

Tourism Development in World Heritage Urban Areas

Júlia Lourenço¹
Daniela Alvares²

ABSTRACT: This paper will discuss how some World Heritage classified urban areas are developing in terms of sustainability, mainly in terms of preservation and tourism development. Another aim is to detect possible paradoxes on the evolution of two case-studies, both classified as World Heritage by UNESCO: Porto, a medieval area in Portugal and Ouro Preto, one of the most representative towns of baroque style in Brazil. Conflicts and different interests can be noticed in the development of tourism industry. In this context, the following question will be addressed: what have been the trickling down effects to the tourist areas?

KEY WORDS: World Heritage; local development, tourism; sustainable development; Porto – Portugal; Ouro Preto – Brazil.

1.0 – INTRODUCTION

Several authors have argued that the cultural tourism segment offers even better growth perspectives than others and that visitor numbers in cities of art may rise even faster than expected (Borg, 1998: 31). In fact, when we look, for example, at the number of visitors per year in the Church of Sagrada Família in Barcelona, we see exponential growth. From around 600.000 visitors in 1992, to 800.000 in 1996, 1.400.000 in 2000, and above 2 million visitors in the year 2003. Other examples could be cited from other European towns, namely Italian cities where there is full awareness now that tourism has heavily influenced the way these towns are functioning. A last example that can be mentioned is Manhattan in New York where after 9/ 11th, the importance of urban tourism was acutely realised.

Thus, a growing number of cities are relying on culture to attract visitors. This is especially true in the case of World Heritage towns, classified as such by UNESCO. The guidelines for world heritage classification can be defined as such: a manner of building that is shared by the community; a local or regional quality that pertains to its environment; a consistent style, form and appearance or resort to traditional building techniques; a traditional expertise in design and construction that it informally handed down; an effective response to functional, social and environment restrictions; an effective application of traditional building methods and know-now (ICOMOS, 1999).

All of the above criteria apply and continue to be found in the towns Porto and Ouro Preto that will be taken as case studies. Ouro Preto, located in the state of Minas Gerais is one of the worldly famous historical brasilian cities. Part of its main attraction among inhabitants and tourists are the baroque and colonial-style buildings. The great cultural richness of this town is also associated with popular festivities, many of them religious, cooking and arts and crafts activities. The history of Ouro Preto is intimately connected with the Gold Rush. In the 18th century, the conquest of mainland Brazil associated with the digging of precious minerals, fostered the creation of a settlement initially called Vila Rica de Albuquerque, afterwards Vila Rica and later on, since 1823, Ouro Preto. In 1980, it was declared “World Heritage Town” by UNESCO but it was already a National Monument since 1933.

Porto historic centre is a huge medieval tissue located in the second metropolitan area of Portugal, an extended strip of the visual basin, along 2Km of the Douro river bank, facing the other bank where Port Wine is stored. After 1990 the area was enlarged to 90 ha. It was included in the World Heritage List in 1996. Further way, 120 Km up the river, where Port wine is produced, another narrow strip of 20 Km was classified as a living evolutionary cultural landscape by UNESCO in 2001. The wine connections established since the 18th century are now enlarged by the tourism connections.

The vernacular structures, examples of different periods, are fragile and become particularly vulnerable when they become obsolete from an economic point of view, left as they often are to fall into rack and ruin or simply destroyed to make way for new buildings

or functions. The classification placed the operational quality demands at a higher level. In both towns, there have been financial programs to keep the built heritage in shape. The Monumenta Programme was established by the Brazilian Ministry of Culture with the InterAmerican Bank of Development (BID). This programme proposes for the next years major investments in 27 Brazilian towns with the objective of rehabilitation of the local historical centres (Gastal, 2003:78). In Porto, CRUARB (Comissariado para a Recuperação da Ribeira-Barredo), a team of technical professionals of architects and engineers as well as historians, archeologists and social assistants among other professionals, has been working on site since 1974, first exclusively with national money and depending on the Portuguese Government, since the late eighties with European funding and depending on the Municipality of Porto.

Moreover, the cross-Atlantic historical connections are now linked to preservation associations. Effectively, there is a not widely known story about one of the CRUARB consultants, Arch. Viana de Lima who was sent to Brasil, as a UNESCO expert, between 1968 and 1977, to study the preservation, revitalization and expansion of several historical cities, especially Olinda and Ouro Preto. Based on experiences like these, he launched in the 90's the idea of applying Porto Historic Centre as Mankind Cultural Heritage at UNESCO. Arch. Rui Loza, further involved with the attempt to classify the Douro Valley since the mid eighties, shifted jobs and responsibilities in 1990 and was responsible for that task for Porto Municipality under a strongly committed Mayor. A leit-motif for landscape preservation, a tourist label association of two products: wine and urban landscape but also a magnet for tourism entrepreneurs, can Porto historic centre survive the propaganda?

Effectively, conservation of a heritage is accompanied by financial and socio-cultural costs that must be openly debated. The standing point this paper will address is that the local community is the most important actor in any classification as it must identify itself with the heritage and cherish it. Likewise, the changes of the present should not eradicate all traces of the former territory, attempting to avoid the threat that the globalisation of the economy and culture pose to diversity.

2.0 - THE FINANCIAL COSTS

Most inhabitants of historic tourist centres will refer traffic congestion and overcrowding of public spaces as some of the anathema of tourism development. However deeply embedded this idea can be, it is also true that critical mass can justify the extra investments. Effectively, to keep an urban built environment not easily adaptable for modern life standards, namely automobile accessibility, alive in the 21st century can be easier if the area has been classified as World Heritage and is thus a tourist attraction.

That is certainly the case in Porto historic centre where the pedestrian streets have some shops, museums, arts and crafts centres, public equipments, bars and restaurants scattered all over the area. The cultural happenings such as concerts in the churches bring crowds at night, making the area safe due to the intensive use. Nevertheless, access to private cars and cargo vans still occurs in areas such as the river front where it should be banned. The building of several car parks surrounding the pedestrian streets, during Porto European Capital of Culture 2001, should act as a disincentive to bring the car to the river front.

Ouro Preto faces a similar traffic problem in the historical centre, aggravated by its composition of trucks and cargo vans. Recently, a truck destroyed a water supply fountain more than a century older. Some researchers claim that this state of affairs will appeal to the greed of some owners and the uncompromising tolerance of the regulating entities (Pires, 2003:74).

Other negative impacts of tourism can also be detected, namely land or real estate speculation. In Ouro Preto, like in many other historic places being targeted for tourism development, the inhabitants may sell their houses, moving into the periphery, in places without infrastructures and basic equipments, lowering their quality of life.

According to Tofani (1999:9) the increase in the prices of goods, services, local taxes in tourist areas as well as the pressures on inhabitants to sell their properties, has fostered the

economic expulsion of the poorest inhabitants living in the tourist areas and has laid patterns of spatial segregation.

Many urban analysts will agree that the interactions between urban form and natural processes cannot be understood in isolation from economic and social structures and consensus has been arising on the importance of urban tourism to shape an historic town.

Another economic cost can be seen: the demonstration effect. With the high demand for products and services and the desire to earn more income with the tourists, there is a general price increase that is also reflected upon the local community. This fact can be easily detected in Ouro Preto in the high season periods, namely Carnival and the Winter Festival.

3.0 - THE SOCIO-CULTURAL COSTS

In the socio-cultural context, tourism can bring serious problems into the accepting community. Taking Ouro Preto as an example, the community is facing problems to preserve the cultural resources. This situation is typical among historical town centres where there are some conflicting interests between conservation of monuments and buildings, the value adding to local tradition and the fair increase of development activities. Despite Ouro Preto's relevant cultural and built heritage, there are conservation problems in several historical colonial-style manors, some churches and museums. Despite their listing as classified monuments and a huger protection of the surrounding area, bigger than in Portugal – 300 metres versus 50 to 100 metres, many inhabitants disrespect the laws, for example ordering repairs without previous authorization. Others, on the contrary, do not have financial resources to repair the decaying buildings.

In Porto, the Municipality has assumed both technical and financial help to the inhabitants. The problem was over population density in the area and some of the most recent inhabitants received social lodgement outside the area. The split of the community was a difficult problem to be handled thirty years ago, in the start of the process. But it stands as a

goal of the urban rehabilitation process to keep the local population there. It is considered one of the most distinctive features of this medieval complex authenticity: houses influenced by the industrial revolution, traditional trade and workmanship, cultural tourism, intense life, businesses, local pride, identity and character (CRUARB, 2000: 139).

Also, another major problem is that due to the extension of the medieval area (90 ha comprised within the operation), once most of it is rehabilitated there is a need to start rehabilitating, again, the areas of the first phase. Furthermore, the rehabilitation processes have become more and more renovation processes with armed concrete due to the high costs of the previous operations, using old traditional materials.

Nowadays, the rules and especially the outcomes with infrastructures and equipments as well as a beautiful rehabilitated or renovated area have lessened the problems. Moreover and contrarily to Ouro Preto, the gentrification process has been controlled by the Municipality and so, in some areas, the problem is to bring in shops or other activities. The former Mayor of Porto even displaced his office, in the late nineties, to one of the last rehabilitated areas trying to attract investors. In this case, it was one of the last areas where the typical situation of the seventies was still visible. But, nowadays, this specific area within the historic centre still faces the possibilities of a different kind of ghetto: from prostitution and drug addiction area, to an area where children will ask tourists for money, where people cannot sleep at ease as bars keep open until late hours. Hopefully, after the nightlife and restaurants phase, another phase where cultural and tourist activities start developing will take place.

As such, the guidelines for the future seem different in Ouro Preto and Porto in terms of strategies for the built environment but both encompass the need to involve the private agents, the property owners, the shopkeepers so that all share the task to keep the historic centres as areas of heritage excellence and superior quality of life. Also, in the social aspects, in terms of endogenous recognition of the area's value by the population, there is a need to invest in programs of social conscience and awakening, support to the creation and keeping of associations, spread of knowledge on the value of the area, promotion of self-

esteem and motivation of the inhabitants. These initiatives are very relevant towards the strengthening of the community and its culture.

In fact, in Porto, the existing cultural, recreational, sportive associations as well as newly formed ones such as for example Portus Cale are given protection by the local authorities. This Association shares a prime location river border area, next door to a helicopter tour enterprise. The space was rented freely to them while the private company has to pay a high rent.

This need for valorisation seems crucial as it reinforces the identity of a community, making it less prone to inappropriate external influences. Therefore, this topic should be addressed in various ways, from talks and campaigns to actions that promote knowledge, self esteem and motivation to cherish and maintain the local/regional differences instead of adhering immediately to the new and what is fashionable.

In conclusion, a new question can be formulated: How much does it cost to reverse an acculturation process undergone by the communities of several tourist places? It is important to notice and take into account that it is not always possible to repair or minimize these costs. As such, it is very important to invest in sustainable development. This concept, although a central issue in tourism literature, is still being implemented in most historic centres rather empirically.

4.0 - THE PERCEIVED ADVANTAGES

As long as tourist activities are well planned and implemented, they can bring numerous benefits to the local communities. The local economy may be increased and diversified, offering more opportunities to the local community. The multiplying effect and the generation of jobs and rents to the local inhabitants are most effective benefits.

Inhabitants perceive a positive effect in the overall effect of tourism even if they resent the overcrowding of space, the traffic congestions and price increases caused by excessive number of tourists.

Local authorities also perceive these value-added inputs as they massively have been joining Associations and tourist routes. Ouro Preto, for example, belongs to two large associations of Brazilian Municipalities with tourist development objectives.

The Golden Route in Minas Gerais has 18 Municipalities while the Programme Royal Road includes three States, Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo and 162 Municipalities. As such, the public initiative has to invest in tourism, giving this sector full attention. The setting of aims and development strategies, the planning of tourism activities with public participation, through the involvement of the local community and economic tourist agents in the management of the area, should be a most important principle of the local, regional and state policies.

The Portuguese Tourism Plan of 1985 stated for the first time a philosophy of development and not merely a growth concept. The objectives stated in this Plan over passed the mere targeting of export-earnings and pointed also at imbalance of regional differentials and asymmetries, a better quality of life and protection of natural environment and enhancement of the country's cultural heritage, strategically pointing out key areas for development (Lourenço, 1989:24). Although this Plan has not been effectively implemented, it has left ideas and strategies that twenty years past, a multitude of actors is taking on. For example, Porto is the assumed lynch-pin of the Northern Region of Portugal. Also, several routes have been designed and implemented, nowadays crossing national boundaries and connecting also to Spanish regions of Galicia and Castilla y León. The networking and institutional re-arrangement towards concentration and innovative management has been taking place slowly but on a consistent basis.

Porto historic centre has had the opportunity of having a specific public administration body (CRUARB) that assumed a pro-active role for the built heritage conservation and development of the area. But as the tourism sector starts assuming a leading role in the area, the shift of functions of this body remains to be seen. That is, the shift from the "hard" functions of locating activities, car parks, rehabilitating or renovating the area to the immaterial functions of coordinating multiple agents and launching initiatives that foster

sustainable tourism development. Most possibly, strategic tourism, urban animation and visitor management policies will have to be designed in the near future. And while the team of Expo-98 in Lisbon had these overall capabilities and Parque-Expo Society keeps managing the area within the new but long acquired “soft” competencies, the CRUARB experience in Porto never involved these dimensions.

The fiscal topic is also a most important one connected with redistributive policies. Effectively, the distribution of the received taxes through accommodation and other sub-sector developments should be reinvested locally increasing the quality of life of the local population and consequently of the tourists and visitors.

Lastly, the end of physical decay and degradation of the historic areas can be a booming factor. And an immaterial but most important benefit for local inhabitants is the chance for self-esteem as the value they see in the tourists’ eyes reflects upon their own perception of value.

5.0 - TRICKLING DOWN EFFECTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Looking at the tourism development in urban centres from these different points of view, a conclusion is obvious. The areas classified as world heritage by UNESCO demonstrate tourism potential, consequently attention to them originates in any part of the globe. But there is a clear distinction to be made and worked upon: tourism potential is very different from tourist product.

When a place has tourism potential, it has the capacity to develop tourism activities, but this capacity has to be worked upon. Therefore, it needs to manage the natural and cultural resources, structure the tourist offer, to develop accommodation and transportation, accessibility and signalling, among other actions. Following the building up of the tourist product, it must be marketed and traded.

Finally, the politicians and public officials should use the important cultural heritage in a sustainable way, keeping responsible action towards the present and the future generations.

Furthermore, they should know how to profit from the cultural potential of these places to revert the benefits through tourism, to their inhabitants, to the conservation of the cultural heritage and for the strengthening of the cultural collective identity. Local municipalities should try to recover full costs, taxing tourists and visitors at cost-price and not making social prices for them. This measure seems to guarantee that the local authorities do not pay for the growth of the tourist sector. And it underlies policies of fairness and accountability that will promote tourism as a source of quality of life for all the parties involved: local inhabitants, tourism industry and the tourists themselves.

Furthermore and to conclude, possibly the most important factor underlying the attraction of an historic city is her capacity to arise emotions, especially affection, in the hearts of those who live there or visit her.

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¹ Doctor in Territorial Planning, Assistant Professor of the Civil Engineering Department at Minho University jloure@civil.uminho.pt

² Postgraduate in *Tourist Planning* at Catholic University of Brasilia – UCB, Lecturer in Tourism Management at Fumec University, danifantoni@ig.com.br