

## Foreword

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# CULTURAL HERITAGE IN TOURIST CONTEXTS

These days, the culture of tourist travel is very much linked to that of heritage consumption. The roots of this link can be found in the early days of tourist travel at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, when the tourist experience consisted in discovering historical remains, works of art, and cultural and natural landscapes. Tourism (which we should perhaps regard as one of the socially most important manifestations of modernity in capitalist and industrialist societies) contributed to the appreciation, in economic terms, of the legacy and cultural present of many peoples, as well as their natural surroundings and resources. The capitalisation and commercialisation of certain objects implied the idea that these resources contained *intrinsic* properties that predisposed them to tourist consumption, which is why a value hierarchy was established between those objects that could have a market interest and generate a return, and those that did not. In this sense, the phenomenon of tourism contributed to heritage “activation”, “promotion”, “categorisation” and “classification” linked to power interests, and planted a series of dominant references in our collective imagination which, in many western European destinations, have endured over the decades. Moreover, in the Catalan case, it should be added that it had a strong political dimension, as the tourist display of some cultural and natural landscapes and objects served to express identity symbols and vindicate national aspirations. All in all, throughout the first third of the 20th century, heritage was used as a factor in competitiveness and territorial prestige within the context of an emerging tourist system.

Today, in a world where leisure behaviour and spaces assert a powerful influence and enjoy social prestige, the links between tourism and heritage, undeniably historical and basically political and economic, are expanding and often lead to situations of conflict, controversy and tension, especially when tourist consumption of heritage has a damaging and negative effect on the life of local people. At the root of most problems we find a notion and use of heritage as an artefact serving the interests of tourism and, therefore, subject to the laws of market supply and demand. The effects of these relationships (sometimes markedly docile) are many and complex, so each case needs to be analysed in a specific way, avoiding generalisations and inappropriate comparisons.

The function of heritage in contemporary global contexts varies enormously and this dossier tries to reflect that. The issues and cases analysed open up debates of great interest that stem from tourist consumption of heritage in very diverse periods and places in Africa, America and Europe, where the pros and cons, opportunities and risks, benefits and losses, possibilities and problems are in constant tension. All this shows the conflictive and eminently magmatic nature of heritage in tourist contexts (Prats, 2014). The articles in this special feature raise questions, among others, about how heritage fits in with, and is used and managed in tourist contexts, which objects are chosen to be offered in the tourist markets, what narratives are spread about the place and its people, what is heritagised, who is involved in those processes, and what the repercussions are for heritage and the host society. In short, the articles we present here contribute a wealth of valuable analysis, reflection and knowledge that we hope can contribute to the work of agents and scholars who specialise in tourism, heritage and related fields, as well as arouse interest among a wider public sensitive to these issues.

One of the central ideas that appears in all these articles (sharing a constructivist perspective) is the categorisation of heritage as an object constructed by many social interactions, one of which is tourist interaction. Far from being conceived as a static, eternal and essential object, or one fatally affected by tourism, heritage is presented to us as a malleable construct that is constantly being defined: the product of a specific political economy (Del Marmol, Frigolé, Narotzky, 2010), a socio-political construct (López López, 2016) created by those in power (Prats, 1997). The understanding is that heritage “appears” to be the result of a process of incorporating value into certain elements of culture and nature which, therefore, have no inherent or universal value but rather a socially attributed one. From this perspective, expressions such as “activating” or “highlighting” heritage would presuppose the existence of a heritage value *sui generis*, of a latent *heritage condition* present in some objects or aspects of culture and nature predisposed to the *emergence* of heritage (Franquesa, 2010). A notion often associated with heritage activation is the idea of conservation as presented in authorised heritage discourses (AHD). Within this framework, notes Smith (2014), heritage is defined as material, non-renewable and fragile, and it prioritises aesthetically pleasing physical objects, sites, places and landscapes. Thus “heritage is something that is found, it has an innate value the authenticity of which speaks of a common and shared sense of human identity” (Smith, 2014: 14). In the AFP framework, therefore, heritage *contains* identity and is something that has to be preserved. Reading the articles in this dossier enables us to reflect on how and in what way the tourist system has endorsed and legitimised the categories of heritage activation and conservation and, consequently, how it ends up sustaining the dominant authorised heritage discourses. Who speaks of heritage?

Who does heritage speak of? Who does heritage speak to? We will return to these questions at the end.

Heritage does not belong to society in the strict sense, rather it is society that *belongs* to heritage. If we presuppose that heritage belongs to a certain society, we accept that its individual members can appropriate it in whatever way they like, because it is theirs and they maintain a relationship of authority. If, on the other hand, we assume that it is society which belongs to heritage, it means we understand it is precisely society’s individual members who create it, who interact and intervene in it according to their needs (and commit to preserving it in order to continue bequeathing it). According to Prats (1998),



Old house of General Gaffory (1704-1753), who led the Corsican government. Façade with traces of the shots fired by the Genovese in 1750. One of the most central and visited places in Corte (Corsega). 2018. SAIDA PALOU.

heritage is, among other things, that which socially is regarded as being worthy of conservation. Thus heritage has to be preserved so it can be transferred, not fossilised. Smith (2014) tells us it is a political negotiation of identity, place and memory, a reconstruction and negotiation of the values, memories and social and cultural meanings of a group. It is neither *own nor eternal*, it is common and changing.

The idea of change is key and critical. In tourist contexts there is an evident tension between heritage conservation (in its acceptance of legacy that is transformed and transferred) and modification (in an affect and harm sense). In fact, one of the most critical questions when it comes to exploring the relationship between tourism and heritage has to do with the transformation certain elements experience due to tourist exposure (or overexposure). The value of change acquired when found in tourist contexts can displace or cancel out their use value and original function, which is intimately bound up with the life and ways of the local community. Thus tourism can produce wear, loss or transformation in the utilitarian character of heritage, and consequently call into question its identity. Obviously, the transformations will be more pronounced depending on the number of visitors, its uses and the management systems for protecting the heritage, as well as the nature and fragility of the heritage itself. The incompatibilities often produced between tourist and local uses can have a negative impact on its use value, that is, on the meaning it has for the community. See the examples of Cordova's patios, Palma de Mallorca, Madagascar and Matera, which illustrate the transformation in heritage uses and meanings due to its overexposure and tourist orientation.

Some transformations can often be inconspicuous, difficult to see. Often changes have wide-ranging implications for the local community. And often these impacts end up being justified by *tourism-centric* discourses. The interpretive element of heritage (that which explains and is explained about heritage) is one of the aspects most likely to be affected by tourism. Misrepresentation of what is being conveyed can significantly harm the heritage object, although it might not seem so or might be difficult to grasp. Marketing strategies often suppress the conflictive and subversive elements of heritage in order to create tourist images and narratives that make it easier to attract visitors. In this sense, deleting certain

complexities and aspects regarded as inconvenient can harm the heritage object and, consequently, a people's memory. On the other hand though, we also know of experiences where great care is taken in the processes of heritage transmission and protection, and where it is tourism itself that encourages heritage conservation and dissemination. In Catalonia's case, for example, we have the sacred elements of some sanctuaries and historical memory sites in the transborder region. In heritagisation processes involving vestiges of past conflicts, opening these places up to visitors is vital for arousing memories, because it is through interaction with present perspectives that it is possible to have a dialogue with the past. In this regard, tourism can play an important role in terms of knowledge, dissemination and a critique of the historical aspects of a society. But it all depends on how tourism, heritage and memory (understood, obviously, as heritage) is managed.

Heritagisation is not the result of a neutral process, as it always obeys the interests of certain players. Consequently, the tourist orientation of heritage is not arbitrary or neutral either. It will always depend on political and economic factors. One of the basic questions when situating heritage in tourist contexts is to foresee what will be represented and related about a place, its people and its history. Heritage can evoke and create versions of history to suit the taste of visitors and tourist agents. In tourist contexts, heritage can act as an image of the place. It can be turned into a reference and even an emblem of the destination and, by means of reductionist and metonymic processes, in the eyes of a tourist, embody an identity or cultural character. The identity burden or overburden attributed to it becomes profitable in tourist terms, even though it is not representative of local society as a whole. In fact, excessive heritage *touristisation* nearly always shows this will not be culturally significant for the people it represents. The fact that heritage serves to broadcast (tourist) narratives of places is not in itself a problem, as it can turn into an opportunity for conveying and explaining sociocultural aspects of a people. However, if these narratives succumb to frivolities, superficialities and spectacles, or adulterated versions of the history and culture of the society represented, it will mean the role of heritage is reduced to a mere instrumental function. In this regard, all the situations which end up reifying its inhabitants (Lacarrieu, 2005) or fossilising certain cultural practices are particularly critical. See the case of





Tourists at Iguazu Falls. Iguazu National Park (Brazil). 2009. SAIDA PALOU.

Cuzco (Peru) for the fabrication of artificial identities and the role of the community.

In tourist contexts, the density of visitors, change of uses and misrepresentation of the meanings of heritage alienate and distance local people from it. In fact, one of the most critical effects of the overexposure of heritage through tourism is precisely the disaffection of local people and loss of the relationship with *their* heritage. It never ceases to be a paradox that the increase in interest and tourist value of some heritage objects is often to the detriment of local values and interest, or that tourist sacralisation of some elements results in their trivialisation (distorting their appearance, memory and function). Likewise, the change of scale experienced by some heritage objects (when they cease to be local references and become global ones as well) is becoming one of the most pressing problems in the tourism-heritage relationship. Due to the effect of tourism, certain aspects of a society can become iconic, global refer-

ences, which requires the *adaptation* of their content so it can be interpreted beyond that society's borders. Thus, within the framework of a global (tourist) culture, tourism makes all those aspects of a local community that it considers idiosyncratic intelligible. For heritage to enter international tourist circuits, it has to undergo a certain decodification and recodification, a change of language, so it can be grasped by visitors from other, very diverse cultural areas. In many tourist contexts, what is local switches to an international language. See the cases of Barcelona and other Spanish cities in this dossier in relation to the globalisation of local references and tourist iconisation of historical heritage.

There are sociocultural contexts where the penetration of tourism may be conditioned by political questions and even terrorism. See the worrying study on Tunisia presented in this dossier. Tourism can move from conflict to festivals: see the example of Girona and the role of folk traditions.

The dossier also explores other questions, for example, the sociocultural, economic and territorial conflicts that arise when rural economies and landscapes are introduced (or the intention is to introduce them) into tourist dynamics. The role of local players and the transformation of the environment in the cases of Asturias and Peguera, in the Catalan Pre-Pyrenees (foothills) are particularly relevant in this regard. And if we are talking about tourist heritage promotion and management, the Portuguese Way of St James and Easter Island (Chile) provide very illustrative examples.

The articles included in the dossier explore the relationship between tourism and heritage and focus particularly on the sociocultural aspects of tourist contexts, adopting a critical view and a constructivist perspective. Taken together, they basically warn of the effects and contradictions involved in orienting, exposing or overexposing heritage to tourism, but they also point out the opportunities and benefits that tourism can have for heritage, the local community and visitors. Finally, whether tourism is seen as a possibility or a problem, we need to be wary of discourses that legitimise linking heritage with tourism.

To what extent can we consider that tourism sustains, uses and reproduces authorised heritage discourses? Smith (2014: 14) tells us that experts who participate in AHD assume the duty of not only safeguarding heritage but also “providing stewardship for the way heritage is communicated to and understood by non-expert communities”. In this sense, it seems obvious that tourism acts and is justified as a mechanism which helps to disseminate

heritage to a non-expert public, thus fostering its socialisation and popularisation. All of that is positive because, thanks to tourism, heritage becomes more accessible and offers visitors the opportunity to learn, to get to know and to understand various aspects of a society. However, we have to be critical of those who justify actions and types of tourist heritage consumption that do not benefit the heritage itself or the local community, or which do not transmit knowledge and values to their visitors but, instead, are clearly dictated by commercial and economic motives.

Today, many heritagisation processes are largely motivated and justified by the tourist industry which, on the one hand, associates tourist promotion of heritage with its conservation and, on the other hand, legitimises its change of use and value, even to the detriment of the uses and meanings it has for the local community. And not only that: tourism can even legitimise itself thanks to the supply of heritage. When this all happens, we can understand how tourism ends up acting as a kind of instrument and authorised discourse on heritage. According to this logic, heritage *activates, justifies and explains* heritage and, in extreme cases, places with heritage become *heritage sites of tourism*. And that is one of the most important challenges that needs to be raised: that heritage in tourist contexts never ceases to be the heritage of its community. ■

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