the research, previously mentioned. In addition, it is suggested that the adopted methodological path in this study may serve as inspiration, in the way to analyze and decode the cultural identity of other relevant destinations to the Brazilian tourism.

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