MOZAMBIQUE ISLAND: TRANSFORM A WORLD HERITAGE SITE IN A TOURISTIC DESTINATION [1]

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ABSTRACT

Heritage is taken by the Unesco and by national governments as a good way to attract tourism. However in a global world and in a postcolonial context the reality in the ground can reveal other representations and interpretations. The local level - present by the difficulty of everyday living and the past memories – must be taken into account for the success or not of investments in tourism. The local context is powerful in making the facilities or, on the contrary, bringing the local conflicts to the tourism scenarios. The Mozambique Island is a case study for understanding some of these questions. The reification of the place for tourist consumption let the "community", the owner, in the Unesco's terms, outside of the recreated mystical past. The investors complain about the passivity of the people and reclaim changing for a better environment. The resistance for changing for a better way of life must be understood through local logic, knowledge and motivations.

KEYWORDS

Postcolonial Heritage, Community, Touristic Scenario, Touristic Commodity, Memories and Conflict.

1. GOALS

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the process of creation of a touristic destination based in a Heritage World Site, in Mozambique Island. Two major problems emerge when we started to deal with the site classification.

First of all the problem of propriety and legitimacy must be acknowledged. Who is and who represents a cultural heritage identified with the colonial legacy. The lifestyle of the local population, their current practices and representations of the "Portuguese Heritage" reveal a process of "cultural objectification" (Wagner: 1986) that in different ways may be interpreted as an attitude of rejection. The material heritage is seen as something coming from the outside and not as "ours". On the other hand, the government of Mozambique claims for the property of a national "multicultural heritage"[2]. The process of transformation of the Island, site of World Heritage legacy, in a touristic destination

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[1] This paper was developed in the context of the Project PTDC/ANT/67235/2006 "Castelos a Bombordo, práticas de monumentalização do passado e discursos de cooperação em Países de Edificação de Património Português", CRIA, was and supported by FCT - Foundation for Science and Technology.

[2] The heritage of Mozambique Island is seen as a multicultural legacy left by all kind of changes that have occurred there; from Europe but also from the continents that border the Indian Ocean. All these flows of people in terms of population reflect in two communities of the Island: the "Portuguese" and the "Africans". Today, within the context of representations and actions, the first one is remember through the Town City, the "material heritage", and the other as "immaterial heritage" by the houses of Macuti, but mainly for their dances and traditions. The material and the intangible are from different traditions.

reveals the same contradiction. The investors, as well as the tourists, are mostly Europeans. Their presence means for the local population an opportunity "to sell" them part of the buildings to build an authentic touristic scenario (MacCanell: 1976) which implies changing the rules of propriety in the country.

Second, developing a tourist destination in an environment of excessively poor population may be a risk and turns very problematic the creation of a balanced atmosphere, in social and environmental terms, essential to provide a positive touristic experience.

The ambiguity between the welfare of the tourists, the heritage protection and the relationship with the authorities and the inhabitants does not guarantee the solutions to a sustainable local development. The touristic commoditization of the Island is an open process, that request a permanently negotiation between the local authorities and the touristic investors.

2. METHODS

The research has been conducted during the years of 2008 and 2009, in two periods of fieldwork. By living in the Island in different periods, it became possible participate in different activities, collecting different data. The most currently tool were interviews to different agents in the field as well as life stories. The interviews have developed from an informal form to a more structured one. As an ethnographic research many different issues data have been collected, but for the purpose of this paper, only those related with the authorities of the local government and the different agents of local tourism, namely the investors, one local association and some "workers" in the sector.

3. RESULTS

The Mozambique Island is a small space – 500m by 3 km - in the north coast of the country. Occupied by the Portuguese, from the XVI century, it was, until XIX century, the most important town of what became Mozambique. During these centuries the Portuguese have built a "Stone Town" for a hierarchical society with the governor on the top, a kind of court society (Elias:1995) . During the XIX century the Island was divided in two parts: the "Stone town" for Portuguese and the "Macuti Town" for the locals (Aharus: 1985). It is still with this initial dichotomy that, today, the Mozambique Government and UNESCO have to deal. However, at the present time, the "Stone Town" - in ruins or in process of recuperation, mostly for tourism - and the "Macuti Town" - overcrowded by almost 16000 inhabitants whose situation is in most cases of absolutely poverty . For the authorities, the occurrence of tourism represents an opportunity for restoring the old heritage and providing economic growth. But, actually, a tacit conflict was opened. To foster the growth of tourism, it is taken for granted that a substantial part of population must be dislocated to the continent and relocate the locals in a invented continental "Millenium Village"[3].

However the inhabitants want keep to live in the Island. For fishermen or little traders, the business of tourism is quite distant from their way of life. Finally, the investors in the old Portuguese houses fear that their investment could be jeopardized in this context. And although some measures are taken by the concerned institutions, the situation remains on a weak balance for all the groups involved.

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[3] "Millenium Village" is a program from ONU for developing villages, try creating a new order based in self self consumption and education. The design of one of these villages in the continent is not see by the population as a promise of devellpoment but as a forced option.

The tourists who visit the Island value all the signs associated with the "nostalgia of the past". It is between the "marks" of the past - ruins and monuments of the Town of Stone - that they authenticate their own romantic experience (MacCannell; 1976: Urry: 1990).

Staying for 2 or 3 days, the tourists with whom I spoke, were really delighted with the place: the restored houses where they were guests, restaurants with decorated in a colonial way, the museum, churches and some monumental buildings. Of course they regret the abandon of the buildings in "Stone Town", but even the ruins are a major subject for their cameras.

As a Portuguese itinerary from the end of the colonial period describes, the Town of Macuti is just a marvel of colour and light, a proof of the innocence of the people (Lobato: 1966; Sousa: 2009). In fact, from a tourist experience point of view, this may, in a certain way, be described as a "non local" (Augé: 1994), a distant landscape, beyond the experience of interaction, a distance which reflects the gaze of the tourists (Urry: 1990).

The local population tries to hide its problems from the tourists, in order to provide them with a more acceptable experience. Young boys who sell some souvenirs and drive the tourists through the Island do not speak about the Macuti – nothing to notice[4]. They drive the tourists around the Macuti Town, not inside, and the tourist gaze seems to cover some scenes and people. In the landscape made by everyone the local life is a distant and impressionist sign. The attitude of looking to the past is embedded with the occidental concept of the heritage given by UNESCO (Lowenthal: 2009) and incorporate the consumption of the place made by the tourists[5].

4. CONCLUSIONS

The reification of the heritage, instead of being a neutral and equalitarian tool at the local level, becomes in fact a device showing the local fractures and divisions. The development of tourism depends on the ability to deal with the local representations and interests, on the aptitude to provide a touristic sense to the cultural heritage, changing it in a local symbol and in a commodity.

The binomial tourists/ UNESCO shows the joint representation of the Stone City as Heritage, leaving the population outside of the patrimonial identity. In this sense they are not the "community" of belonging identified by UNESCO. The "community" who belongs to the heritage, in the Unesco

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[4] In fact, the boys hide their local identity. Usually they give an occidental name to tourists instead of their muslin names. This strategy is a way of helping the tourists to remember them, in case a tourist sends them some of the goodies they ask for. The post office employee told me that consequently it happens often that she does not recognizes the boys … because they did not use their really names.

[5] And cover some touristic policies to involve the poorest. As an example, let me tell a paradox situation with which I was confronted in my field work. One day I visited a woman in Macuti Town , I have been looking for her because of her important role in a women's muslin association. But instead of speaking about the association she preferred to complain about a cyclone that had taken her roof and empathize how unfair it was that the Portuguese had receive a lot of money for the rehabilitation of the fortress while the people who live in the Island received much less for their homes. Some weeks later, I found her name in an awareness program for the population about the heritage. When I met her she was making a break to do her muslin prayers of the middle of the day in a patio of the house. The training was about the architecture of the catholic churches in the Island. For the Unesco former that action is to make people "learn about the local heritage", but for the women it was an helper in incoming for his life (this was an opportunity to get some more incomes to help dealing with their daily expenses). The contradiction in the different levels of touristic policies arises once more, through these kind of misunderstandings about integration (Hall:1994).

sense, is a "imagined community" (Anderson: 1991), not the local one. On the other hand, there are no such things as a unit community (Amit: 2002), and a unique interpretation.

As we know in anthropology there are always "different voices" in the ground and of course different forces (Cliford:1 986). A local association of tourism services try take a place in the tourism business. This group supported by the local government depends of their resources – houses or land – that they try to convert to tourism offer. But the uncertainty about the demand of tourists - "what they like" – a question of taste and feelings that only the intimacy cultural provides. In another words the access to western culture as a "capital" (Bourdieu: 1979).

Tourism, as others global cultural forms provide the reification of the heritage, an hegemonic approach that gives the illusion of a neutral matter, but, in fact, it is not only a resource. The construction of the heritage as a touristic commodity cannot avoid the arguments in economic and political fields (Boniface: 2000; Urry: 1997). Therefore the heritage tourism option discuss here is impregnated on the conditions and relations ascribed in the field.

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