

# Tackling tourism-driven development in World Heritage cities: A comparison between Macao, China and Evora, Portugal

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# Tackling tourism-driven development in World Heritage cities: A comparison between Macao, China and Évora, Portugal

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## **Abstract:**

World Heritage cities, all over the world, are a centre of tourist attraction. In many of these cities, tourism is one of the main driving forces of local economies. As a result, these cities come under intense pressure to accommodate tourism-driven developments; summed up with the pressure to fulfil the needs of local communities. How development in World Heritage cities can be tackled is, thus, an important issue for both heritage management and urban development. This paper presents two World Heritage cities – Macao, a former Portuguese colony in China and Évora, the capital of Alentejo region in Portugal - as case studies and discusses and compares the way tourism-driven development is being tackled in these cities. Macao's economy depends almost entirely on tourism-driven activities. While the World Heritage status has added additional attractiveness to Macao, the main attraction there is gambling. On the other hand, Évora is much less dependent on tourism. Similar to Macao, the World Heritage status has raised the attractiveness of Évora as a tourist destination; however, the university plays also a fundamental role. Consequently, despite the efforts of the local authorities, the city is losing its local community. Even if for different reasons, in both case studies, heritage is often sidelined in the urban development agenda. The case studies identify the raise of cultural-driven tourism and the consequent urban developments and illustrate the role of legislations and regulations and the impact of their variation per heritage protection zones. Moreover, it identifies the resultant urban development scenario that enhance or diminish the heritage values of the cities and, therefore, help retain or cause destruction to the very cultural capital that has brought and can bring many more benefits to these cities of outstanding universal value.

*Keywords: tourism, world heritage cities, urban development, sustainability.*

## **1 Introduction**

Managing urban development is a major challenge in this era of globalization and competitiveness (UNESCO, 2005b). Even more challenging is to manage development in historic urban centres, where meeting “the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987) by respecting the needs and achievements of past generations (Pereira Roders, 2007) is a prime consideration.

In urban development, an integrated revitalization approach that combines preservation with development (UNESCO, 2008c) is fundamental for strengthening local identity, enhancing investment and retaining communities in historic centres (Beatley & Manning 1997; Nasser, 2003). While these interventions help the present generation meeting its needs, often the repercussions of such approach for future generations are largely underestimated, if not totally disregarded.

In most historic centres, tourism is one of the significant driving forces for urban development. Consequently, heritage resources of these centres become marketing instruments for tourism. When overstated, tourism-driven developments start eroding the core values of these places. The over-emphasis on meeting mainly economic objectives results

into serious losses of identity, functional diversity and centrality of the historic centres and turns them into open air museums by converting public facilities and spaces into predominately tourism-driven facilities (Peixoto, 2003), leaving very little space to the resident population.

World Heritage cities face a similar fate almost everywhere. As the centre of tourism attraction, these cities are in fact even more endangered. The fact that any loss of the outstanding universal value of these World Heritage cities can be “an impoverishment of the heritage of all the people of the world” (UNESCO, 2008a) makes the sustainable management of these cities of utmost importance. It is therefore significant to understand the type of development tourism-driven activities can induce in a historic city and how under such circumstances an integrated revitalization of the city can be insured.

To illustrate the challenges of meeting this objective under different contexts, case studies of two World Heritage cities – Évora, the capital of Alentejo region in Portugal and Macao, a former Portuguese colony in China – is discussed and a comparison about the way tourism-driven development is being tackled in these cities is presented.

Évora represents a university city where tourism is being sought as a mean to sustain the liveliness of the city and Macao represents a tourism city that is struggling to cope with the pressure tourism is exerting on the city environment.

### **1.1 The Historic Centre of Évora**

In 1986, the Historic Centre of Évora was the second Portuguese city to integrate the World Heritage List. Today, it is internationally recognized for its cultural heritage significance (CME, 2009).

The reopening of the University of Évora in 1979 had a strong impact in the city and its region (CME, 2009). However, its resident depopulation problem persists increasing. Between 1940 and 2001, Évora has lost almost 70 percent of its resident population (Sousa, Magalhães, & Oliveira, 2005). In contrast, the surrounding zones register a constant demographic growth, especially after 1974 when the national programme for building social housing was implemented (Sousa, Magalhães & Oliveira, 2005).

Nowadays, the population of the historic centre of Évora is moving towards a strong bipolarization: the long-term residents who are considerably aged and have low incomes on the one hand and the temporary population (students and staff) that is young and has higher incomes, on the other. These generational, economic and cultural differences within the population often lead to social conflicts (Sousa, Magalhães & Oliveira, 2005).

Moving towards a point of losing all resident population, the local authorities are now focusing their strategies on stimulating the growth of a new resident population, rather than trying to recover the former one which has left the historic centre for the surrounding zones (CME, 2009).

### **1.2 The Historic Centre of Macao**

The Historic Centre of Macao was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2005, almost twenty years later than the historic centre of Évora. It is a small special administrative region of China of little over 29 square kilometres that has a long history as a trading port. In fact, Macao was the only major sea port in South China Sea until Hong Kong was founded in 1842 (Imon, 2008).

Since 1842, Macao started to lose its importance as a trading port and then Portuguese government had to find another commercial alternative for Macao. Five years later, gambling

was legalized and the revenue from gambling became the main source of income for Macao. Today the tax from gambling represents about 70% of Macao government's income (Imon, 2008).

In 2002, the control over gambling was relaxed and that marked the beginning of a period of unprecedented growth in Macao: economy grew at a very fast rate, building constructions boomed and there was a huge influx of foreign workers to work in various service sectors, including the casinos (Imon, 2008).

## **2 Cultural-driven tourism**

The historic centres of Évora and Macao have distinct tourism-driven positions, but this distinctiveness tends to disappear. Currently, the historic centre of Macao is already almost entirely dependent on tourism-driven activities, but its nature is far more gambling- than cultural-driven. Instead, the university-driven activities still play a fundamental role in the historic centre of Évora (CME, 2009), but the nature of its tourism-driven activities is already mainly cultural.

Both local authorities are targeting for an even more cultural-driven tourism on their strategies for a more sustainable development. According to the local authorities of Évora, one of the main objectives is to “declare Évora as a cultural city” (CME, 2009). Not much different, the Macao government stated that “the sustainable development of Macao rests on attracting tourism interest in cultural heritage”, and they are willing to gradually change Macao into a “City of Culture” (UNESCO, 2005).

During the four years subsequent the nomination of the historic centre of Évora as World Heritage, the number of tourists has tripled (Peixoto, 1997). Similarly, the number of tourists coming to Macao also increased dramatically since 2002. According to government statistics, more than eleven million tourists visited Macao in 2002. In 2007, only two year after its nomination as World Heritage the number jumped to close to twenty seven million. An increase of almost 250 percent, within a five year period (Imon, 2008).

The needs of tourists cannot be simply ignored by the local authorities, even though their length of stay is much shorter than the one of their temporary population such as the students and staff of the University for Evora; and the foreign workers for Macao. They contribute significantly to the economic sustainability of both historic centres.

Consequently, urban developments are planned and executed. Varied buildings are converted into tourism-driven facilities (e.g. hotels, commerce and restaurants) and the residential-driven facilities get even scarcer. Especially for Evora, the cultural-driven tourism has been fomenting several urban developments such as museums, art galleries, theatres, annual cultural festivals, etc (CME, 2009).

Though, both resident populations understand the importance of tourism-driven activities for the sustainable development of their historic centres (e.g., employment and revenue generation), they are concerned about the consequences of such metamorphosis. Particularly in Macao, the most serious concerns are the pressure on the infrastructure, land and their living quality, as well as, the gradual disappearance of traditional commercial activities e.g. traditional/familiar restaurants and small shops (Imon & Lynne, 2008).

With an historic centre with even more tourism-driven activities, these two cities will not see their problem of resident depopulation tackled yet; which is affecting Evora in the classified zones (CME, 2009); and Macao in the buffer zones (Imon, 2008). Instead, it might aggravate and endanger their outstanding universal value even more.

To prevent these historic centres to become open air museums, local authorities are advised to search for broader and less conservative strategies, defined together with the local community. That would prevent residential facilities from moving into the surrounding areas (Berke & Conroy, 2000; Nasser, 2003), and foment the restoration of its functional diversity (Peixoto, 2003).

### **3 Heritage protection zones**

Legislations and regulations are fundamental for the maintenance and protection of the outstanding universal value, authenticity and integrity of a World Heritage property (UNESCO, 2008). Besides influencing the future impact of any intervention (Rizzo and Mignosa, 2005), regulations strongly influence how people appraise heritage (Grefe, 2004).

Both “Heritage Law” – Decree-Law no. 107/2001 – concerning the protection and enhancement of cultural heritage in Portugal and the “Law for the Defence of architectural, landscape and cultural heritage” in Macao – Decree-law n° 56/84/M – foresee varied categories of cultural heritage (monuments, buildings of architectural interest (Macao), architectural groups, and sites) and the respective protection zones.

However, the “Heritage Law” is much more specific on the physical delimitation of protection zones for all buildings, groups of buildings and sites classified as cultural heritage. By nomination, they all have automatically “special protection zones”, which are limited by a 50m radius distance (DR, 2001). In contrast, the Macanese legislation only provides a definition of protection zones, which size differs per cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2005).

Moreover, in both historic centres, there is the requirement of having an architect in the design team of all urban development projects within the protected areas and the external consultation of a National Heritage Organization to appraise them, whenever targeting properties classified as cultural heritage. For Portugal, that is the Architectonic and Archaeological Heritage Institute (IGESPAR), for Macao, the Commission for the Protection of the Architectural, Environmental and Cultural Heritage (CPAEECH).

Even though, the World Heritage Convention recognizes three protection zones for World Heritage properties: the classified zones, the buffer zones and the areas of influence; not all World Heritage properties have them all officially approved or legislated. That is the case of Évora and Macao.

Unlike the classified zones, which have seen its outstanding universal value recognized, the buffer zones and the areas of influence do not integrate the World Heritage property. Though, they are under the World Heritage Convention’s protection for their extreme importance as tools for the “protection, management, integrity, authenticity and sustainability of the outstanding universal value of the property” (UNESCO, 2008b).

Even if similar in size, Évora and Macao have distinct protected zones defined and legislated. Évora only has a classified zone, with an approximate size of 100 ha. There is no buffer zone, nor area of influence officially approved by the World Heritage Committee (CME, 2009) (see figure 1). Instead, Macao has a classified and a buffer zone (UNESCO, 2005) of respectively, 16 and 106 ha (UNESCO, 2009b) (see figure 2).

The Local Authorities of Évora understood the need to define a buffer zone and are now working on its approval. After its first proposal had been refused by the World Heritage Committee in 2008 (UNESCO, 2009), the buffer zone is currently being reformulated and the criteria evaluated by IGESPAR (CME, 2009).

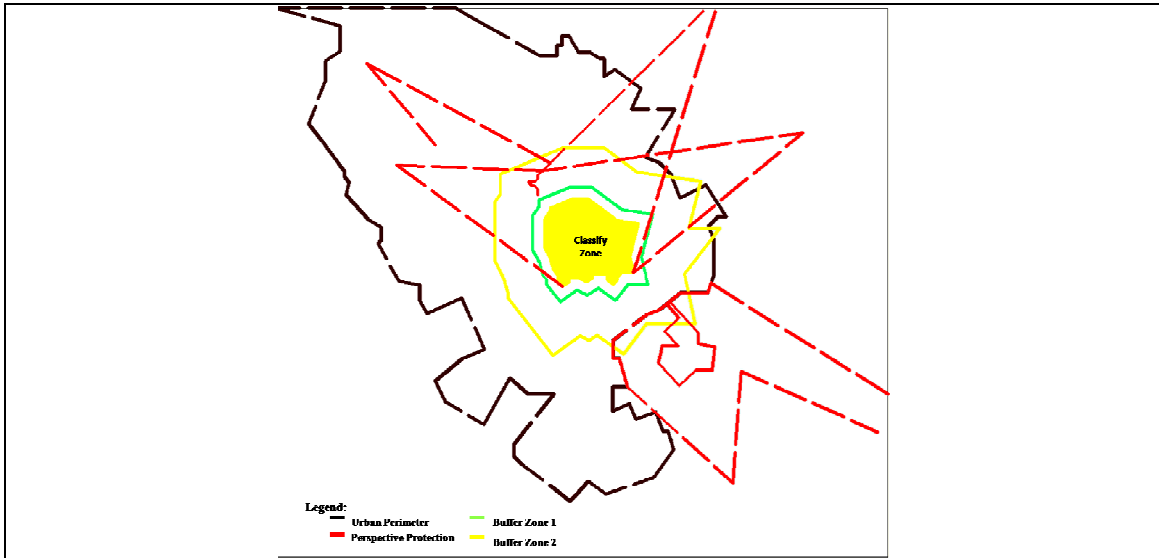


Figure 1: The protected zones in the historic centre of Évora (adapted from CME, 2007)



Figure 2: The protected zones in the historic centre of Macao (UNESCO, 2005)

Like the “special protection zones” for all cultural heritage in Portugal (DR, 2001), the proposed buffer zone covered an area of 23.48 Ha, with its limit 50 meters radius distance to the city walls (see figure 1), the actual limit of the classified zone (UNESCO, 2009). But, among other remarks, its size should respond to the “setting of the city” (UNESCO, 2009), as recommended at the International Expert Meeting on “World Heritage and Buffer Zones” (UNESCO, 2008b).

An important measure for the preservation of the historic centre of Évora was the creation of “perspective protection zones” (see figure 1) within the surrounding zone, decreed at the Urban Development Plan (CME, 2000). According to the Local Authorities of Évora, these zones have been helping to preserve the existing structural and visual integrity, as well as, to maintain the principal sightlines of the classified zone (CME, 2009).

No such measure was found currently active for the historic centre of Macao. Quite the opposite, in 2002, the legislation for the surrounding zones changed and the construction of

high-rise buildings was allowed, despite compromising the visual integrity of both classified and buffer zones (Imon, 2008).

Consequently, the urban development planning in the surrounding zones is taking ever reached proportions, against the aim to “make every effort to develop the management system so as to retain the existing structural and visual integrity, and to maintain the principal sightlines of the nominated area within its contemporary setting” (UNESCO, 2005).

#### 4 Urban management

The cities of Macao and Évora share the considerable differences between the levels of intervention allowed in the protected zones versus the ones allowed in the surrounding zones. Moreover, in both cases there is a strong relation between the scale of the urban development interventions and the property classification.

In Évora, this relation is even to be found within the classified zone (see figure 3). Meaning that, for buildings classified as monuments or as buildings of heritage value, the Local Authorities foresee interventions such as conservation, preservation, restoration and rehabilitation; and their design needs to be appraised by the Local Authorities and IGESPAR.



Figure 3: Classified versus surrounding zones in Évora (CME, 2009)

For remaining buildings within the classified zone, interventions do not necessarily require government consultation as long as they preserve the total mass/dimension and the building alignments, the pre-existing elements (interior and exterior), the traditional materials and technologies, as well as, the small heritage elements (e.g. chimneys, decorations). They can also not exceed 3, 5 meters of height, nor reduce common private spaces (e.g. inner courtyards). Also, façade re-finishing and roof re-coverage needs to use specific materials and techniques (CME, 2000).

Generally, interventions of demolition are not allowed, except in buildings where the reconstruction of the facade is mandatory. The projects for new buildings are allowed on the defined areas, exclusively for residential and touristic uses; however, their height cannot overpass the city walls skyline. However, exceptions can be made (e.g. partial demolitions or extensions) as long as they will improve the living conditions of the population (CME, 2000).

There are buildings within the classified zone with established uses, such as the administrative facilities around the Roman Temple and the educational facilities at the Holy Spirit College. However, even if always favouring residential facilities for subverting the residential depopulation, the functional diversity of the city is being strongly stimulated in the classified zone e.g. commerce and services, hotels, craftwork industry, etc (CME, 2000).

Last, industrial buildings are no longer allowed in the classified zone, and have to be relocated outside the protected zones. Consequently, their former buildings require rehabilitation interventions and the recommended functions are either administrative, residential, mixed (residential and services) and parking uses (CME, 2000).

Unlike Macao, the protection of the classified area in Évora is also taken into account when planning urban development in the surrounding zones of the historic centre (see figure 3). As previously mentioned the “perspective protection zones” is preventing interventions from damaging the visual integrity of Évora and compromise the understanding of its historic urban landscape as a whole.

Unlike Évora, the classified zone in Macao is exclusively composed by classified buildings. The remaining buildings, within the buffer zones, have to comply with some rules. But, as long as their consolidation, modification, conservation, reparation, as well as, all works that do not imply alterations in their façades e.g. composition, texture and painting, their designs do not require governmental appraisal (UNESCO, 2005).

Generally, such interventions are requested to respect the historic integrity of the building and their environment. However, this trust on the urban developers can make the intervened buildings easy targets of misadjusted actions (Imon & Lynne, 2008) e.g. fachadism and irreversible situations that can place the outstanding universal value of the classified zones in danger.

The few rules to comply in the buffer zones of Macao are e.g. the roofs cannot be changed unless it is intended to restore the original silhouette; the court-yards, gardens or other public or private space cannot be changed on its size; the finishing colours must match the surroundings, as well as, the alignments should be respected (UNESCO, 2005).

Moreover the Management Plan also decides upon the height of the buildings, setback, site coverage, buildings dimensions, exterior finishes, facades and coverage (Imon, 2008). These rules are stipulated individually for each set of the monuments and respective buffer zones (UNESCO, 2005).

Demolitions can be approved as long as fully justified and accompanied by a redevelopment plan. The projects for new constructions are restricted within the permitted zones, and have to be appraised positively by the CPAECH.

Also, the legislations in Macao do not impose any mandatory uses for any building within the classified zone. However, they recommend that the selected uses are compatible with the conservation of the architectural features of the properties and their urban environment, as they will be conditioned to the recommended solutions for their preservation, present by the both Local Authorities and CPAECH.

Last, unlike in Évora, industrial and warehouse facilities are still allowed in the historic centre of Macao. However, these facilities will only be approved if it is proved that they do not constitute any problem for the environment (UNESCO, 2005).





Figure 4: Classified versus surrounding zones in Macao

## 5 Major challenges

Facing the ambition to raise even more cultural-driven tourism, both local authorities have the major challenge to prevent their historic centres from losing their entire resident population and become an open air museum. Moreover, the impact of the resultant development should be carefully monitored. Otherwise, at a slow pace, these veiled interventions may be destroying the outstanding universal value of these historic centres.

This major challenge means to effectively control the growth of tourism-driven activities versus the non tourism-driven activities, inclusive the residential-driven activities. For Evora, the local authorities also need to control the growth of university-driven activities. Clear limits could be established for the varied nature of facilities and no further urban development projects could be appraised positively, unless when respecting those limits.

To prevent the irreversible destruction/disappearance of intangible heritage with the eventual resident depopulation of the protected zones, the local authorities should stimulate the inventory, dissemination and continuance of their traditions; even if those undertaking it are no longer the former resident population, but a new one.

## 6 Conclusion

The comparative analyses of these two case studies have shown that tourism-driven activities are playing a fundamental role for the economic sustainability of both historic centres of Evora and Macao; but not for their social and ecological sustainability. It is also clear that tourism-driven development regards the present generations and their needs. However, the repercussions towards both past and future generations are largely disregarded.

Tourism can and shall remain a driving force of urban development, but the local authorities should use it in favour of the sustainable development of their cities. Even cultural tourism should not convert historic centres into an open air museum, nor contribute to the resident depopulation of the protected zones. A balance needs to be reached.

The resident population is fundamental for the sustainable development of historic centres. Further research should focus on the relation between tangible and intangible heritage. When historic centres reach the limit of losing their entire resident population; their intangible heritage might get lost, even when most part of the tangible heritage remains.

The implementation of the international recommendations into national and local legislations may also be playing a misleading role, away from their noble intentions. Buffer zones and areas of influence should not be feared but acknowledged for their merits towards

the classified zones. The gap between their legislations and the legislations of the surrounding zones should be strongly diminished.

The sustainable development of the city as a whole; crosses legislations from classified, buffer, areas of influence and surrounding zones. The “perspective protection” decreed by the local authorities of Évora are certainly a strategy to explore within the concept of areas of influence. Nonetheless, to become areas of influence they need to be approved as such.

All opportunities for de-contextualized urban development should be erased from the legislation; despite zone, cultural heritage classification, scale of intervention, building’s exterior/interior, etc. Further research is required to identify the bridges and gaps between these different legislations; in order to effectively contribute to the raise of sustainability of urban developments in these historic centres. Consequently, they remain part of the cities they self witness evolving.

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