International tourists in a 'pacified' favela: profiles and attitudes. The case of Santa Marta, Rio de Janeiro

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Abstract

This article examines the experience of foreign tourists who have visited the Santa Marta favela in Rio de Janeiro after the recent "occupation" and "peacemaking" policy implemented by the Rio de Janeiro state government. The contribution is based on empirical research conducted with 400 international tourists who visited the community between March and May 2011. The study investigated the tourists' profiles as well as their expectations and impressions of the visit. The article concludes with some reflections on how tourists evaluate not only the tourist facilities in the locality, but also their own experience as participants of the reality tour.

Zusammenfassung

Dieser Artikel untersucht die Erfahrungen ausländischer Touristen, die die Favela Santa Marta in Rio de Janeiro nach den jüngsten Maßnahmen der „Besetzung" und „Befriedung" durch die Stadtverwaltung Rio de Janeiros besucht haben. Die empirische Studie, auf der der Beitrag basiert, wurde zwischen März und Mai 2011 mit 400 internationalen Touristen durchgeführt, die Santa Marta besuchten. Die Studie behandelt allgemeine Merkmale der Touristen ebenso wie deren Erwartungen und Eindrücke. Der Artikel schließt mit einigen Überlegungen zu der Frage, wie die Touristen nicht nur die touristischen Einrichtungen sondern auch ihre eigenen Erfahrungen als Teilnehmer einer solchen "Reality-Tour" bewerten.

Keywords   Tourism, favela, public policy, poverty, perception, Brazil

1. Introduction

The term favela was originally used to denote the agglomerations of substandard housing that emerged in Rio de Janeiro in the early 20th century. The term has broadened, with some regional variations, to refer to illegal squatter settlements that are characterised by a high population density, clusters of run-down houses and buildings, as well as inadequate or non-existent public infrastructure and services. None of these features, however, is exclusive to the favelas, with illegality and precariousness being more the rule than the exception in the Brazilian urban territory as a whole. Presently, the more than one thousand favelas that exist in Rio de Janeiro State are increasingly diverse both in social and economic terms, some having their own middle class of entrepreneurs and liberal professionals with college and post-graduate degrees.

"After one hundred years", *Zaluar* and *Alvito* (2004: 21) correctly state, "the favela has triumphed". It has evolved into a central discursive and material reality upon which major issues – inequality, urban violence, (lack of) housing, citizenship and so on – are projected,

debated and dealt with in different arenas and by various social actors (see *Valladares* and *Medeiros* 2003). In the international imagination, along with carnival, football and sensuous women, favelas have become part of the stereotypical image of Brazil (*Jaguaribe* 2004; *Williams* 2008; *Freire-Medeiros* 2009, 2013).

There is no document evidencing a date on which favela tours began in Rio. In the collective memory, though, the 1992 Earth Summit (Rio Conference on Environment and Sustainable Development), where a large number of international visitors were gathered in the city, is usually pointed out as an important milestone. At that time, Rocinha, the paradigmatic touristic favela till these days, started receiving groups of visitors in organised tours conducted by professional travel operators. Relating the origin of the favela as a tourist attraction to the 92 Earth Summit is in some ways ironic if one remembers that, throughout the event, government authorities invested specific efforts towards isolating the favelas from foreign eyes, even enlisting the army's aid to do so.

Frenzel and *Koens* (2012) suggest that attitudes of rejection and/or indifference mark the early states in the development of slum tourism around the world. For many years, favela tourism was indeed highly criticised by official representatives as well as most middle- and upper-class Brazilians who considered it a despicable activity which not only denigrated the nation's image, but also trapped the poor in a zoo-like display. Now, however, favela tourism is following the
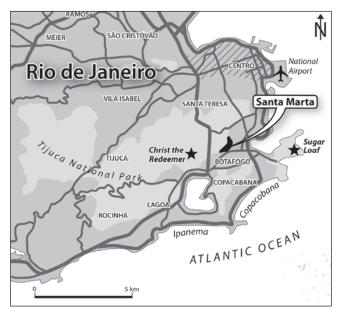
route observed in South Africa, with a wave of public sector support and intervention in certain favelas, i.e., those which have been targets under the policy of the Peacemaking Police Units (Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora), which will henceforth be referred to by its frequently used acronym UPP.

The next section presents some geographic and historic aspects characterising the Santa Marta favela. Section 3 presents the recent "occupation" and "peacemaking" policy conducted by the Rio de Janeiro state government and its consequences for the locality and its residents. In Section 4.1 we explain our research goals and methodological strategies, while in Section 4.2 we analyse some findings based on the survey that was conducted with 400 international tourists who paid for a tour in Santa Marta. We conclude with some brief comments on the potentials of the favela as a tourist destination.

2. Geographic, historic and social aspects of Santa Marta

The Santa Marta favela is situated on an extremely steep hillside of Botafogo neighbourhood in Rio's South Zone – the more upscale, middle-class section of Rio de Janeiro (*Fig. 1*). The locality received its first residents in the late 1930s. It is not possible to know precisely who owned the 50 000 square metres where today almost 5000 people live. Some older favela residents speak about generous donations given by owners of the region's old estates. However, even before the eradication of favelas became a systematic public policy under the military government of the 1970s, there were frequent conflicts with landowners and threats of removal, giving rise to negotiations involving, on the one hand, the local state and, on the other hand, favelados and their allies, including political and religious authorities and leaders of left-wing parties (*Rocha* 2005).

The first urbanisation project for the Santa Marta favela dates from between 1985 and 1986 when residents pressured the City Hall to install pipes, to open streets, to improve sanitation etc. In 2000, the territory was considered an Area of Social Interest and urban regularisation was initiated, defining boundaries between private and public spaces, as well as establishing specific rules for the use and the occupation of land (*Araujo* and *Lopes* 2007).

Between 2003 and 2004 infrastructure works began in Santa Marta. The Rio de Janeiro state government con-

Fig. 1   Rio de Janeiro: location of Santa Marta favela; cartography: U. Dolezal

structed an inclined-plane tramway and new buildings, which required the demolition of some of the existing houses. Along with infrastructure works there were also proposals for housing improvements.

In the last decades, Santa Marta has increasingly become a socially and economically heterogeneous ground. While residents witnessed the expansion of basic services which improved their quality of life, they still had to endure the consequences of the constant conflicts between armed drug dealers who dominated the favela territory and the military police, not to mention the heavy social stigma and police brutality that they also have to bear.

As a growing literature attests, a powerful drug and crime culture feeds the idea that favelas are violent areas, allowing arbitrary measures to be seen as legitimate by the population of Rio de Janeiro (*Burgos* 2004; *Pandolfi* and *Grynszpan* 2003; *Zaluar* and *Alvito* 2004; *Machado da Silva* 2008). As in other favelas, the media have portrayed Santa Marta as a territory of poverty and violence and its residents have been considered accomplices of drug trafficking.

3. UPP in Santa Marta and favela tourism

The dominant public discourse has apprehended and explained urban violence by resorting to the "metaphor of war" and its attendant "myths": the lawful city versus the city of crime, the state within the state, the banality of violence etc. (cf. *Leite* 2000). These myths

have supplied the interpretive toolkit which currently structures the "problem of violence" and the perspective of proposals and measures for its control and reduction in Rio de Janeiro. Among the proposals in the field of public security, currently one of the most high-profile projects is the Peacemaking Police Units (UPPs).

The public security project began in 2008 with the implementation of the first unit in Santa Marta and now there are 33 UPPs in the city. As summed up by *José Mariano Beltrame*, the Secretary of Security, the main goal of the UPPs is to "(...) allow the state to reoccupy the territories dominated by drug-trafficking factions. During the last decades, these groups [the police and the factions] have entered a weapons race, a private war in which the automatic rifle reigns supreme. In Rio, this dispute is unique. It takes place in densely populated areas, it makes no distinction between poor or rich, and the favela is its main stage. And the police is caught up in the thick of it [...]. Despite this complicate routine, the city keeps attracting larger numbers of tourists year after year [...]. We have [initially] occupied four communities, each one in different neighborhoods, with the intent to remain there permanently. It's the end of the automatic rifle, the end of the traumatic experience in its proximities"[1].

The police occupation in the favelas which now have a UPP was supported by the Special Operations Battalion (Batalhão de Operações Especiais – BOPE) and by the shock battalions which "prepared" the terrain for the entry of the new police units. After the UPPs were installed, a large contingent of policemen started operating permanently in these territories. The policemen

Photo 1   Michael Jackson statue in Santa Marta.
Photo: Bianca Freire-Medeiros

Photo 2   Panoramic view from Michael Jackson belvedere
Photo: Palloma Menezes

stationed at the UPPs are almost entirely young beginners, recruited right after training, and have taken courses in Community Policing and Human Rights; they have also been trained in approaching the population together with the Special Operations Battalion.

Public authorities have been trying hard to transform the "pacified" favelas into tourist attractions. Santa Marta was the first favela in which such an idea was put to test. In the spectacular launch of the "Rio Top Tour – Rio de Janeiro from a new perspective" programme in August 2010, the Santa Marta favela welcomed then-president *Luis Inácio Lula da Silva*, Rio de Janeiro State governor *Sérgio Cabral* and Rio de Janeiro City mayor *Eduardo Paes*. The official speech reproduced in the media referred to the Rio Top Tour programme as a possibility of "making the most of the touristic potential of communities in need" through the inclusion of the inhabitants themselves, "who will have the means to become qualified and invest in local economic, social and sporting activities", according to President *Lula*.

A bronze statue of *Michael Jackson*, the "King of Pop", was commissioned by the Governor of Rio de Janeiro State. Amidst precarious shacks and a beautiful view of the ocean, it constitutes the main tourist attraction in Santa Marta (*Photo 1*, *Photo 2*).

In addition, another 30 sights considered relevant have also been mapped as tourist attractions in a leaflet (*Fig. 2*), and signposts with touristic information in Portuguese and English have been installed. The project encourages not only foreign tourists to visit the favela but also instigates better-off people of Rio de Janeiro to visit Santa Marta for the first time. An information kiosk situated at the entrance of the favela supplies information and sells bilingual maps.

During the launching ceremony of the project referred to above, the state government announced that a new credit line was opened for the renovation of kiosks, handicraft co-ops and other local activities, with the aim of stimulating local entrepreneurship. And a stamp "Selo amigo do Turista" was created which will be given to "local tourism promoters", i.e. residents who own stores in the favela that may be part of the tourist market as well as local artists who participate in arts and crafts workshops promoted with official support.
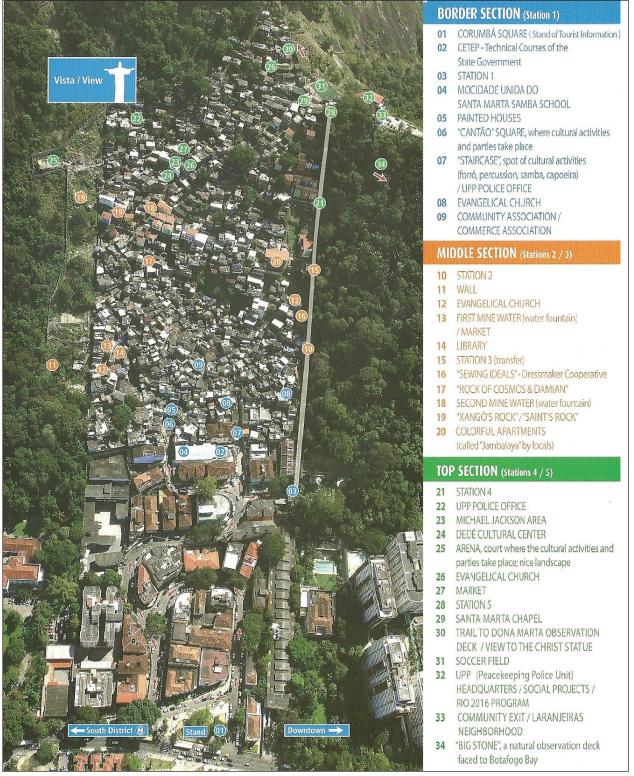
Since the arrival of the UPP, the formalisation of services in the favela was intensified. In early 2009, a free wireless internet connection was set up in Morro Santa Marta and a regularisation process of services like water supply, electricity and cable television began, significantly affecting the hitherto common practices and the informality of pirate cable television and illegal transfer of energy from the electric system.

After the "pacification" process, commercial shops in the Morro Santa Marta also had to be formalised by registering themselves in the national register of legal entities (CNPJ), under the umbrella of a partnership between City Hall, state government and Sebrae (Brazilian Service to Support Micro and Small Enterprises), through a project called Empresa Bacana. The government and Sebrae used two different strategies to convince dwellers to formalise their businesses. On the one hand, formalising the businesses was recommended because the number of tourists visiting the favela was increasing and new opportunities were emerging. On the other hand, the formalisation opportunity came with the implicit threat that those who did not want to register their shops would most likely have future problems with the Shock of Order (Choque de Ordem) units, which were created in 2009 to combat disorder in Rio de Janeiro's public spaces.

Thanks to the public investment into the touristic infrastructure in Santa Marta, the community was referred to, not without irony and sarcasm, as the "Disneyland favela". Hip-hop rapper and community leader *Fiell* used the phrase for the first time during his speech in the launching ceremony of the Booklet 'Popular Santa Marta: How to react when approached by the police (Cartilha de Abordagem Policial do Morro Santa Marta)' in March 2010. In an interview conducted in May 2012, *Fiell* explained to us that he decided to use the term because "the bourgeoisie media always referred to Santa Marta as the 'model favela', it has been on the spotlight with the UPP. The gringos now tour the favela as they were touring Disneyland. We residents know better, we know that we still face the same difficulties and daily oppressions".

As a matter of fact, in the last two years almost every important public figure or international celebrity visiting Rio, such as popstar *Madonna*, visited Santa Marta. In this sense, it is possible to say that Santa Marta now competes, in the media and in the tourist trade, with Rocinha – the main touristic favela for two decades – for the title of the most famous and most visited favela in Rio de Janeiro.

BORDER SECTION (Station 1)

01 CORUMBÁ SQUARE (Stand of Tourist Information)
02 CETEP - Technical Courses of the
   State Government
03 STATION 1
04 MOCIDADE UNIDA DO
   SANTA MARTA SAMBA SCHOOL
05 PAINTED HOUSES
06 "CANTÃO" SQUARE, where cultural activities
   and parties take place
07 "STAIRCASE", spot of cultural activities
   (forró, percussion, samba, capoeira)
   / UPP POLICE OFFICE
08 EVANGELICAL CHURCH
09 COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION /
   COMMERCE ASSOCIATION

MIDDLE SECTION (Stations 2 / 3)

10 STATION 2
11 WALL
12 EVANGELICAL CHURCH
13 FIRST MINE WATER (water fountain)
   / MARKET
14 LIBRARY
15 STATION 3 (transfer)
16 "SEWING IDEALS" - Dressmaker Cooperative
17 "ROCK OF COSMOS & DAMIAN"
18 SECOND MINE WATER (water fountain)
19 "XANGÔ'S ROCK" / "SAINT'S ROCK"
20 COLORFUL APARTMENTS
   (called "Jambalaya" by locals)

TOP SECTION (Stations 4 / 5)

21 STATION 4
22 UPP POLICE OFFICE
23 MICHAEL JACKSON AREA
24 DEDÉ CULTURAL CENTER
25 ARENA, court where the cultural activities and
   parties take place; nice landscape
26 EVANGELICAL CHURCH
27 MARKET
28 STATION 5
29 SANTA MARTA CHAPEL
30 TRAIL TO DONA MARTA OBSERVATION
   DECK / VIEW TO THE CHRIST STATUE
31 SOCCER FIELD
32 UPP (Peacekeeping Police Unit)
   HEADQUARTERS / SOCIAL PROJECTS /
   RIO 2016 PROGRAM
33 COMMUNITY EXIT / LARANJEIRAS
   NEIGHBORHOOD
34 "BIG STONE", a natural observation deck
   faced to Botafogo Bay

Fig. 2   Map of Santa Marta with main attractions (from official leaflet)

4. Research and findings
4.1 Research design

The article establishes a dialogue with previous reflections by two authors (*Freire-Medeiros* 2007, 2009; *Menezes* 2012) and other researchers on the subject of converting Rio de Janeiro's favelas into tourist destinations. Despite possible theoretical divergences and particular empirical approaches, these researchers – with their diverse approaches – all operate fol-

lowing the observation that the favela has become a constitutive part of the stereotypical image of Brazil.

The methodological and empirical approach for this study, carried out with foreign tourists in the Santa Marta favela, is part of a larger project conducted by FGV (Fundação Getulio Vargas, Getulio Vargas Foundation), which itself is based on a contract with Brazil's Ministry of Tourism. This larger project has encompassed four stages of research: In the first stage, we analysed the perceptions of the main actors directly or indirectly involved in tourism activities in the Santa Marta favela, i.e. we carried out ethnographic fieldwork, along with 40 in-depth interviews with inhabitants, owners of small businesses, local leaders, community police officers, tour operators and guides who regularly work on the site.

In the second stage, which we designated "tourism potential", we conducted a survey encompassing 900 face-to-face interviews at Antonio Carlos Jobim International Airport in Rio de Janeiro. The survey sample was segmented in the sense that it was equally divided between national and foreign tourists. The goal was to identify the tourists' perceptions of Rio de Janeiro and their motives for choosing the city as a destination, with a special focus on their evaluation of the tourism potential of the favelas. In the third stage, we carried out ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth interviews in the favelas Borel, Providência, Babilônia (Chapéu Mangueira) and Cantagalo (Pavão-Pavãozinho) in order to map the existing tourist activities in each area and, if there were none, to formulate a diagnosis and to survey potential tourist attractions, such as regular cultural and community activities, with the aim of steering future public investment, as a result of the aforementioned contract with Brazil's Ministry of Tourism.
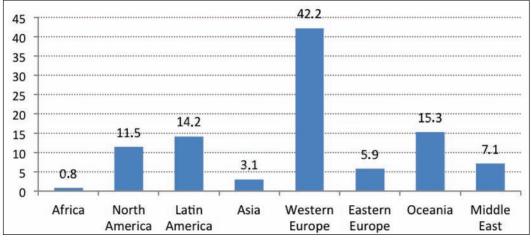
The fourth stage of the project, which essentially provides the empirical material for the current article, was based on 400 interviews with foreign tourists visiting Santa Marta. These interviews sought to analyse the tourists' profiles, asked how the tours were organised and marketed, and investigated the tourists' impressions of the site and how they evaluated not only the tourist equipment present in the favela but also their own experiences as visitors. The questionnaires were available in English, French and Spanish and were filled out at the end of the visit by the tourists themselves in the presence of two field supervi-

sors, both anthropologists[2]. Data collection took place between 23rd March and 14th May 2011.

The survey was preceded by fieldwork, the purpose of which was to assess who were the agents conducting the tours, which tourist attractions were visited and which guided paths were followed in the favela. The lack of a common pattern in the tours presented a methodological problem, since the initial research design assumed that it would be possible to approach tourists at both the beginning (in order to capture the tourists' expectations) and the end of the tour (in order to verify whether or not the experience had altered the visitors' parameters for defining the object 'favela'). However, even with distinct patterns of access to the favela, we observed that the larger part of the visitors reached the favela through private companies, which usually rely on outsourced guides, who present the favela as one sightseeing element of several in an itinerary that may include, in a single day, visits to other urban landmarks, too. To take account of the brevity of the visit and the tourists' and guides' impatience, we decided to distribute questionnaires for the tourists to fill out during the main breaks of the tour, in the area called Cantão (in the lower part of the favela) or in the Michael Jackson Laje (located in the favela's intermediary section).

4.2 Results
4.2.1 Composition of the sample

Almost half of the 400 people interviewed were European tourists, followed by travellers from different parts of the Americas. Another particular feature was the prevalence of English speakers present in the sample, with 13 % Australians, 12 % English and 10.4 % Americans, followed by Israelis in fourth place with 7.1 % (*Fig. 2*).

The average age of the people interviewed was around 40 years, a relatively mature bracket, however half of the visitors were in the younger age band – up to 32 years old. Regarding their occupations, 19 % of the visitors were students and another 11 % of the sample were retirees and pensioners. The level of education of the interviewees in the sample was distinctly above-average: 61.4 % held undergraduate degrees and 11.4 % were taking post-graduate courses. In addition, looking at family income, 28.4 % earned between 5 000 and 10 000 Reais (i.e. roughly between 2 500 and 5 000 US$) per month and another 28 % were higher than this level.

Fig. 3   Foreign tourists interviewed by country of residence

Nearly 86 % of the tourists were visiting Rio for the first time. This is remarkable and an indicator for the fact that tourist visits to the favela are consolidating as an important contributor to the image of the city, especially when considering the competition with other more traditional attractions such as Christ the Redeemer, Sugar Loaf Mountain and the beaches. Even a very short stay in the city (up to 3 days) proved not to impede in the choice of 27.5 % of the tourists to visit a favela.

Questioned about the existence of favelas or other poor, segregated areas in their own country or city of origin, the majority (52.8 %) recognised the existence of these types of areas in their home country or city, but only 28.3 % affirmed that they had visited such a place. In other words, the tourists who had effectively visited a favela-like area in their city or country of origin make up only 15.8 % of the sample. Here, the importance of what *Urry* (1990) called the "exoticisation of a place" is reaffirmed, a process that is determined as much by geographical as by cultural distances. To put it differently: The distances that separate the foreigner from the Rio favela, as well as the media references which tend to sensationalise these territories, guarantee that they are exoticised and as such gain new significance as tourist attractions.

Despite the fact that the tour to Santa Marta is a new experience for the large majority of the visitors, 95.5 % confirmed that they knew people who had visited a favela before. Similarly to previous observations in the study of Rocinha as a tourist destination (*Freire-Medeiros* 2009), word-of-mouth plays a decisive role here. There is an evident disposition among the tourists to base their decision on the previous experiences of members of their social circle. But the decision to visit a favela is equally

due to the marketing efforts of companies or institutions with a commercial interest in the tours, 44.3 % of the tourists interrogated mentioned hotels and travel agents as their principal source of information. Mass media, such as print or electronic, are less important.

4.2.2 The security aspect

Starting from the assumption that the type of information acquired or received about the favelas, or the tourist experience there, is of fundamental importance for the decision to go on a tour, we can consider the plausibility of a second hypothesis which posits that this information is then combined with the question of violence/personal safety in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Expressed in a more concrete form: Tourists' perceptions about the level of violent crime in the city form a second filter; they want to be reassured that these areas are not controlled by drug trafficking. For some tourists, however, "risk" is a necessary component in the package (*Freire-Medeiros* 2009) and the presence of drug trafficking is not an inhibiting factor but, in fact, an attractive feature that confers uniqueness to the experience. The quantitative data to follow explore and justify these hypotheses further.

In contrast to the high level of violent crime frequently communicated by the mainstream media, tourists in general have a more positive view in regard to safety in the city. Given the anticipation of violence, moulded by the presentation of violence in the sensationalist media, the actual experience of the city shows that the situation is less dramatic, at least in those parts of the city visited by tourists in general.

It is not surprising that 42.8 % of the interviewees considered, at varying degrees, the city to be safe. In addition, the 27.8 % who had a negative impression of the safety situation still opted to visit a favela.

Our interpretation of the tourists' perception of violence as a non-inhibiting factor for a favela visit is further reinforced by the tiny number of tourists that were actually aware of the existence of community policing in Santa Marta. When asked about policing, also to gauge the importance of required security levels in the decision to visit the favela, 57.2 % of tourists were not aware of the policing in Santa Marta at all. Of those who were aware, 18.1 % considered this information irrelevant and only 24.7 % thought the policy would influence, in some way or other, the choice of Santa Marta as their tourist destination.

The press and the state government, as a rule, view the installation of UPPs as a fundamental moment in the development of tourism in the favelas. In contrast, the research shows that a preoccupation with security is not central for the majority of the tourists who visit these places. Asked to assess the perceived level of security in the favela, the tourists gave an average score of 7.9, on a scale from 0 to 10. Only the small minority of tourists of 4.5 % who considered the city "very unsafe" showed the greatest propensity to inform themselves about the new form of policing and considered this relevant for their decision to visit the favela.

4.2.3 The impact of the tour organisation

A third filter with impacts on the perceptions and, consequently, on the tourists' responses is the communication with the tour guide and how the tour is carried out. It can be assumed that the means by which the tourist accesses the favela – with or without a guide, with a guide from the community or a guide from a professional operator – influences the form in which he or she spends his/her time, for example in appreciating a view or visiting a social project.

When this research was carried out, there was in fact a quasi-monopoly of professional and/or private guides; they are responsible for nearly 60 % of the guided access to Santa Marta. Members of the community, NGO guides or representatives of Top Tour accompany 25 % of the visits, and 11 % visit the favela on their own, without a specific guide. Currently there are at least three types of guides operating in the favela: external guides contracted by private agencies, external independent guides, and community members who serve

as local guides. In addition, there are interns from the tourism classes sponsored by the government who receive government funding from the project 'Rio Top Tour'. The interns do not guide the tourists through the favela but act as local monitors at a stand placed at the entrance to the favela, supplying information to tourists that arrive at the community on their own.

During our fieldwork, the tension between these different players in the tourguide business was palpable. Local guides do not consider it fair that "outsiders" earn money "exploiting the favela" and believe that tourism should promote local development. Community members who work with favela tourism expressed the view that they were more competent, professionally prepared and, therefore, had more legitimacy to work as tourist guides. Agency owners, on the other hand, argue that it is not possible to hire community members as tour guides as they lack the adequate qualification, particularly in foreign languages. But they also say that they hire locals to assist their own guides when large numbers of visitors are expected for one single tour. The local guides do not appreciate this job as they are poorly remunerated and have to work as second-rank "assistant guides".

In an attempt to escape from this dependence and break the monopoly of the agencies, a number of local youths, having accomplished a local tourism monitor course offered by the state government, are studying various foreign languages with the aim to qualify and gain the official registration as tour guides. Furthermore, a group of local guides is trying to organise a cooperative that may act as a local tourism operator.

4.2.4 Favela shopping

As such, the means by which visitors have access to the favela has an impact, not only on what is emphasised as topics during the tour, but also on sales actitivies connected with the favela tour, above all the production and the sale of souvenirs. Despite the widely acknowledged importance of the sale of souvenirs etc. in connection with the favela tourism industry, only 36.6 % of the visitors made some kind of purchase during the tour to the favela at all. In all cases the amount spent was very low: 61.4 % spent only 5 R\$ (i.e. about 2.50 US\$) and only 7.1 % spent over 20 R\$ (10 US\$). Less than 10 % bought some kind of keepsake or artisan product, i.e. some kind of item produced directly by the community. The tour-

ists pointed out that they were not offered any type of product and did not see shops during the visit. These indicators reinforce the idea of the precariousness of the tourism industry in Santa Marta; this problem can essentially be attributed to the way the tours are organised, especially by the agencies. According to some shopkeepers, the local guides take the tourists around to the local centres of commerce, in contrast to the third party external guides of the agencies for whom the favela is one stop of a larger tour around a number of other attractions seen in one day.

4.2.5 Expectations and perceptions

Questioned about what were the two most important highlights of the visit[3], the physical aspects of the favela were mentioned as the greatest attractions by the tourists: the local architecture (56 %, *Photo 3, Photo 4*) and the view of the city (41 %), followed in third place by social projects (35 %). A little over a quarter of the respondents chose options related to the hospitality of and the interaction with the residents. Nevertheless, these data should obviously be viewed with a certain caution due to the unidentifiable mix of individual tourist expectations and routes and emphases given by the guides during the visits.

The whole field of tourists' motivations, expectations and concerns is in itself an area of complex subjectivity and self-referentiality. Several authors pertinently suggest, nevertheless, that even within a heterogeneous group of travellers, one can still perceive the bundle of motivations and expectations as built upon a common repertoire of culturally informed notions (*Graburn*

1983; *Cohen* 1988). With the objective of improving our understanding of the tourists' expectations regarding the visit, we listed a variety of attributes and asked the tourists to classify them by the level of importance in order to optimise our notion of the tourist experience. Among the listed aspects, the need for information regarding the history of the area came first, with 76.3 % recognising this as one of the two most important items ('extremely' or 'very important'). This demand goes hand in hand with one of the principal desires of the community members: to be able to tell, in their own words, the story of the favela. In more in-depth interviews, the community members complained that they received a disrespectful and out-of-context treatment by the tourism agencies, as they were presented as a "generic favela", portrayed by marketing material that was also used for other favelas.

A visit to social projects was considered the second-most relevant item for the tourists in Santa Marta, with almost 66 % of the replies concentrated in the ranges of 'very important' or 'extremely important'. This factor which is generally underestimated by the tourist guides is of course most welcomed by the community members.

The other options (involving a number of very distinct themes, such as music/dance recitals, visit to a samba school, contact with local community leaders, visit to a resident's house and construction of public toilets) were seen as less relevant. Such a classification may indicate that the tourists do not make a distinction between these activities nor see a clear hierarchy in them. A visit to a local crèche was viewed even less attractive, being of value for only 32 % of the respondents. A visit to a resident's house,

Photo 3 and 4   Local architecture in Santa Marta favela   (Photos: Palloma Menezes)
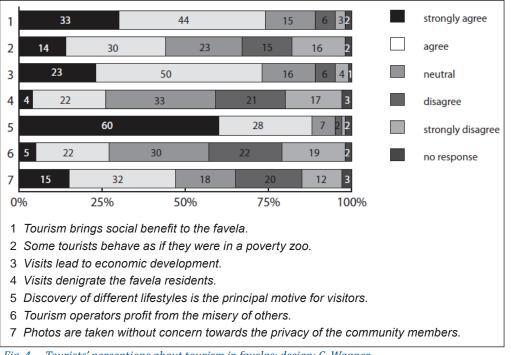
a theme directly linked to the question of privacy, was the second least valued item mentioned, only 42.7 % of tourists considered it a relevant option.

In another section of the questionnaire, we confronted the tourists with polemic perceptions usually associated with tourism in impoverished areas (see *Frenzel* and *Koens* 2012). We offered the tourists a list of statements, together with options to tick the level of intensity, so that they could express their level of agreement or disagreement with each item as is shown in *Figure 4*.

As a counterpoint to the common accusations of voyeurism and exploitation of other people's misfortune brought forward against those who sell and consume tours in the favela, the foreign tourists "strongly agree" that the principal motive for a visit is to discover different lifestyles. In addition, there is the supposed potential of tourism to bring economic development and social benefits to the favela which is rated relatively high (adding up the options 'agree' and 'strongly agree'), however, as we saw earlier, the amounts spent by the tourists in the favela tend to be very small. This might indicate that the reply served more as a mechanism of self-justification in this highly ethical issue, rather than as the expression of an objective opinion. Data from a complementary sample of the research project carried out with the same objective as the present one, with 450 foreign tourists at Rio's international air-

port, allow us to visualise this question more effectively: Here the positive interpretations about economic and social development through favela tourism as well as the desire to discover different lifestyles were even shared by tourists who did not visit any favela at all during their stay in the city. This allows us to exclude the self-justification hypothesis with a degree of certainty, at least in relation to this series of statements[4]. On the other hand, more than two thirds of these latter tourists – who did not visit a favela at all – tended to be more critical towards slum tourism than those who actually went to Santa Marta. They expressed agreement about the exploitative nature of the tourism agencies and about the behaviour of the tourists, associating the visit with a safari tour.

In another approach to learn about the tourists' perceptions of the favela, we presented the participants with two lists of a) positive and b) negative expressions, inspired by the academic literature on slum tourism (*Rolfes* 2009; *Rolfes* et al. 2009), and we asked them to choose four options that most accurately represented their expectations regarding the favela and, in addition, the four options that best defined the favela Santa Marta[5].

The objective driving these two latter questionnaire elements is to compare, albeit in an imperfect way, the tourists' pre-conceived representations of daily life in the favela with the earlier assessment carried out during the on-location experience.

Fig. 4   Tourists' perceptions about tourism in favelas; design: G. Wagner

	Expectations: rank	Post-visit evaluation: rank
Poverty	1	1
Mess/Disorder	2	8
Filth	3	6
Solidarity	4	3
Development	5	2
Tradition	6	5
Precarious dwelling	7	7
Happiness	8	4

Tab. 1 Comparing expectations with post-visit evaluations of the favela

This means, we grasped preconceived representations as prejudices and information acquired through the media, advertising flyers, tour operators etc. During the fieldwork we observed, for instance, that the tour operators used marketing material with "generic" and decontextualised information about favelas in Rio de Janeiro. In a later set of questions, we asked the tourists to define a favela. Here, the perceptions of the favela would be influenced by the experience of the visit, in itself possibly influenced and mediated by the guide, the type of visit and the interaction with the community members.

Table 1 compares the relative positions of the items mentioned most by the tourists during the two stages. Despite 'poverty' being the most commonly used word – taking first place in both rounds of questioning – it should be highlighted that in general the actual favela experience had a hugely positive impact on the visitors' impressions of the favela. This can also be read from the attributes with which the tourists identified "what Santa Marta is", where positive attributes were mentioned with greater frequency; in contrast to the commonly held generic representations of favelas, the occurrences of negative aspects decreased.

Negative attributes, such as "disorder" and "dirtiness" fall from second and third place to ninth and seventh place, respectively. "Development", in second place, and "solidarity" and "happiness" become the most relevant positive categories in the definition of Santa Marta.

This form of data representation, however, on the one hand, helps to select and summarise the most important factors, but, on the other hand, hides the magnitude of the changes. This is why, in *Figure 5*, we organised the words in descending order, according to the difference in the absolute number of listings between
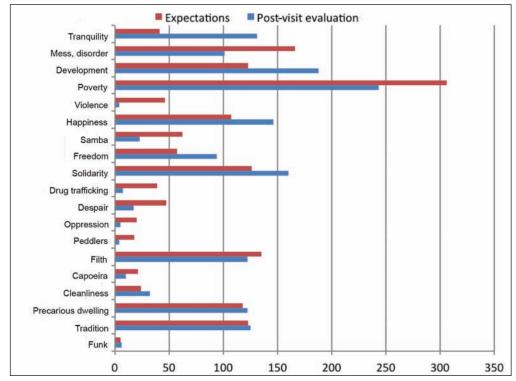

Fig. 5   Comparison between expectations and post-visit evaluation (absolute numbers of mentions; N = 400)

the expectation sample and the post-visit evaluation sample. The unit of analysis is the number of mentions[6] of each category. As such, the category 'tranquility' showed the greatest absolute magnitude of change, followed by the words 'disorder', 'poverty' and 'violence'. These representations suffered the greatest cognitive change caused by the contrast between the prejudices and the real-life experience of the visit.

This comparison allows us to verify that the pre-visit perceptions regarding disorder, poverty and violence, as constituent elements of the favela, are no longer held when, in the second analysis, we ask the participant to define "what Santa Marta is". The difference between the numbers of mentions at both stages gives an indication about the direction and magnitude of the change (whether positive or negative).

Just as in the case of Township Tours in South Africa (see *Rolfes* 2009, 2010; *Rolfes* et al. 2009), "poverty" is the most cited item, both in the expectations and in the post-visit definitions the tourist gave regarding the situation which they had witnessed. However, a clear reduction occurs in the perception of the favela as an exclusively poor space and in the factors that would propagate this condition. The same could be said in relation to "desperation", "drug trafficking", "oppression" and the supposed existence of "beggars". Of the negative items which we investigated, only 'dirtiness' and 'precarious homes' did not show a great variation, which demonstrates coherence between the image which the tourists bring with them and that which they take with them after the visit to the favela. In addition, the aspects that involve a more cultural dimension of the favela, for example "Samba" and "Capoeira", were much more frequently mentioned in the expectation sample.

This diffuse combination of factors may help to explain why 39.3 % of the participants responded that the favela experience surpassed their expectation and another 39.8 % responded that it fulfilled them at least partly. Only 5.2 % of the tourists showed some disappointment with the tourist experience.

In spite of the fact that the great majority of the tourists considered the experience positive, visiting another favela in Rio de Janeiro did not seem a viable option for 56.1 % of them. However, a not negligible 27.5 % of the participants expressed interest in visiting other favelas, the most frequently cited ones being Rocinha and Cidade de Deus ("City of God"), localities commonly featured in international media.

5. Final comments

Favela tourism is approached, by many critics, with eminently normative and reductionist arguments. More often than not, they depart from and idealise a singular ideal-type of tour and visitor: the image of a voyeur touring a poverty zoo. In contrast, on empirical grounds, what one finds is a rich profile of types of tourists, types of tours and means of visiting a favela.

"Poverty" is the category that characterises the tourists' expectations and post-visit evaluations of the Santa Marta favela most; at the same time, from the real-life experience in the favela, there was a tendency towards a more positive image of the favela. In general, we can summarise that tourists who have visited Santa Marta go back to their home country with a more complex and positive image of the favela. This observation is of course very much welcomed by the community members who have expressed in in-depth interviews that the tourist visits to the favela help to reduce and invert stigmas produced by media coverage.

As we have attempted to demonstrate here using the case of Santa Marta, the touristic favela is currently being reinvented as a result of a public policy of all three levels of government, sheltered under the "magical mantle" of the organisation of the forthcoming sports mega-events. In this sense, the cooperation with third-sector partners, with teaching and research institutions, and with agents from the tourism trade is fundamental in giving legitimacy to the Rio Top Tour policy.

The favelas are still the target of arbitrary and often violent actions, not only Santa Marta but also other "pacified favelas"; nevertheless, on the other hand, they receive governmental investment directly connected to the promotion of tourism. It is impossible to predict if the Rio Top Tour programme will work on a broad scale, or even if there is the long-lasting political intention to try. But it is important to acknowledge what these actions represent: They do not represent the retreat of governmental action. Rather, they reformulate strategies, tactics and procedures in regulating free subjectivities in the exercise of government in stigmatised territories such as the favelas where mobility patterns are still highly controlled and inhibited by legal and/or illegal apparatuses of power.

Notes

[1] http://veja.abril.com.br/40anos/blog/lucila-soares/, 05/09/2009

[2] We are grateful to the in-field collaboration of research assistants *Martin Ossowicki* and *Bruno Mibieli*.

[3] The following listed options were available 1) Have more information regarding the history of the favela; 2) Visit a crèche; 3) Music or dance recitals; 4) Contact with community leader; 5) Visit a resident's house; 6) Visit a social project; 7) Construction of public toilets; 8) Visit a samba school.

[4] We registered that visitors from Latin American countries tended to express more interest to get to know different lifestyles and, at the same time, were the group that believed most strongly in the social and economic benefits of this type of activity, in contrast to most European interviewees and residents of North America.

[5] To avoid bias in the results, different versions of the questionnaire were given to the people that were interviewed, each with a different ordering of the words according to a random selection. In the questions we asked the tourists to name four options regarding what they "expected to see in the favela". As a matter of fact, we asked them to mark four options, ordered according to importance. However, as the questionnaire was self-applied, nearly a third of the sample marked only one X without giving a hierarchy of importance. To avoid bias in the analysis, we decided to give all responses the same weight.

[6] As the questionnaire was self-applied we, in actual fact, when using the word "mention", refer to the number of words marked in the questionnaire.

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