

Hospitable characteristics of the tourist information centers in the city of São Paulo

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Abstract

Interpersonal relations bring hosts and guests closer at the Tourist Information Centers of the city of São Paulo. From this service, the guest gets a positive impression or not of the destination, that is, the people who provide this service are responsible for the impressions that the visitor carries about the city. This study aims to recognize hospitality characteristics in the personality traits of individuals who worked at the Tourist Information Centers of the city of São Paulo between the years 2014 and 2018. The study analyzed results from a survey applied to 47 employees and interns of these establishments, who answered the questionnaire made available online. The survey was conducted between April and May 2019 with those responsible for helping tourists, guests and residents of São Paulo, the public that uses this service. The survey was based on Blain & Lashley's scale (2014), which was translated according to the profile of the respondents. The answers were analyzed through Microsoft Excel 2017, with the purpose of performing a descriptive statistical analysis to identify traits of the personality of the hosts with respect to individual hospitable characteristics. The study found that the individuals studied have personality traits related to hospitality.

Keywords: Hospitality; Hospitable characteristics; Hospitableness; Tourist Information Centers; Brazil.

1. Introduction

Tourist activity in the city of São Paulo received more than 15.44 million in 2017, according to data from Fecomercio (2018). The city promotes business events daily, from small meetings to important fairs in certain sectors; events related to entertainment such as art exhibitions and even sporting events, such as Formula One and IndyCar Series, which take place annually. Due to all these activities, São Paulo is considered by many as a city that never stops, because there is something happening in the city at every moment.

All the existing tourist infrastructure, such as hotels, restaurants, tourist attractions, among others, reveals a network of services available to those who visit the city. Included in this network of services are the Tourist Information Centers, places that give information to guests and residents of the city of São Paulo about cultural activities, tourist attractions and dislocation between regions of the city. Knowing a destination involves the search for several services, such as transportation, recreation, entertainment, lodging, food services, among

others (GADOR, 2019). Inquiries of options for these services can be made at the Information Centers, both by residents and by guests.

Nationally, an approach more focused on the development of public policies for hospitality occurred in 1966, with the creation of the Brazilian Tourism Company (Embratur), which, through the creation of specific laws, encouraged the arrival of international chains in Brazil (Basta, Abreu & Araujo, 2018). As a result, there was an increase in infrastructure aimed at receiving tourists. Over the decades, the sector has developed until reaching the existing structure, like other tourism support services.

The centers have existed since 1983 in several tourist spots in the city. Since January 1, 2019, they are managed by the City Secretary of Tourism. However, this study concentrates on the previous management, carried out by São Paulo Turismo (Tourism and Events Company of the City of São Paulo). We consulted officials and interns who worked at the Tourist Information Centers between 2014 and 2018, during which two important events took place: the 2014 World Cup, in which São Paulo was one of the venues, and the Olympic Games 2016, in the city of Rio de Janeiro, when São Paulo, due to the proximity, also received tourists.

Currently, the city of São Paulo has four Tourist Information Centers, but this number has changed over time, reaching seven fixed stations in the city in 2013. During the FIFA World Cup 2014, in addition to the fixed information centers, there was the use of mobile stations in vans and in mobile equipment, such as Segways. The service team has qualified professionals in Tourism and with language skills in English and Spanish. In a city like São Paulo, visitations occur for reasons such as leisure, business or studies, and this public obtained assistance in other languages, not only Portuguese. The study is relevant for this reason, since the host's contact with the guest may be essential for the generation of an experience of hospitality for the individual in the city of São Paulo.

The study proposes to investigate the presence of hospitable characteristics in the hosts of the Tourist Information Centers of the city of São Paulo. A questionnaire was created based on the scale elaborated and tested by Blain & Lashley (2014). It was answered by 47 employees who worked in the Tourist Information Centers during the described period.

Hospitality and hospitableness are intertwined, but they are different concepts. Acting with hospitality requires skills and efforts, but what characterizes a good host, a hospitable host, with hospitableness, is paying attention and having a genuine desire to please guests (Telfer, 2004). Thus, considering the analytical dimensions of hospitality, this study assumes that individuals who work in the Tourist Information Centers have personality traits consistent with hospitableness.

The relationship between hospitality and the service provided by the hosts is revealed in the way those who receive guests use characteristics such as generosity, cordiality, respect, among others, in the construction of their relationship with guests. Thus, the research problem that permeates this study is related to hospitality and the view that the hosts that receive tourists in the Tourist Information Centers of the city of São Paulo have of themselves: What is the perception of the workers who give tourist information on the city of São Paulo about their own hospitable characteristics when talking to guests? The theoretical revision of the concepts that permeate this study contributes with an approach regarding the relations of hospitality that are established between host and guest.

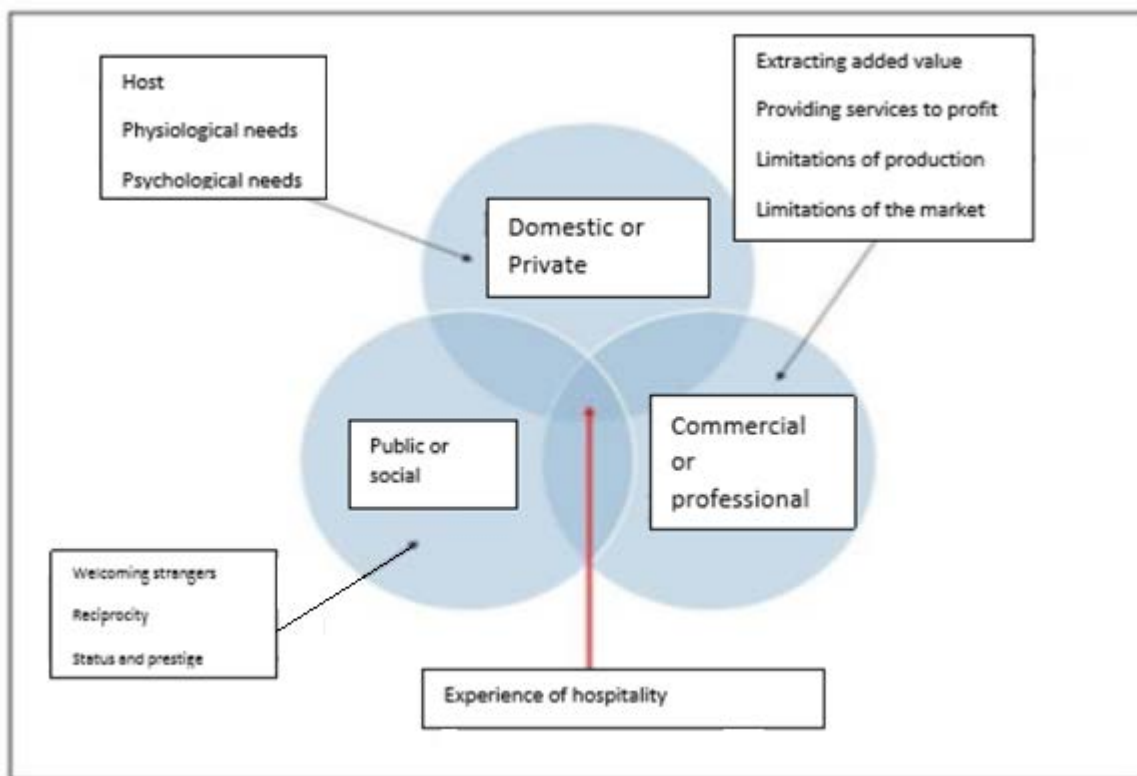
2. Literature Review

2.1 Hospitality

Hospitality is a virtue that is expected when one encounters the other, whether it is someone you already know or a stranger. It is transformative, creates new relationships, or consolidates existing relationships. That is, it turns strangers into acquaintances, enemies into friends, friends into best friends, bringing together friends and strangers (Selwyn, 2004). To complement this idea, Grinover (2002) states that in order for there to be any gesture of hospitality, there is a need for reciprocity between two types of individuals: the host, who is inside some space and receives the guest, and the guest, who is outside of some space, passing through.

Hospitality narrows relationships between people, and is represented, according to Lashley & Morrison (2004), from the perspective of three domains: social, private and commercial, according to the Venn diagram.

Figure 1 – Venn diagram containing the hospitability domains



Source: Adapted by the authors from Lashley (2015).

Studying each of the domains present in the diagram defines new approaches to the relationships and experiences of hospitality generated in the host-guest relationship. Although they are interconnected, each domain has particularities, and there may be further studies and research in the area. The intersection of the domains in which hospitality is developed generates the experience of hospitality in the contact between host and guest.

Hospitality has been the subject of recent studies, but the origin of the term comes from the mid-1700s in the taverns of Greece and Rome. Hospitality derives from a French word that has the sense of sheltering and helping guests (Walker, 2002). However, Grinover (2002) states that the word hospitality comes from the Latin

hospitalita-atis, which means to welcome, receive, host, kindness, politeness. It also derives from the term hospitalis, which refers to the idea of free lodging and charitable attitudes towards indigents and travelers, hosted in hospitals, hospices and convents.

The hospitality domains have their roots in the domestic, as their practice stems from the idea of entertaining family and friends, inviting them to dinner and offering drinks to guests, an aspect that is present and common in most societies. Although there are intrinsic rules and codes in the practice of domestic hospitality, it is experienced in every meeting between host and guest (Lashley, 2008). Hospitality is evident when there is someone who receives (host) and someone who is received (guest). In this context, hospitality is civilizing, a way of living with other individuals, governed by rules, rights and laws (Moretti, Cruz & Silva, 2015). For Barreto (1995), since humans had to start traveling long distances in the prehistoric period, they were had to stay overnight in places considered safe, thus generating the need to offer hospitality to travelers.

Recent research on hospitality has focused on a sociological, philosophical, and anthropological approach under different social contexts. Thus, according to Lashley (2004), hospitality can be understood as “a set of behaviors originating from the very basis of society,” based on the social, private and commercial domains, which allowed the understanding of human behavior characteristics in their social relations.

Hospitality is an attribute of people, not of companies; thus, one must look beyond the combined exchange and the financial value of a service, to what people provide in addition to the established contract. Hospitality transcends the agreed upon and involves the relationship developed between host and guest (Camargo, 2006; Lashley, 2004). It can also be understood as a relation that occurs inside a space, composed between the host, the one who welcomes, and the guest, the individual who wishes to be welcomed (Schneider & Santos, 2015).

Lashley & Lee-Ross (2009) complement this idea by asserting that the private or domestic domain contributes a great deal of information to the hosts in other domains of hospitality, establishing, in this context, acts of hospitality between individuals, which also makes it possible to convey authenticity in relationships. On the other hand, Telfer (2004) shows that hospitality is not always genuine; even so, commercial hospitality has many aspects in common with private hospitality, and the hosts may have a characteristic that the author calls hospitableness, which means the ability to exercise hospitality, also known as hospitable characteristics or, “hospitability”.

Service providers who have the hospitable characteristics (hospitability) discussed by Lugosi (2008) and Telfer (2004) can add considerable value to the provision of services. Lashley & Morrison (2004), when referring to the administration of hospitality, define that it involves the administration (essentially, but not exclusively) of commercial organizations that provide services and the like, such as food, drink and lodging, as well as concepts and techniques for the provision of goods and services.

Regarding space, Camargo (2015), argues that a company, an environment or a city cannot be considered hospitable or inhospitable. It is the individuals who are responsible for the care and the relationship with the guests that can be classified, or not, as hospitable. This statement by the author strengthens the idea that hospitality is essentially intertwined with the relationship between humans. Lugosi (2008) argues that not only the host and guests’ relationship can transform spaces into hospitable encounters, but also the perceptions and actions of the consuming guests that enable the production of hospitality. He says that hospitable spaces have an

ideological dimension that allows the identification of the guest with the environment and the people who frequent the place, or not.

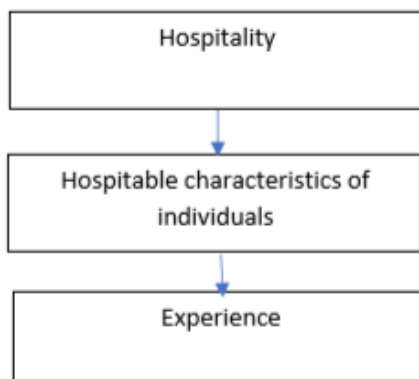
2.2 Hospitable characteristics in the provision of services

The provision of services is a process in which a relationship is established between the provider and the consumer, or between the host and the guest. It is in this relationship that hospitality is present and can improve the guests' perception of the quality of the service provided.

Considering the experience generated in the relation between host and guest, the following process can be considered.

According to Figure 2, it is understood that hospitable characteristics can generate hospitality experiences within the relationship between host and guest. This experience can contribute positively at the end of the trip, with a positive perception of the destination that was visited.

Figure 2: Diagram of the experience of hospitality



About the hospitable characteristics of individuals, Telfer (2004) explains that to be hospitable, to act with hospitableness, is to pay attention and to genuinely have the desire to please guests. Hospitable characteristics are attributed to attentive people, who are motivated to please others, even when they do not necessarily have the ability to satisfy their guests. That is, a host who has a good infrastructure will not necessarily be a host who acts with hospitableness. Just as a host who has hospitable characteristics, who acts kindly and proactively with the guest, does not always have the best infrastructure.

Telfer (2004), while clarifying the difference between hospitality and hospitableness, explains that acting with hospitality requires skills and efforts, since a good host has the ability to leave his guests happy; he knows what to do to please the guest and has an interest in doing so. Additionally, the author explains that being hospitable, acting with hospitableness, is paying attention and having genuine desire to please guests. The hospitable characteristic, then, is attributed to attentive people, motivated to please others as if they were unique.

According to Moretti (2015), when it comes to services, the experience is part of the service, that is, it is a characteristic of the service, which in no way can be dissociated from it. When guests acquire the service, they also acquire the intrinsic experience. This indicates the importance of considering the client’s experience in interpersonal relationships. It can be said that the experiences are the result of two dimensions: the perceived hospitality and the emotions felt (Alves & Marques, 2019).

For O’Connor (2005), characteristics that contribute to “hospitality” can be developed, that is, people can be born more or less hospitable. It is a characteristic that is born with the individual, but that can be developed during life. In contrast, Lashley (2008) states that the practice of hospitality is revealed in three constructs: culture of hospitality, quality of hospitableness and emotional intelligence, aspects that cover the characteristics of the host to generate a positive experience of hospitality. In each of these manifestations there are the characteristics of a good host, according to Table 1.

Table 1: Lashley’s key-constructs for hospitality

<p>Culture of hospitality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The stranger is treated as a guest and potential “friend”. • The guest included in the social context without limits • All guests are accepted as individuals with the same value, regardless of their characteristics. • There is no evidence of hostility against the guest. • The client is protected and provided a secure and protected environment. • The host receives guests with gifts. • The host expresses compassion for the needs of others.
<p>Hospitableness qualities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A desire to thank others. • General niceness and benevolence. • Affection for people, concern for others, and compassion. • A desire to meet the needs of others. • A desire to entertain. • A need to help those in distress. • A desire to have company or make friends. • A desire for the pleasures of entertaining.
<p>Revealing emotional intelligence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The hosts recognize their own emotions and can express them to others. • The hosts recognize and understand the guests’ emotions. • The hosts use emotions with reason and emotional information in thought. • The hosts regulate and manage their own emotions and the emotions of others. • The hosts control strong emotional states, anger, frustration, excitement, anxiety, etc.

Source: Lashley (2008)

Telfer (2004) makes a comparison between a good host and a hospitable one. She states that the former needs to have skills, seeking to be considerate and committed to tasks, but usually has interests for reasons such as profit, power, vanity, etc. While the second one is considerate, likes to please, to help and has no hidden interests. In fact, to be a good host, even when meeting the needs of guests, it is not enough to be hospitable, that is, to have the virtue of hospitality.

Lashley and Morrison (2004) emphasize the importance of the host's obligations to the guests, noting that this relationship cannot be based on hidden intentions. The concern for the well-being of the guest must be genuine and the ideal of hospitality must always be sought. Still regarding hidden intentions, Telfer (2004) states that there must be a genuine internal motivation to practice good welcoming.

On the characteristics of services, according to Las Casas (1999), it is possible to list: intangibility, perishability, heterogeneity and simultaneity. All these aspects mean that service provision is abstract. It can be said that customers do not acquire services, as they do with goods. Just like it is not possible to produce or stock services, as one does with tangible objects. Usually, services are provided when the seller and the customer are face to face. It is impossible to keep the quality of service constant, because, as services are provided by human beings, which have unstable natures, consequently, the quality of services will also be unstable, and it is not possible to follow a service provision standard. Production and consumption occur at the same time, so it will always be necessary to consider the moment of contact with the customer as a main factor.

The competitive advantage, in the case of traveling, arises fundamentally from the value that a management creates for its consumers and that surpasses the cost of the company (Porter, 1989). In this case, the value created is intertwined with the experience generated to the guest; the more positive the experience is, the greater the competitive advantage of the destination compared to other destinations, which do not have this differential.

3. Methodology

The measurement scale was developed based on an existing scale, proposed according to the literature review. The scale items were translated and adapted to Portuguese. The items were measured based on a Likert Scale with 7 points, 1 being "Totally disagree" and 7, "Totally agree".

The questionnaire was composed of statements related to the "hospitality" aspect of the respondents. This scale was proposed by Blain & Lashley (2014) and addresses three dimensions: putting the guest first, making guests happy, and making guests feel special. The second part of the questionnaire refers to the sociodemographic information of the respondents.

Due to the original scale being in English and the respondents being Brazilian, the questions were translated into Portuguese. To verify the degree of comprehension of the data collection instrument, the questionnaire underwent an initial round of testing. The initial round was constituted by an evaluation carried out by 10 respondents related to the area of tourism and events, who identified difficulties when answering the questionnaire. The changes were made, and the questionnaire restructured for the application.

After the first test phase, the questionnaire was applied to 47 employees and interns who worked at the Tourist Information Centers of the city of São Paulo between the years 2014 and 2018. Individuals were found between April and May 2019 and answered the questionnaire through the *GoogleForms* online platform. Although the initial perspective counted on the participation of employees who work in the Tourism Information Centers in 2019, the application of the questionnaire was not authorized by the current management company of the service, limiting the application to employees acting between 2014 and 2018. The results of this research contain the information provided by respondents who expressed their agreement to participate in the survey and have their information disclosed.

The 47 questionnaires were tabulated and downloaded to Microsoft Excel 2017, where they were grouped to analyze the data obtained. The data were divided into Table 2 and Table 3. Table 2 includes the questions about the hospitable characteristics of the individuals. Table 3 shows the sociodemographic profile of the respondents.

Table 2. Data collection instrument

Item	Description	Frequency (n) / % (percentage)						
Putting the guest first		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
H_PR_1	I put the satisfaction of the guest, before my own satisfaction.	0 / 0%	1 / 2.13%	0 / 0%	3 / 6.38%	4 / 8.51%	13 / 27.66%	26 / 55.32%
H_PR_2	I do what is necessary to ensure that the guest has a pleasant time during the service	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	1 / 2.13%	1 / 2.13%	0 / 0%	45 / 95.74%
H_PR_3	I always try to be a good host.	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	1 / 2.13%	1 / 2.13%	1 / 2.13%	44 / 93.61%
H_PR_4	The guest's comfort is important to me.	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	1 / 2.13%	1 / 2.13%	4 / 8.51%	41 / 87.23%
Making guests happy		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
H_FL_1	I feel genuine satisfaction in serving guests	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	1 / 2.13%	1 / 2.13%	45 / 95.74%
H_FL_2	I feel responsible for the guests' well-being.	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	1 / 2.13%	46 / 97.87%
H_FL_3	It is important to me when guests show approval for my hospitality.	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	1 / 2.13%	1 / 2.13%	45 / 95.74%
H_FL_4	It is important to do things that guests expect from a good host.	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	1 / 2.13%	1 / 2.13%	45 / 95.74%
H_FL_5	I seek opportunities to help guests.	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	47 / 100%
Making guests feel special		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
H_ES_1	When I talk to guests, I try to put myself in their shoes.	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	1 / 2.13%	2 / 4.26%	44 / 93.61%
H_ES_2	I try to be in tune with the guests.	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	47 / 100%
H_ES_3	The guests should have my attention at all times.	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	47 / 100%
H_ES_4	I feel motivated to take responsibility for the well-being of guests	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	1 / 2.13%	3 / 6.38%	2 / 4.26%	41 / 87.23%

Note: 1 is used for “Totally disagree” and 7 is used for “Totally agree”.

Table 3. Profile of the sample – sociodemographic data

Item	Frequency	% (Percentage)
Gender:		
Female	38	80.85%
Male	9	19.15%
Age group:		
1. Up to 18 yo	0	0%
2. Between 18 and 25 yo	0	0%
3. Between 26 and 29 yo	19	40.42%
4. Between 30 and 40 yo	23	48.94%
5. More than 40 yo	5	10.64%
Your monthly income is approximately:		
1. Up to BRL 998.00	0	0%
2. Between BRL998.00 and BRL2994.00	9	19.15%
3. Between BRL2994.00 and BRL4990.00	34	72.34%
4. Between BRL4990.00 and BRL9980.00	4	8.51%
5. More than BRL9980.00	0	0%
Marital status:		
1. Single	10	21.28%
2. Married	35	74.46%
3. Separated	2	4.26%
4. Widowed		0%
Occupation:		
1. Freelancer	2	4.26%
2. Formal employment	17	36.17%
3. Public service	28	60%
4. Unemployed	0	0%
Education:		
1. None	0	0%
2. Basic education	0	0%
3. High school	0	0%
4. Higher education	29	61.70%
5. Post-graduate degree	18	38.30%

4. Results and Discussion

The results of the application of the questionnaires indicate homogeneity among the respondents about their hospitable characteristics. Although there is a higher percentage of agreement in the statements about making guests happy and making guests feel special, the aspect that refers to putting the guests first also presents consistent results. In this regard, 95.74% of the respondents totally agreed with the statement “I do what is necessary to ensure that the guest has a pleasant time during the service”. On the other hand, 44.68% of the

respondents did not totally agree with the statement “I put the satisfaction of the guest, before my own satisfaction”, with 55.32% who totally agreed. The results are shown in Table 1.

Regarding always trying to be a good host, 93.61% of the respondents stated that they totally agree with this aspect, revealing that during the service they always seek to expose the characteristics of hospitable individuals. Regarding guest comfort, 87.23% of respondents stated that guest comfort is an important aspect for them when providing the service.

Regarding making visitors happy, 100% of respondents said they are always looking for opportunities to help guests, which is a good indicator, considering that one of the main functions of Tourist Information Centers is to assist guests with information about city. As far as having genuine satisfaction in servicing and feeling responsible for the well-being of guests, 95.74% and 97.87% of the individuals, respectively, totally agreed with the statements. Directly related to to hospitality, 95.74% of the respondents stated that they feel satisfied when guests show some kind of approval for the way the host has shown hospitality. Just as 95.74% totally agree that it is important to have attitudes that are expected of a good host when dealing with tourists, guests or residents of São Paulo.

The statements about making guests feel special demonstrate the empathy of the respondents in the statement “When I talk to guests, I try to put myself in their shoes”, with which 98.61% of respondents have totally agreed. Just as 100% agreed that the host should be in tune with the guest and that they should have their attention at all times. Regarding feeling motivated to take responsibility for the well-being of guests, 87.23% totally agreed with the statement.

In the second stage of the questionnaire, sociodemographic data were analyzed to obtain information about the profile of the respondents. The data collected are in Table 2.

The numbers show that 80.85% of respondents were female, and 59.58% were over 30 years old. The monthly income varies between 3 and 4 minimum wages to 72.34%. Most respondents were married, 74.46%, and the predominant schooling is higher education, with 61.70%. Regarding occupation, 60% reveal to be civil servants, considering the fact that São Paulo Turismo is a company linked to the São Paulo city council.

From the results shown in Tables 1 and 2, it becomes clear that the hosts have personality traits and characteristics common to hospitable people in the services provided in the Tourist Information Centers.

5. Conclusions, Implementations and Limitations

The study premise was to verify the relation of hospitableness within the profile of the hosts of the Tourist Information Centers of the city of São Paulo. The aspects were measured based on the data of 47 individuals who answered the questionnaire and through a theoretical framework. With this, it is understood that hospitality and hospitable characteristics are perceived as relevant in the exercise of helping guests and are personality traits of the hosts that provide this service.

The data obtained reveal that the hosts focus on hospitality, as well as seek to welcome guests well, in order to make the relationship formed during the service as pleasant as possible. The scale applied refers to the characteristics of hospitable relationships between host and guest and does not have questions directly related to hospitality. Thus, individuals responded indirectly to the concept of hospitality.

The limitation of this study is the number of respondents who participated in the survey. Due to the company currently responsible for the operation of the centers not having authorized the application of the questionnaire to the current employees, the number of potential respondents became smaller, which was one of the limitations of this study. Future studies using the same scale could apply it in other capitals of the country for prospective studies compared to this one. Also, a new request should be made with the company that manages the service in São Paulo, for a study with more respondents and for a longer period.

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