

# **Experience Tourism and Cultural Equipment: The artisanal production of CEPRAMA in São Luís-MA**

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## **Abstract**

*This article's main objective is studying the conceptual relationships that intertwine between the tourist phenomenon and the appreciation of local culture in the city of São Luís/MA. Having as object of study the development process of the production, exhibition and sale of handicrafts in the Center for Craft Production of Maranhão (CEPRAMA). Focusing on broader concepts such as: culture, experience tourism and cultural tourism, unfolding into more specific concepts such as: heritage, cultural facilities, crafts and identity. The research is relevant for studying an activity of great importance to the city's economy, cultural tourism, which seeks to value local culture through the acquisition of knowledge from the tourist and the community. For the discussion to develop, authors such as: Eagleton (2011), Barreto (2003), Fernandes (2015), Hall (2006), Panosso Netto (2010), Tuan (1983), among others were used. This is a bibliographical and documentary research (since it is characterized as one of the chapters of the Master's Thesis, it will analyze instrumental aspects of the research in loco), where the discussion seeks to maintain an interdisciplinary and transversal dialogue between the concepts, focusing on the importance the cultural appreciation and the gains that the tourist phenomenon can provide to the city of São Luís/MA.*

**Keywords:** Cultural Tourism; CEPRAMA; Experience Tourism; Handicraft.

## **1. Introduction**

This article is the result of discussions raised in the first chapters of a dissertation work that has been developed about the phenomenon of experience coupled up to tourist activity in the city of São Luís, having as object of observation the process of interaction between tourists and local population within the dynamics of the Handicraft Production Center installed in the former Textile Factory Cântamo. It begins by discussing the transversal conceptual relationship between experience, culture and artisanal production. After a more comprehensive conceptualization, concepts such as cultural tourism, experience tourism and cultural facilities are discussed, like other related concepts too. Those concepts are developed to guide the

research in loco, increased in another phase of the research.

## 2. Conceptual transversal relationships between experience, tourism, culture and cultural equipments

Actual world has been passing through a moment of resignifications, where relationships between people acquire new facets, enabling that the interactions may occur much faster, through factors such as: technology, ease of contact between disparate and distinct cultures and societies, opening of borders that were previously inaccessible, and, of course, by the search of human beings for experiences far from their place of residence. Because of these and other factors, the world has been experiencing a deterritorialization of its economy and social relations, about this subject, Pierry Lévy (1996) says:

The contemporary economy is an economy of deterritorialization or of virtualization. The main sector in the world in terms of volume, let us remember, is tourism: travel, hotels, restaurants. Humanity has never dedicated so many resources to not being present, to eating, sleeping, living outside their home, getting away from their home. (LÉVY, 1996, p. 31. **Free translation**).

A re-signification of the experiences of contact between societies can be observed, and this being in contact requires resources that did not exist before, like: technologies in general, both software and hardware; access routes for contact to be in person; physical support equipment; intermediation between speeches, as is the case of translators and interpreters; etc., features that make the phenomenon of experience much more comprehensive, elaborate and diversified. But what is meant by experience? The Cambridge Online Dictionary defines experience as:

*noun*

*(the process of getting) knowledge or skill from doing, seeing, or feeling things:*

*something that happens to you that affects how you feel;*

*the way that something happens and how it makes you feel*

*verb*

*(the process of getting) knowledge or skill that is obtained from doing, seeing, or feeling things, or something that happens which has an effect on you.<sup>1</sup>*

In general terms, experience has to do with what is acquired of knowledge about a certain entity, place or object, this knowledge may or may not be deepened, intensified, and the means by which this experience is acquired is entirely empirical and sensory. This knowledge is undeniably a practical and active knowledge, as the experience, mainly, uses the interaction between people to be even more genuine. Yi-Fu Tuan (1983) conceptualizes experience as a term that:

Covers the different ways in which a person knows and constructs reality. These ways diversify from the more direct and passive senses such as smell, taste and touch, til active visual perception and the indirect way of symbolizing. [...] The thought colors all human experience, including the primary sensations of heat and cold, pleasure and pain. Experience implies the ability to learn from the experience itself. To experience is to learn; it means acting on the data and creating from it. The data cannot be known in its essence. (TUAN,

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1 Available in: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/pt/dicionario/ingles/experience>. Access is: Aug. 10, 2021.

1983, p. 9-10. **Free translation**).

The experience cannot be limited or static, but it involves an empirical process that goes through physical sensation and reaches human thought itself, thus perpetuating itself in the memory and becoming the way in which the individual understands and builds his reality (TUAN, 1983). An experience can mark the individual in such an intimate and particular way, to the point of building his identity memory, and at the same time it can mark him in such a relational way as to determine aspects of his reality as a whole, with the community in which he is inserted. Halbwachs (1990), detach the individual's relationship with objects, building private and collective memory, highlighting the relationship of memory with memory objects and the space the human being occupy, memory changes with each space the individual is in, objects pass to have a memory value according to the particular experience it provides to the subject. Corroborating with Halbwachs (1990), Stuart Hall (2006), affirm that:

Identity becomes a “mobile celebration”: formed and continuously transformed in relation to the ways in which we are represented or challenged in the cultural systems that surround us [...]. It is defined historically, not biologically. The subject assumes different identities at different times, identities that are not unified around a coherent “I”. [...] A fully unified, complete, secure and coherent identity is a fantasy. (HALL, 2006, p. 13. **Free translation**).

It is seen that Stuart Hall (2006) says that the particular experience can become a collective experience, when it starts to be shared between individuals. When it comes to cultural interactions, the experience is highlighted in this aspect, as the exchanges enable the strengthening of identity aspects of the community, based on the valuation provided by the knowledge acquired in this interaction process.

The experience thus acquires the character of a transdisciplinary phenomenon, since it is not just about the individual's view of the reality, but permeates the construction of private and collective memories, being structurally constructed and maintained in society and reverberating in history (Halbwachs, 1990). This transdisciplinary view of experience can be observed within the phenomenon of consumption of cultural products, Fernandes (2015) explains it very well by stating that:

During an experience, the combination of the products and services that make up the offer reveals the composite and compound character of tourism. For example, when visiting a cultural attraction, it is not only the attraction itself that is decisive, but what involves it – whether it is transport, a guided tour, the availability of brochures and explanatory materials or the existence of entertainment activities. (FERNANDES, 2015, p. 16. **Free translation**).

The experience thus has several determinants that are not intrinsic to the main entity of the relationship and this can be observed in the artisanal production process, since for the visitor to be able to consume a handcrafted product, there is a range of activities related to this moment of sale, depending on several factors that work in concert in pursuit of a greater objective: providing leisure, entertainment and knowledge to the tourist (FERNANDES, 2015). The development of experience within a cultural facility takes with it all the cultural load of the client and the local community. About culture, it should be clarified that, contrary to common sense, it is not defined only as cultural manifestations, or parties and celebrations. According to Eagleton (2011):

If culture means the active search for natural growth, then the word suggests a dialectic between the artificial and the natural, what we do to the world and what the world does to us. It is an epistemologically

«realistic» notion, insofar as it presupposes the existence of a nature or raw material beyond ourselves; but it also has a «constructivist» dimension, since this raw material has to be worked on until it is given a meaningful human form. It is, therefore, not so much about deconstructing the opposition between culture and nature as about recognizing that the term «culture» is already, in itself, this deconstruction (EAGLETON, 2011, p.13. **Free translation**).

He defines culture as a set of habits and customs belonging, disseminated and inherited by a people within a certain geographic area (EAGLETON, 2011). The author summarizes his concept, corroborating other authors, because:

In an approximate way, culture can be summarized as the complex of values, customs, beliefs and practices that constitute the way of life of a specific group. [...] The cultural and the social thus become effectively similar. Culture will then be everything that is not genetically transmitted. It is, as one sociologist says, the conviction that human beings <<are what they are taught>>. Stuart Hall offers an equally generous idea of culture as <<vital practices>> or <<practical ideologies that allow a society, a group or a class, to experience, define, interpret, and understand its conditions of existence>>. (EAGLETON, 2011, p. 52. **Free translation**).

Terry Eagleton (2011) summarizes his own thinking and of other authors, concluding that the definition of culture is quite complex and is defined as which is not genetically transmitted, but is apprehended by human beings during their experiences. (EAGLETON, 2011). The richness of this definition also shows that a conceptualization of culture is based on the experience of the human being throughout his life. At this point, the definition becomes even more important for this research, because here it is about the importance of experimentation as a necessary tool for obtaining knowledge, interaction, economic gains, etc. He is also shows that culture develops on a daily basis, through the ideological practice of living and interpreting the way of life and the existence of a certain social group (EAGLETON, 2011), and this concept arises from an approximation with the work of Stuart Hall (*The State and Popular Culture – 1982*), that is, it is seen that the thoughts corroborate each other, in a conceptual complement. Eagleton (2011) proceed:

In the postmodern world, culture and social life are once again intimately linked, now, however, through the aestheticization of consumer goods, politics as a spectacle, the consumer lifestyle, the centrality of image and definitive integration of culture in the general production of goods. Aesthetics, which began as a term to designate the everyday experience of perception and only later became specialized in art, thus describes a full circle, rediscovering its mundane origin, like two of the senses of culture – arts and life common – had merged into style, fashion, advertising, media and the resemblings. (EAGLETON, 2011, p. 45-46. **Free translation**).

Appreciating consumer goods, emphasizing their previously unrecognized beauty, now gives them a new meaning. Now, people can see art in an object of culinary use, for example, thanks to its peculiarity and historical and cultural representation of a certain people, or of a certain period. Handicraft is a great example of this new vision of the cultural representation of a people, highlighting its identity. Thus, an artisanal cultural production center becomes a place where local culture is exposed, and not just a place where common utensils are bought.

Art gives a new meaning to each piece, and this makes the customs represented by such objects to be exalted, preserved and disseminated. In this sense, Scótolo and Panosso Netto (2015) corroborate this idea,

as they claim that each place, each people, each community develops based on its basic cultural characteristics, one cannot think of a community through the peculiarities of other societies. Therefore, the appreciation of local cultural production permeates the appreciation of local identity, each object carries with it an identity representation of a particular group, people or society. Bauman (2005), in his interview with Benedetto Vecchi, comes to a very interesting definition of identity, defending that:

Identity politics, therefore, speaks the language of those marginalized by globalization. But many involved in postcolonial studies emphasize that recourse to identity should be seen as an ongoing process of redefining itself and inventing and reinventing its own history. That's when we discover the ambivalence of identity: nostalgia for the past combined with total agreement with "liquid modernity". This is what creates the possibility of transforming the planetary effects of globalization and using them in a positive way. (BAUMAN, 2005, p. 6-7. **Free translation**).

Identity survives the effects of modernity, allowing people to interact with their past to transform their future. In the context in which the world currently live, preserving cultural identity is a major challenge in the management of cultural facilities, Marta Porto (2007), states that access to cultural products is made possible by cultural facilities, which encourage the process of cultural enjoyment (PORTO, 2007) and, in this context, the questioning of what would be the Cultural Equipment emerges. It can be understood, according to the authors Santos e Davel (2017), that:

The term cultural equipment refers to "buildings intended for cultural practices", serving to designate cultural organizations of the most diverse types such as theaters, cinemas, libraries, archives, galleries, multipurpose spaces, concert halls, museums, among others. It serves as a synonym for terms such as culture house, cultural space, cultural complex, cultural set, cultural center or point of culture. (SANTOS; DAVEL, 2017, p. 04. **Free translation**).

This definition also covers the center of artisanal production, which is the object of this study, as it is a center of cultural production, according to the aforementioned definitions of culture and production of culture. The authors give the cultural equipment three characteristics that define and specify it, namely: "1) being built-up spaces; 2) specially dedicated to cultural action and 3) permanently functioning. [That is,] building, specialization and perpetuity" (SANTOS; DAVEL, 2017, p. 04. **Free translation**).

The above characterization further clarifies the possibility of including CEPRAMA in the category of cultural facilities, since it is imbricated in a physical space with great historical representation; it shows itself as a space of cultural representation, not only in artisanal production, but in the execution of cultural manifestations such as: parties, events, presentations, etc.; and, despite the pandemic scenario that society has been experiencing, since 2019, artisanal production continues to be carried out, even with government assistance, it is observed that the production center managed to keep its economic, cultural and social representation active. On the economic/cultural role of social responsibility with the local community of cultural facilities, Santos and Davel (2017) continue saying that:

The cultural equipment is a meeting point for artists, show technicians and managers; between artists and artists; between artists and thinkers; between artists and audience; between public and work and, finally, between all these and the city itself. This crossover of different flows and social actors highlights the importance and transversality of the action of this type of organization. By sheltering and promoting the most varied cultural actions, cultural facilities play an important artistic-cultural part.. (SANTOS; DAVEL,

2017, p. 05. **Free translation**).

Cultural facilities, such as the Craft Products Trading Center studied here, have this characteristic of cultural transversality, as they bring together a range of agents, such as managers, artisans, artists, local consumers, visitors, etc. During the interaction of these groups – which can be an interaction of person to person, person to group and from groups to groups of people – it is possible to verify the development of a remarkable cultural experience, as this experimental transversality allows the cultural loads of each person or group can be viewed, known, apprehended, highlighted, admired, valued, etc. Reflecting on the perspective of the audience *versus* the perspective of cultural agents within this interaction, the authors claim that cultural facilities:

From the perspective of the public, they offer opportunities for enjoyment, learning about artistic practices and, in some cases, space for expressions of identity, mobilizing sensibilities and promoting experiences related to the symbolic and aesthetic dimension. From the perspective of cultural agents, they enable the development and improvement of artistic, curatorial, archival, heritage, technical management practices and knowledge inherent to cultural production, constituting, in many cases, laboratories for creation and reflection around artistic activities. (SANTOS; DAVEL, 2017, p. 05-06. **Free translation**).

Cultural facilities represent for the public the enjoyment and experimentation, enabling artistic practices that represent the local identity, the dimension of the experience in these places is much greater, much more than the consumption of a product, a remarkable experience for life (SANTOS; DAVEL, 2017). The authors talk about the impact of the same center on the lives of culture producers, with economic and identity gains: strengthening the image they have of themselves; encouraging their personal and professional growth through training; encouraging the transfer of knowledge and practices to future generations; generating community involvement in the construction, exhibition and execution of demonstrations and products that represent the local way of life; etc.

The importance of a cultural production center – like the one studied here – in the tourist activity, a great generator of income, is highlighted here. Cultural tourism linked to experience tourism encourages the development of local sustainability by developing it in a responsible way. The importance of tourism to the economy has been in evidence in recent decades, it is noted that around the world:

Countries, States and cities have resorted to tourism as a development strategy, assuming that tourism has the potential to rectify economic and social inequalities through the generation of employment and income. (SCÓTOLO; PANOSSO NETTO, 2015, p. 37. **Free translation**).

Tourism acts as a vector for employment and income generation, traveling has never been so necessary, because: the current moment has awakened a feeling of need for interaction between people; emotional stress demands distraction, rest and entertainment; the landscape of travel and cultural enjoyment has changed and travel has become both necessary and different because social relationships have changed; marketing actions encourage people to visit places that were previously undervalued and this awakens the adventurous feeling in travelers; distances are getting shorter because equipment and transport routes are developing and commuting time is decreasing, making travel less tiring and more pleasurable; etc. Highlighting this tourism bias, Scótolo and Panosso Netto (2015) show that:

It is a fact that, whether for reasons of leisure, work, studies, health seeking or others, tourism is related to the displacement of people and these displacements have costs and move the economy. Thus, tourism has

been related to economic practices and pointed out as an important activity in economically “underdeveloped” regions that produce or could produce some tourist interest in more fortunate travelers. (SCÓTOLO; PANOSSO NETTO, 2015, p. 40. **Free translation**).

The importance of Tourism as an activity that drives local development is seen and deserves the attention of managers from all scopes of administration. Furthermore, it is necessary to study tourism paying attention to its segments and understanding how each one develops, since tourism, according to Fúster (1973):

Is, on the one side, a group of tourists; on the other, the phenomena and relationships that this mass produces as a result of their travels. Tourism is all the receptive equipment of hotels and travel agencies, transport, shows, interpreter-guides that the core must enable to meet the currents [...]. Tourism is the set of private or public organizations that emerge to foster infrastructure and the expansion of the nucleus [...]. It is also the effects [...] that take place in the recipient populations. (*apud* BARRETO, 2003, p. 11. **Free translation**). Corroborating Fúster (1973), Barreto (2003) defines that “Tourism is undeniably the most important economic activity in the world. It is currently moving more money worldwide than the arms industry” (BARRETO, 2003, p. 95. Free translation). In other words, an activity that generates so much interaction must be organized so that it can be used much better. Classical Tourism authors defined it as an activity related to the movement of people, in a perspective very linked to the economic bias, without taking into account aspects more related to visitor satisfaction and even less concerned with the resident of the visited location, in this way tourism was regarded as an industry, an example of this, Wagen and Davies (2003), when defining the activity in relation to hospitality and leadership, define tourism as “one of the fastest growing industries in the world” (WAGEN; DAVIES, 2003, p.10. **Free translation**).

Wagen and Davies (2003) also emphasize the tourism industry bias in their analysis of the activity in Australia, stating that this is the activity that generates the most income in that country, the data presented indicate the economic importance of tourism for Australia, such as largest generator of foreign exchange (WAGEN; DAVIES, 2003). Another statement that follows this thought is the one said by the authors Chris Cooper, John Fletcher, Alan Fyall, David Gilbert, Stephen Wanhill (2007), where they postulate that:

History teaches us that tourist activity would be relatively new, and that only a short time ago it would have come to be considered worthy of greater business investments or deeper academic studies. However, tourism is an important enough activity in economic terms, and the impact it has on economies, environments and society is significant enough that this topic deserves academic consideration. (COOPER; FLETCHER; FYALL; GILBERT; WANHILL, 2007, p. 33. **Free translation**).

The authors argue that tourism is still a new activity and that it raises discussions about the method of study it uses. As a still new subject, it had been studied in a more restricted and quantitative way, without taking into account more intangible variables, such as the degree of tourist satisfaction with the product consumed, for example.

It is understood that these classic analyzes showed the gains obtained economically, however, they did not take into account aspects such as environmental, cultural, social, historical impacts, etc. caused by tourism as a vast and multifaceted phenomenon. An analysis with a multidisciplinary bias should emphasize other aspects, in a more complete approach to the activity. For this reason, new, more current and transdisciplinary concepts consider tourism as a sociocultural phenomenon, not only as an industry that

provides quantitative data, but as a multifaceted activity that offers gains in various sectors for the community where it is carried out and for the visitors who are responsible for the existence of tourism.

One of the most current definitions of tourism is that of Panosso Netto (2010), who states the following: Tourism is related to the possibility of social inclusion; development of actions to minimize its negative impacts and maximize the positive ones; collection of qualitative and quantitative data; production of critical knowledge in search of its better understanding; implementation of public tourism policies; interdisciplinary studies that involve society in all its economic, political, cultural, social and environmental aspects in the search for solving any problem caused by travel; analysis and forecasting of tourism development trends. (PANOSSO NETTO, 2010, p. 17. **Free translation**).

This definition by Panosso Netto (2010) embraces more completely what this work wants to demonstrate about the importance of tourism as a dynamic and multifaceted activity, in a more recent production, Denise Scótoló and Alexandre Panosso Netto (2015) reaffirm this line of thought, by claiming that:

Tourism is permeated by a series of ideas and concepts related to the theme of travel. It can remit to the idea of vacation for the tourist, the idea of profit for the entrepreneur, the idea of job and income generation for the workers, and the idea of local development for the indigenous community. (SCÓTOLO; PANOSSO NETTO, 2015, p. 39. **Free translation**).

Still in this same holistic perspective, Scherer (2019) corroborates with Panosso Netto (2010) and Scótoló and Panosso Netto (2015) when stating that:

A clear and complete definition does not only cover the trip, days spent and motivations. It also considers the relationships and possible consequences of the flow both for tourists and for the host locations; the multiplicity of institutional and business agents involved so that the phenomenon can manifest itself; the implications, not only economic, but also social and cultural. [Tourism is a] Socio-economic phenomenon that nucleates a series of related activities, resulting from the displacement of people to a certain location, in search of different activities and experiences for leisure, studies or business, which has the capacity to expand income, employment and quality of life in the regions where it occurs. (SCHERER, 2019 p. 31. **Free translation**).

This work takes for itself the transdisciplinary concepts of tourism, assuming the dynamic and holistic character of this activity. The dynamics of its various segments must be taken into account when studying experience tourism, which is still expanding. This research is therefore dedicated to this correlation within tourist facilities, noting that:

When we talk about experience tourism, we are referring to a type of tourism that intends to mark the tourist in a deep and positive way [...]. We are not referring to any type of experience, although we believe that every human act, contextualized or not, generates or comes from an [experience]. (PANOSSO NETTO, 2010, p. 44. **Free translation**).

Experience tourism is an activity aimed at the gaze of the tourist, the visitor, but, at the same time, taking into account the local population, the visited community. That's why this activity is intrinsically linked to local culture, using its cultural equipment to develop, and bringing as feedback the cultural appreciation and encouragement of cultural activities. Thus, experience tourism is closely related to cultural tourism, often becoming the same segment of tourist activity. When making a transdisciplinary analysis of the concept of cultural tourism, it is observed that this is also shown as a comprehensive concept, as Marujo



(2015) points out, stating that:

The concept of cultural tourism is complex and, therefore, there is a huge debate among academics about its conceptualization. In other words, “cultural tourism due to its multidisciplinary nature is difficult to conceptualize because it is knowledge, but it is also experience, it presupposes the active participation of the individual and implies subjectivity with regard to the perceptions of individuals who observe a culture through their own representations. On the other hand, cultural tourism is dynamic and evolving in a certain space[...]”. (MARUJO, 2015, p. 09. **Free translation**).

Therefore, it is concluded that cultural tourism is a dynamic activity, which uses the space where it is located to enhance it, providing tourists with knowledge and at the same time enabling an experience of immersion in the local culture, and this cultural experience should be encouraged through artisanal production and commercialization, defended here. Cultural facilities are the materialization of the cultural experience that tourists seek, tourism acts as a tool that facilitates the contact of tourists with cultural products within cultural facilities.

For this reason, the artisanal production center studied here is an important tool for the use of culture, both for residents and local workers, through artisan producers, and for visitors, who manage to interact with these local agents, valuing the native culture and getting a genuine and satisfying experience that will be remembered for a lifetime. It is clear that cultural facilities in São Luís, like CEPRAMA, play the part of facilitators of tourist experience and need to be increasingly used in this regard.

### **3. Final Considerations**

The importance of the Artisanal Production and Commercialization Center – CEPRAMA, as cultural equipment, in the city of São Luís, and its role as a producer and diffuser of culture, identity objects, leisure, entertainment, cultural history, etc., is highlighted. When speaking about cultural appreciation, the above concepts are intertwined and gain greater representation when it comes to the study of society. For this reason, it is emphasized that CEPRAMA must have public policies on marketing, valorization, development and preservation;

Tourism acts as a vector of experience in the city, providing, through experience tourism, cultural exchanges between the local community and visitors, becoming an important generator of economic, cultural and social profits. In this way, it is necessary to develop this activity in the place, allowing a valued experience for the community and a genuine and remarkable one for the tourist;

The concepts of cultural tourism, experience tourism and sustainable tourism are related in a transdisciplinary way with the concepts of culture and cultural facilities, allowing to understand their function within the study proposed here, which seeks to understand the dynamics of production artisanal developed in cultural and tourist facilities, namely the Maranhao Artisanal Production and Commercialization Center – CEPRAMA;

Finally, it is expected that the concepts presented and related here are verified and corroborated with the results obtained in the locus of the empirical research that will be developed through a case study, where questionnaires will be applied to CEPRAMA space visitors, as well as to managers and workers in general who sell products that represent the local culture of the city of São Luís.

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