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## A phenomenological approach of blogger's view on cultural distance

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### ABSTRACT

This paper is intended to determine the influence of cultural distance on the international destination choices by tourists. We adopted a phenomenological approach and data were obtained from 17 bloggers with structured interview form and evaluated by content analysis. We evaluated the research data as three processes, as pre-travel, during travel and post-travel. We identified a tangible and an intangible preparation stage in the pre-travel process. We observed that an increase in cultural distance caused an increase in the destination obscurity and thus in the mental preparation. We found cultural experience, cultural acquisition and personal change themes during traveling. In the meantime, the increase in the geographic distance influences the cultural distance perception. We determined that destinations that are geographically remote (especially the Asian countries) are also culturally remote and interesting. We proposed a model that cultural distance is a moderator variable between travel motivation and destination choice.

### KEYWORDS

Travel motivation; push and pull factors; cultural distance; blogger; phenomenology

### Introduction

Destination preferences of individuals are influenced by the mental, geographic, social and cultural distances between the places where they live and the destinations where they plan to go. Culture plays a pivotal role in understanding destination preferences within the scope of travel motivations (Crotts & Erdmann, 2000; Pizam & Sussmann, 1995; Solomon, 2014). In other words, cultural past (Abooali, Farahani, & Mohamed, 2011) is significant in determining tourist behaviors.

The literature suggests that a number of factors, such as the travel motivations, travel programs, visit purposes, past lives, educations, cultures and ages of the tourists are determinant in the destination perceptions of the tourists (Buhalis, 2000, p. 97). Furthermore, we should not overlook culture in destination choice researches, considering that culture guides in the daily life of an individual, and influences his purchasing behaviors, attitudes and decision-making processes (Abooali et al., 2011). Some researchers argue that cultural differences rather than cultural similarities are influential in destination choices of tourists

(McKercher & Du Cros, 2003, p. 45; O'Leary & Deegan, 2003, p. 213).

We observe that cultural distance is handled in a limited manner in tourism researches despite its above-mentioned importance. We believe that researches questioning cultural distance, which is believed to be influential in the destination preferences of tourists, in the field of tourism are limited since it is difficult to measure cultural distance (Ahn & McKercher, 2015), and therefore its examination will offer a different perspective in the literature. And we believe that handling the research with a phenomenological pattern will contribute in the elimination of the measurement difficulties and conceptual uncertainties.

This research is intended to understand the influence of cultural distance on the travel motivations of tourists. Based on the findings, we obtained from 17 bloggers who traveled abroad from Turkey, we identified the travel motivations of the participants as push and pull factors. At the end of the research, we recommend a model that incorporates the travel motivations, destination choice and cultural distance relationship.

## Literature

Distance is an important component for destination choice in travel planning (Larsen & Guiver, 2013). The seminal study on the influence of geographic distance on tourism demand has been studied by Greer and Wall (1979). Since then, the influence of distance has been researched under the headings of recreational services (Hanink & White, 1999), and demand for national parks (Paul & Rimmawi, 1992). The influence of distance on tourism has been included in destination choice researches (Fang Bao & Mckercher, 2008). The researches show that distance may be both a positive and a negative factor in influencing travel behavior (Nicolau, 2008). It is possible to examine the influence of distance on tourism from the perspectives of both the homelands and the destinations of the visitors. According to Larsen and Guiver (2013), distance is the result of the correlations made by tourists between their cultures and the destination culture and how eager they feel about the likelihood of meeting with a different culture. In addition, distance reflects the value of the destination for the tourists, since traveling is perceived beyond being merely a forward and return trip. In the touristic context, distance is conceptualized as physical distance (geographic distance between two countries), mental distance (the distance perceived between two countries) (Håkanson & Ambos, 2010; Kantarci, 2007; Sousa & Bradley, 2006), social distance (class difference of individuals as a result of the stratification in the society) (Thurot & Thurot, 1983) and cultural distance. Geographic distance is the distance that can be quantitatively measured between any two destinations (Janson & Rudolfsson, 1965, p. 286). Geographic distance is used in the same sense as physical distance. Mental distance expresses the perceptions of foreign countries by individuals or societies (Sousa & Bradley, 2006, p. 52). The mental distance to a certain foreign country is a reflection of the perceiver's knowledge, familiarity and understanding about a foreign country (Dow & Karunaratna, 2006, p. 579). Perceptual definitions of mental distance acknowledge that it may differ depending on the perceptions of individuals about foreign countries, at least implicitly (Håkanson & Ambos, 2010, p. 196). Meanwhile, cultural distance (Clark & Pugh, 2001, p. 286; Shenkar, 2001, p. 520; Crofts, 2004; Litvin, Crofts, & Hefner, 2004; Kastenholz, 2010) examines whether the culture of one country may be different from the culture of another country or not (Clark

& Pugh, 2001; Shenkar, 2001). Various researchers have proposed some cultural distance scales, such as Kogut and Singh (1988) cultural distance index, Clark and Pugh (2001) cultural distance clustering index, perceived cultural distance poll, Jackson (2001) cultural difference index, and West and Graham (2004) linguistic distance in the context of cultural distance.

Cultural distance in the context of tourism includes the difference or similarity between the culture of the country where a tourist comes from and the culture of the destination (s)he visits (Crofts, 2004, p. 83; Ng, Lee, & Soutar, 2007, p. 1499). According to another definition, cultural distance implies the extent of the difference between the culture of the area where the tourist lives and the culture of the host area (Ahn & Mckercher, 2015; Fang Bao & Mckercher, 2008).

Cultural distance is generally used to measure the differences of cultures at national levels between countries. National culture, which is defined as the extent of the difference between the cultural norms in one country with the cultural norms in other countries (Kogut & Singh, 1988, p. 412), is also used as cultural values required to represent intangible ideas that are shared socially regarding what are good, correct and desired within a society (Shenkar, 2001, p. 522).

Hofstede (1980, 1991) has carried out the well-known research in order to determine the dimensions of national culture. As a result of this research, he has identified six dimensions, namely power distance, individualism and collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity and femininity, long versus short-term orientation, indulgence versus restraint, as the dimensions of national culture. Power distance is related with the distribution of the power that emerges from the people and organizations within the society. Individualism and collectivism explains the interests that individuals deem superior from among their personal interests and the interests of the group they are a member of. Uncertainty avoidance is related with whether individuals living in the same culture see ambiguities as threats or not and how they perceive ambiguous circumstances. Masculinity and femininity expresses the distribution of the emotional roles within a society. Long versus short-term orientation explains how time oriented perceptions of groups change in their designs aimed for the past, the present and the future. In the indulgence versus restraint dimension, tolerance reflects the ability to satisfy natural human ambitions related with enjoying and having fun in life freely within the

society. Meanwhile, restriction expresses societies that restrain the satisfaction of needs and try to correct these with strict rules (Hofstede, 1991; Hofstede & Minkov, 2010).

Other researches related with the dimensions of national culture have been made by Hall (1976), Trompenaars (1993), Schwartz (1994), Inglehart (1997) House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, and Gupta (2004). Cultural distance researches are generally examined in the sense of opening abroad by businesses, choice of market entry strategies by multi-national businesses, and the performances of strategic associations in the international management literature (Kogut & Singh, 1988; Shenkar, 2001). When we look at the cultural distance researches in tourism, the researches that emerge to the forefront despite the measurement difficulties and conceptual ambiguities are provided below.

Jackson (2001) has determined that the people in societies such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand and United States, where individualism is at high levels, visit culturally similar destinations; and collectivist societies such as Colombia, Ecuador, South Korea and El Salvador primarily visit culturally different societies.

Another research has determined that remoteness of cultural distance is more influential in cultural tourism preferences. Visitors coming to Hong Kong from three Asian and three Western destinations have been examined by comparing the visitor profiles, culture tourism participation ratios and the followed activities. In conclusion, statistically significant differences have been identified between these two groups. Western countries have visited Hong Kong more as compared to the Asian destinations. This research has shown that the increase in culture distance has a positive influence on destination choice (McKercher & Chow So-Ming, 2001).

Weiermair and Fuchs (2000) have investigated the impact of cultural distance on the service quality perception of tourists. They have concluded that cultural distance increased because tourists traveled with the motivation of a different and new destination and this had a positive impact on the perception of service quality.

Crotts (2004), in his research where he examined the influence of national cultural differences and international travel behavior, has included 302 American citizens, who were traveling abroad for the first time as a recreational activity, in the research and has taken not only the culture of the country where they live, but also the destination culture as a

variable. As a result of this research, he has determined that cultural distance may be used in a more comprehensive and detailed manner to explain international travel behavior. The researcher has included the avoidance of ambiguity dimension, from the cultural dimensions of Hofstede, in the research and has determined that those who avoid ambiguity at a high extent planned shorter term trips that were made in groups and accompanied by a guide. He has also determined that individuals who have a low extent of avoiding ambiguity, on the contrary, preferred traveling to different destinations alone and for longer terms.

Ng et al. (2007) have used five different cultural scales (Kogut & Singh, 1988 – cultural distance index, Clark & Pugh, 2001 – cultural clustering distance index, perceived cultural distance, West & Graham, 2004 – linguistic distance, Jackson, 2001 – cultural diversity index) in their research, and have determined the intentions of Australian tourists to visit different destinations. They have expressed that four elements were influential in the destination choices of tourists in the research. These elements are the national culture of the tourist, personal culture of the tourist, culture of the destination that will be visited, and the distance between the culture where the tourist lives in and the culture of the destination. In conclusion of the research, they have determined that the Clark and Pugh (2001) cultural clustering index is the most accurate measurement tool to measure the intentions of tourists to visit different destinations.

Abooali et al. (2011) have discussed that mental distance and cultural distance are concepts forming a psychological distance and how cultural distance could be used in tourism marketing. They have determined that cultural distance influences the individual's mental distance, and have asserted that the concepts of cultural distance and mental distance are significantly related. The difference between the destination culture and the culture of the country where the tourist lives influences the tourist in mentally encountering with a new environment.

Paiva, Abrantes, and Cravidão (2012) have examined the relationship between cultural distance, motivation, perception of authenticity in world heritage areas and the tourism experience. According to this research conclusion, the touristic product perception of tourists in World Heritage areas and their tourism experiences have been found to be significantly different, depending on motivation and the different dimensions of cultural distance.

Yang and Wong (2012) have focused on the analysis of the determinants in the tourism movements of China and how cultural distance influences tourism movements from the macro perspective. In conclusion, they have determined that cultural distance has an apparent negative influence on the tourism movements of China and supported the hypothesis that cultural distance is a cultural impediment in international trips. In the meantime, they have also reached the conclusion that the influence of cultural distance is not important for the Western countries.

Lai and Vinh (2013) have examined the influence of the culture of the visited destination and the accommodation style of the tourist on the tourist's motivation and satisfaction. They have determined that tourist motivation and satisfaction is influenced positively when the tourist stays at homes, apart (home-staying) type places instead of accommodation businesses such as hotels at the visited destination, since the tourist interacts with the local community, and furthermore, the tourist has a tendency to revisit the same destination.

Gnoth and Zins (2013) have intended to develop a "Cultural communication scale in tourism" with 250 tourists who came to visit the Maoris in New Zealand from 20 different countries. In conclusion of their research, the cultural communication scale has represented a variety of approaches and activities such as cognitive steps, sparing time, understanding, participating, watching, drawing interest and showing oneself to a different culture. Moreover, they have determined that local culture is an important factor that motivates traveling.

Liu (2014), in the research where he examined the influence of perceived cultural distance on international destination choice, has determined that tourists selected culturally similar destinations. In addition, he has determined that geographic distance and the tendency to seek innovation have significant influences as intermediary variables between the perceived cultural distance and destination choice.

As a result of a research on the influence of cultural distance on the behaviors of foreign tourists visiting Hong Kong, it has been determined that cultural distance has the influence of a mediator on the profiles of those who travel, tourist behaviors, expenditures and satisfactions (Ahn & Mc Kercher, 2015).

Fan, Zhang, Jenkins, and Lin (2016) have conducted a research setting off from the question of "Does the social contact between the tourist and the host reduce the perceived cultural distance?" and have

asserted that social contact and cultural distance constitute a good area to understand the relationships between different groups, the travel experiences and the attitudes of the tourists. In the research, they have aimed to explore the influence of social contact on the perceived cultural distance and develop and verify measurement tools related with the subject. The research conclusions have shown that it would be appropriate to measure the perceived cultural difference in three categories as cultural attitudes, behavioral characteristics and social characteristics. According to the research conclusions, social contact has been divided into two sub-dimensions, as socially oriented and service-oriented. Social-oriented contacts represented interactions for social purposes such as acquiring friends, visiting the homes of the local people, exploring the lives of and traveling together with the local people, and it has been determined that the cultural distance perceived between the tourists and the host community decreased under these circumstances. On the contrary, it has been stated that there is a positive relationship between service-oriented social contacts and the perceived cultural distance. Such contact represents contacts with the service personnel while receiving services such as food, shopping, transportation, accommodation. The cultural distance perceived by the tourist has decreased with social-oriented contacts, as a result of spending more time with the local people as compared to service-oriented contacts.

As can be seen from the above examples, the researchers adopt a positivist paradigm in researches made concerning cultural distance and in parallel; they resort to the quantitative method. We observe that recommendations are offered as based on tourism planning, tourism marketing and touristic attractions in the researches. Meanwhile, we have adopted an interpretive paradigm in this paper and benefited from the qualitative method. The objective is to reveal the perceptions of tourists regarding cultural distance and analyze the perception comprehensively.

## Method

In this research, intended to determine the influence of cultural distance on the international destination choices of tourists, we adopted the qualitative research approach in order to analyze the obtained data in depth and reach different dimensions. We

conducted a phenomenology research, which is defined as the common meaning of the experiences of several people regarding a phenomenon or concept and where data analysis may be made as descriptive and thematic content analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 76). We evaluated the obtained data with content analysis.

Tourism is a field of research that is highly suitable for using the phenomenological approach since it deals with actual experiences (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010). It is advantageous to use phenomenological patterns in order to explore the hidden meanings behind an apparent event in tourism since experience is and is perceived as personal (Li, 2000). It may be useful to explore the travel experience with the phenomenological research method due to these reasons (Andriotis, 2009). However, this method has been overlooked at a large extent in tourism researches. Therefore, we believe that the use of phenomenology as the research pattern will contribute in that sense.

Cohen (1972, 1979) and Plog (1994) have made the first phenomenological researches in the field of tourism. Subsequently, researches by Mannell and Iso-Ahola (1987) and Dann and Cohen (1991) have followed (Szarycz, 2009). Some phenomenological researches that have been made so far in the field of tourism have examined the preservation area experiences of university students (Masberg & Silverman, 1996), the influence of geographic awareness on tourist experience (Li, 2000), the classification of the experiences of Israeli backpacker tourists (Uriely, Yonay, & Simchai, 2002), identified the farm tourism motivations of the local people and the guests in southwest Australia (Ingram, 2002), explored of the nature of the tourist experience in the History of Rocks Area in Sidney (Hayllar & Griffin, 2005), , experiences in sacred spaces (Andriotis, 2009), explored the spiritual visits of individual tourists (Willson, McIntosh, & Zahra, 2013). The data collection techniques that are used in these researches are generally in the form of unstructured or semi-structured interviews and they have benefited from the observation technique. The numbers of participants in the relevant researches vary, as minimum 7 and maximum 39. There is no precise information concerning the numbers of participants in qualitative researches (Merriam, 2009, p. 55; Patton, 2014, p. 243; Miles & Huberman, 2015, p. 27). We have accepted that the number of participants, which is 17, in this research is suitable upon looking at past researches and benefiting from the opinions of experts.

### *Generation of the data collection tool*

In the first stage, we chose a structured interview form as the data collection tool. At the same time, we held discussions with experts in this field. We generated a draft question form following these discussions and literature scanning. We benefited from the literature on tourist motivation, push and pull factors and cultural distance in generating this form. In the second stage, we resorted to the opinions of eight experts in order to question the compatibility of the prepared question form with the research purpose. These experts were from the fields of sociology, management and organization, communication, marketing, tourism and distance learning. We held interviews for expert opinions, by making appointments first through electronic mail. We prepared a letter explaining the research and submitted the interview questions as attached for expert opinion. In the third stage, we put the feedback obtained as a result of the expert opinions in the form of a table. In the fourth stage, we brought the interview form into its final form considering what comments the experts made to which question as aimed for the research purpose. In the fifth stage, we reduced the number of questions by deleting some questions from the question form. In the meantime, we made corrections in the questions that were necessary with regard to redundancy and fitness for the purpose. We aimed to obtain more information with fewer questions thanks to the expert opinions. And, following these corrections, we obtained a question form that consisted of 9 questions.

### *Research participants*

We identified travel bloggers as the participants in our research. The main reason for this was the fact that cultural distance is a concept that is used to compare national cultures and travel bloggers visit many different countries. As another reason, we believed that active bloggers would be able to express themselves in detail concerning the research subject. The participants were 10 males and 7 females in the age range of 26 and 41. The participants had been writing as bloggers for minimum 3 and maximum 11 years and continued to write their blogs actively. The number of destinations they traveled to varied between 6 and 84. The most visited destinations were Asian destinations for 8 participants, and European destinations for 9 participants.

## Data collection

At the stage of data collection, we reached 68 travel bloggers by writing “seyahat blogları, seyahat blog, seyahat blogu, travel blog, travel blogger” key words in the “Google and Yandex” search engines. We sent a briefing letter to these bloggers through electronic mail, social media or their own websites. The initial briefing was intended to introduce the researcher and the research, ask whether they would like to participate in the research or not, and in case they wanted to participate, how they would be able to participate. As a result of the received feedback, we attached the question form to our electronic mail message and sent it to the bloggers who accepted to participate. We sent a reminder e-mail within 10–15 days to the bloggers from whom we were not able to get a response. The number of bloggers who accepted to participate in the research and filled in the question form was 17. Two criteria are determined for participants of the study. The former is to contact with the active bloggers (n:68) and the latter is to participate voluntarily (n:17). Examining the blogs, there are 17 participants matching the criteria included in the study. The sample size is confirmed via both the experts’ opinions and literature review. The literature suggests that in qualitative studies there are no strict rules for determining the sample size. Relying on the purpose of the study, the data can be gathered from even a single participant (Creswell, 2017; Patton, 2014). Additionally, the data saturation can be reached when there is enough information to replicate the study (Charmaz, 2006; Fusch & Ness, 2015).

## Findings

We read the question forms without making any marking and coding, and made the necessary formal changes. Then, we made content analysis and identified the codes and themes.

In the question form; we queried thoughts, expectations and researches prior to destination choice and the preparation stage (questions 3, 4 and 6), destination choice (questions 2 and 5), experience (question 7), and the desire to re-visit (question 8). In addition, we asked the 9th question in order to understand both the compatibility with the research purpose and the consistency of the participants in destination choice.

We identified 1023 codes in this research. Two different researches made the coding at different

times. The two authors of this article and an independent researcher have examined the obtained data. In the sequel, the common codes and themes included in the study. This procedure is preferred in order to minimize reliability problems (Creswell, 2017). After coding was completed, we compiled and evaluated the identified codes. We named each participant as “K.” The numbers of codes as based on participants was maximum 126 codes by K1 and minimum 41 codes by K11. When we looked at the numbers of codes for each question, the maximum number of codes was 81 from question 2 and minimum number of codes was 18 from question 9.

*The first question* was aimed to identify the demographic characteristics of the participants. In the *second question*, we asked “Considering the trips you have made abroad, can you choose one country and give information about it? Why would you like to give information about that country?” The purpose of this question was to determine which country that remained in their minds and why from among all the countries they visited, and whether this had any relations with cultural distance. The interest of the participants in the culture of the destination they chose, its difference and natural beauties were determinant factors. They explained the destination culture with the codes of closed, rich, traditional, modern, traditions, customs, language, religious ritual, old, historical heritage, art, local cuisine, unmatched, near, different, wealthy, conspicuous, less known. Natural beauties were explained with glacier, islands, rain forests, active volcano, mountain, river, bridge, view, geography, preservation of natural beauties and national park codes.

*The third question* was “What sort of preparation or research did you make about the country you were going to visit before traveling? What did you resort to in order to obtain information?”

We asked the *fourth question* as aimed to identify what the participants experienced before traveling and their opinions about the destination. As a result of analyzing the responses to this question, we identified the themes of tangible (physical) preparation and intangible (mental) preparation, and the codes were internet (7), other blogs (6), guide book (5), draft route (4), social media (4), local community (3) tangible (physical) preparation; and curiosity (6), culture (6), local community and life (5), focusing on experience (4), thinking about exploration (4), obscurity (3), dreaming (3) for intangible (mental) preparation.

**Table 1.** Comparison of the determined push and pull factors with the literature.

Determined in this research		Standing out in the literature	
Push factors	Pull factors	Push factors	Pull factors
Exploring	Destination culture	Escape	Cultural attractiveness
Difference	Natural beauty	Prestige	Education
Learning	Geographic proximity/location	Innovation	Nature
Being interested in		Entertainment	Affordable price
Curiosity		Leisure	Safety
Making dreams come true		Social interaction	Cleanness
		Learning	Travel and accommodation means
		Cultural experience	Desire to be together with family and relatives

We asked the participants “Why did you choose this country to visit? What was the most important factor for you?” (fifth question) in order to determine their travel motivations in their destination choices. We determined the travel motivations as a result of this question, and grouped these as push and pull factors; which are provided in Table 1.

When we looked at the more frequently repeated codes for the push factors that are influential in the participants’ choice of destinations abroad, we identified these as; difference (7), exploring (7), learning (5), being interested in (4), curiosity (3), making dreams come true (2). At the same time, the pushing travel motivations included the desire to make childhood dreams come true, being interested in the destination planned to travel, advice, sponsor support, desire for different experiences, flight ticket prices, desire for a different and unfamiliar life, obscurity and the interestingness of the destination.

In the general sense, we might say that the push factors are focused on the desires of individuals to achieve their dreams and contribute in their personal developments. Along this line, we might give the desire to see new places, curiosity, exploration, making childhood dreams come true, learning factors as examples. On the other hand, we determined that the push factors were in line with the desires of the participants in the social and cultural sense. Social and cultural factors were the desires to make new friendships, to have different experiences, to participate in different activities.

Pull factors were listed as; destination culture, natural beauties and geographic proximity/location. Destination culture was explained with the culture (11), local community (7), history (5), social life (4), literature (2), music (1) codes. Natural beauties were explained with the view (3), nature (3), activity (2) codes. When we looked at the pull factors in general, we observed that social and cultural elements emerged to the forefront. The desires to build

communication with the local community, to witness and experience different lives, to experience the music, food and festivals of the destination, to examine the literature works, to make friends demonstrated that the push factors include social and cultural elements.

The travel motivations (push and pull factors) determined in this research are similar to other studies. We determined that there were similar results as the curiosity, dreaming, exploring, difference, learning expressions for pull factors, and culture, natural beauties, activity expressions for push factors.

The *sixth question* was as “What can you say about your thoughts and expectations about this country before you went?” We determined that the participants were biased in their approach to the destination they were going to visit in general, from the responses to this question. Bias was explained with the culture (12), social life (5), local community (5), safety (5) codes.

The *seventh question* was “What did you feel during your visit?” The responses shows that they generally traveled with a biased approach but experienced a trip that was exactly contrary to what they thought. The feelings during the visits were explained with the excitement (7), exploration (7), happiness (6), serenity and peace (4), having made dreams come true (3) codes.

The *seventh question* was composed of the “What type of comparisons did you make during your trip between the country you traveled and the country where you live?” and “Did you interact with the people living on the country you visited during your trip? How did you feel?” questions. This question was intended to determine what type of differences there were between the country where they lived and the destination. In this question, the participants generally expressed that they made comparisons concerning the local community and social life. The codes

under the local community theme were as human behavior (8) family structure (6), traditions and customs (5), free (3). In the meantime, we determined the economy (economic) (8), traffic (5), safety (5), hygiene (4), local cuisine (4), architecture (4) codes under the social life theme.

This demonstrates that the participants were in communication and interaction with the local community in the destinations where they visited. This opinion was supported by the question *n* continuation (part B of the seventh question). In this question, we asked the participants whether they communicated with the people living in the country they visited and how they felt about this. When we analyzed the responses, we determined that all of the participants were in communication with the local community. This communication was named as the cultural experience theme. The cultural experience theme was composed of the accommodation (11), spending time (8), making friends (6), meeting and communicating (5) codes. The codes for the feelings of the participants as a result of this communication were getting familiar with the culture, feeling like a world citizen, exploring that place, learning, understanding the community dynamics, getting to know the culture more closely, getting to know the social life, forgetting about being a tourist, excitement, acquiring a different perspective, sharing views and culture, sharing information, entertaining guests, witnessing rituals, sharing with the local people, telling about one's problems, feeling trust, being trusted, happiness, and they composed the cultural attainment theme.

The *ninth question* was asked as "If there were no obstacles today and all conditions were created for you, where would you like to go?"

- a. Why would you choose this country or countries?
- b. What would you think about the cultures of the countries you selected?
- c. Would its being culturally different or the same attract you attention?

We asked this question as intended to determine the destinations that the participants could prefer in the future and evaluate the reasons for this choice within the context of cultural distance, plus to make a comparison with the other questions in the interview form. The destinations that the participants would like to go, in response to this question, were respectively, New Zealand (2), India (2), Ocean and Space, Mexico, Antarctic (2), U.S.A. (New York),

Australia, Southeast Asian countries (2), Japan (2), Caribbean countries (2), Galapagos Islands and Egypt. Meanwhile, the reasons for selecting these destinations were determined as curiosity (4), exploring (4), dreaming (3), learning (3), excitement (2), comfort (2) as the push factors; and culture (5), natural beauties (4) and social life (4) as the pull factors. The opinions about the destination culture were about the local community and social life. Destination cultures were explained with the codes of similar, rich, cultural past, historical heritage, diversity, feeling close, matchless, different, colorful, wealth of traditions and customs, historical wealth; local community with the codes of respect, polite, beautiful, cordial, happy people, coexistence of differences, warm people, lenience, tolerance, human relations, understanding: Social life with the codes of lack of control, trust, films, warm country, nature, not taking as example, creating from scratch, unique life, tolerance, experiencing contrasting circumstances collectively, priority of human life.

With the ninth question, we asked the participants whether cultural differences or similarities were interesting. Although we determined that both different and similar cultures were interesting when we analyzed the responses, different culture was explained with more codes. In the research, different culture was explained with people I do not know, different lives, being interwoven, cultural difference, interesting, observation, learning, vision, lifestyle, different thinking, social order, cause for preference, interesting, development of man by differences, multi-cultures, exploring, getting to know, different, important factor, satisfactory, lifestyle, music, dining, social life, acquiring a different life perspective, attractive, pleasant, different experience, perspective development codes. Meanwhile, similar culture was explained with exploring differences among those that are the same, enjoying similarities, accepting cultures, deriving different meanings, living in the fullest sense codes.

The experiences of the domestic tourist prior to destination choice and during the visit, and the intentions to re-visit that we determined as a result of examining the interview are provided in stages in [Figure 1](#).

We determined tangible (physical) and intangible (mental) preparation and research processes prior to destination choice. The pull factors in destination choice were exploring, difference, learning, being interested in and making dreams come true. The

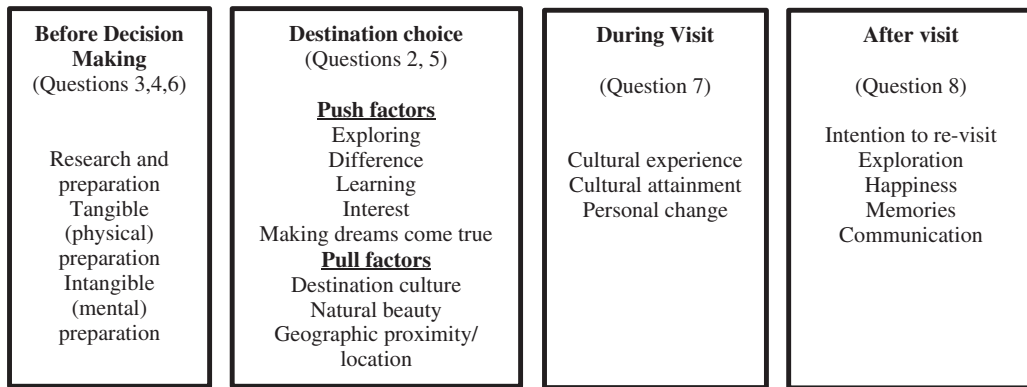


Figure 1. Destination choice process.

pull factors were destination culture, natural beauties and geographic proximity/location. We identified cultural experience, cultural attainment and personal change themes in the experiences during the visit. And the re-visit themes were exploration, happiness, memories and communication.

A comparison of the responses to the second question (destination that is experienced and participants want to speak of) and the ninth question (destination that participants want to experience in the future) is provided in Table 2. The purpose of this comparison is to identify the cultural distance perception of participants in destination choice and the consistency of the responses.

Within the context of this research, the push factors of the experience that the participants wanted to speak of were curiosity, experience, dreaming and difference. Meanwhile, the pull factors were destination culture, local community and natural beauties. The codes determined regarding the culture of the experienced destination were closed, different, rich, traditional, modern, tradition, custom, language, religious ritual, old, history, art, local cuisine, interesting, less known and matchless. The codes determined for the local community were communication, friendly

approach, being unimpaired, living collectively, opposite ideas, warm, crowded.

On the other hand, the push factors for the destination desired to be experienced were curiosity, exploring, learning, excitement and comfort. And the pull factors were destination culture, local community and natural beauties. The destination culture was explained by rich, cultural past, historical heritage, diversity, feeling close, matchless, different, colorful, traditions and customs, history codes. The codes determined in the local community theme were respect, polite, cordial, happy, coexistence of differences, warm, lenience, tolerance, human relations, understanding.

Furthermore, we determined that cultural differences were more influential than cultural similarities in destination choice. The different culture theme was composed of the people I do not know, different lives, being interwoven, cultural difference, interesting, observation, learning, vision, lifestyle, different thinking, social order, ability of difference to develop man, multi-cultured, exploring, getting to know, learning, music, dining, acquiring as new perspective to life, attractive, pleasant, different experiences, developing a perspective codes; and the similar culture theme

Table 2. Comparison of Questions 2 and 9 on the interview form.

Experienced destination (determined with question 2)		Destination desired to be experienced (determined with question 9)	
Push factors	Pull factors	Push factors	Pull factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Curiosity</li> <li>• Experience</li> <li>• Dreaming</li> <li>• Difference</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Destination culture</li> <li>• Local community</li> <li>• Natural beauties</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Curiosity</li> <li>• Exploring</li> <li>• Learning</li> <li>• Excitement</li> <li>• Comfort</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Destination culture</li> <li>• Local community</li> <li>• Natural beauties</li> </ul>

was composed of exploring differences among similarities, enjoying similarities, accepting cultures, deriving different meanings, living in the full sense codes.

The common themes in the experienced and desired to be experienced destinations were curiosity, destination culture, local community and natural beauties. Acting from the above findings, we determined that increased cultural distance was a reason for preference in destination choice.

We determined that cultural distance was an important factor when we examined what the participants experienced and how they felt during the trips. While 12 participants evaluated the increase in cultural difference as interesting and reason for preference, we determined that increased, decreased or same cultural distance would be influential in the destination choices of 5 participants. In parallel, when we look at the intentions to re-visit, 13 participants expressed that they intended to re-visit a destination they went before, and 4 participants expressed that they do not have such an intention. On the other hand, from the 13 participants that had the tendency to re-visit, 10 expressed that cultural differences attracted their attention and 3 expressed that similarities as well as differences attracted their attention.

## Discussion

When we look at the relation of this research with the literature, Fang Bao and Mckercher (2008) have handled geography in the physical sense in the research they conducted on tourists coming to Hong Kong from nearby and far countries, and have argued that it influences destination choice and the tourist profile negatively. On the contrary, our research demonstrated that destination choice does not depend on geographic/physical distance when cultural factors are included in the travel motivations of tourists.

Yang and Wong (2012) have determined that cultural distance poses as an impediment in the destination choices and travels of international tourists. In this research, the said impediment was explained by the difference of social life from many aspects and the likelihood of the tourist to be influenced by this and change his destination choice. On the contrary, in our research, we determined that tourists especially felt happy due to these differences in the countries they visited and had the tendency to re-visit such destinations. In addition, we can also argue that these

differences were found to be interesting in destination choice.

The determination made by Lai and Vinh (2013) that the accommodation of tourists in places such as homes, apart hotels where they communicate more with the local community in the destination they visit and the results we obtained from this research are similar. We identified that the participants of this research attained different perspectives, the ability to get to know a different culture and explore the local life since they lodged at the homes of the local community, or traveled through means such as couch-surfing and airbnb, and this made them feel peaceful and happy.

Liu (2014) has expressed that tourists generally select destinations that are culturally similar to the countries where they live and determined that past experiences, geographic distance and search for innovation are influential in destination choice. In the meantime, he found that tourists who identified themselves as globetrotters or backpackers acquired matchless and unforgettable experiences as a result of communications with the local communities. When we look at the experiences during visiting the destination, we might say that consistent results were obtained in this research.

The researches of Weiermair and Fuchs (2000) and Sharma, Tam, and Kim (2012) have similarities with respect to choosing international tourists as the sample group, but the relations of the tourists with the tourism sector personnel of the visited country were questioned in these researches. In our research, we tried to evaluate cultural distance from a sociological perspective. As Litvin et al. (2004) have expressed, it would be accurate to conclude that globetrotters are in constant communication with the local communities during decision making before traveling and while they are traveling.

In their research, Fan et al. (2016) expressed the accuracy of measuring cultural distance in three categories as culture attitude, behavioral characteristics and social characteristics. The social aspect of the contacts that tourists build at the destination was highly similar to our research. The cultural experience, cultural attainment and personal change we determined in this research are explained as socially centered contacts in the research of Fan et al. (2016).

Acting on the research findings, we observe that cultural distance has a significant influence on the international destination choices of tourists. Tourists who travel abroad are in communication with their

surroundings prior to, during and after their travels. We determined that they are in communication with their social surroundings at the decision making stage before traveling, and with the local communities during their travels. It is possible to speak of the cultural contributions of the experience during the destination visit.

## Conclusion

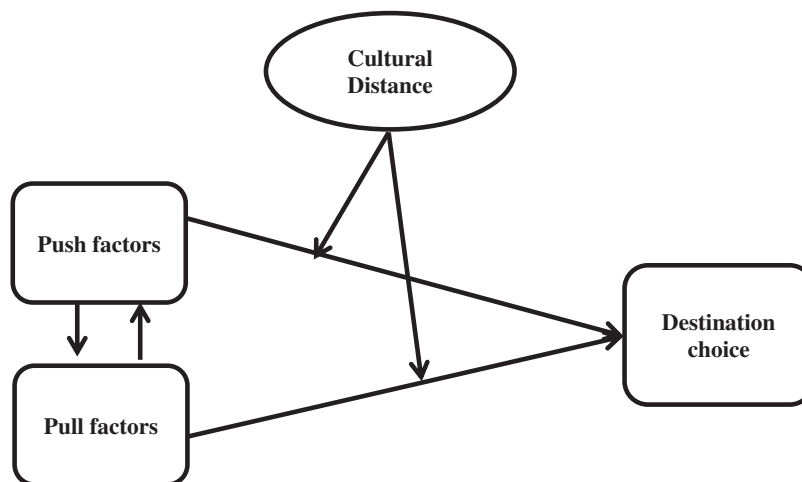
In this research that we conducted as aimed to determine the influence of cultural distance on the travel motivations of tourists traveling abroad, we determined that increase in cultural distance influences destination choice. Meanwhile, the increase in geographic distance influences the perception of cultural distance. We determined that destinations that are remote geographically (especially Asian countries) are also destinations that are culturally remote and interesting. In short, we believe that there is a linear relationship between geographic distance and cultural distance. In other words, an increase in the geographic distance also causes an increase in cultural distance. The other conclusions reached in the research are explained below.

We determined that there are pre-travel tangible (physical) and intangible (mental) preparation stages in international destination choice. Physical preparations such as collecting information regarding the destination, determining a draft route and packing do not differ depending on the destination. On the other hand, mental preparation that is related with obscurity, feeling of exploring, experience focus and

expectations is influenced by cultural distance. According to this conclusion, *while physical preparation is not a differentiating element for the destinations, mental preparation changes depending on the cultural distance. In other words, mental preparation will increase as the cultural distance increases.*

Travel motivations are collected under two groups as push and pull factors. Push factors are exploring, difference, learning, interest, curiosity and making dreams come true. Pull factors are destination culture, natural beauty/beauties and geographic proximity/location. Exploring expresses the exploration of the destination culture and social life. We observed that cultural distance is influential both on the push and the pull factors. Accordingly, we concluded that the push and pull factors are interdependent and consistent. If the tourist is deprived of the exploration feeling, is not open to differences and learning, his destination will also form accordingly and influence the time he will spend at the destination. According to these conclusions, we see that thinking about and evaluating the push and pull factors collectively can explain the travel motivation better.

*We determined that the most important elements for an international destination are the local community and social life.* The time spent at the destination is generally composed of cultural experience, communication and interaction. Accordingly, we identified the cultural experience, cultural attainment and personal change themes during the destination visit. Cultural experience expresses interaction with the local community and being a part in cultural life. Cultural attainment expresses the acquisition of a different



**Figure 2.** The impact of cultural distance on the destination choice of travel motivation. Source: Created by the researcher.

perspective as a result of the experience, the ability to be more objective, making local friends and getting familiar with a different culture. Meanwhile, personal change expresses the decrease of the tourists' biases concerning the destination culture and social life. According to this conclusion, we may deduce that tourists focus on cultural experience and attainment since they travel alone, or they travel alone because they want to focus on cultural experience and attainment.

*While the increase in cultural distance influences destination choice, we see that the tendency to re-visit does not develop along the same line.* When we look at what the participants experienced and felt at the destination, while there is an intense cultural interaction, they desire to re-experience these cultural experiences at a different location. However, although the research conclusions demonstrate the significance of increased cultural distance for the participants, another conclusion, which would create a dilemma, emerges at the point of having new and different experiences by traveling to the same locations (Figure 2).

In light of the above conclusions, the researchers have found out that cultural distance has a prevailing influence in the destination choice of travel motivation. Cultural distance constitutes a prevailing influence that causes an increase or decrease in the influence of travel motivation on destination choice.

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