Theories and Practices in touristic strategies in rural areas. Case studies: Bertiandos Lagoons and Barroso Ecomuseum

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Abstract: *The changes in touristic strategies in the use of privileged ecological spaces, as are some of those which are associated to the rural world, gives a chance of development to the local rural communities which witnessed in the last few years a deep transformation in their economy. How can two distinct rural territories, strongly featured by an economic underdevelopment and deep demographic changes, find a way of development in cultural touristic projects respecting both the ecological sustainability and the dignity of their culture?*

Keywords: *Rural world crisis, new rural areas, touristic development, participation, protected areas and Ecomuseums.*

Introduction

The ways and theories on which most part of the strategies of touristic development were based until the end of the twentieth century were put at stake by social values and challenges. Those challenges appeared both in the technological revolution with the new information technologies, in the stressing of a new economic and financial order, in which mass production, called "fordist" by some (Donaire, 1998), and the problems of economic crisis in European societies - which the recent financial crisis revealed and stressed, led to a new vision of the products and hypothetical consumers of the touristic offer – and the ecological sustainability, the issues associated to foreseen pandemics and in the end the introduction of the socio-cultural values in the management of the offer (Botkin, 1990; Allen et al, 1993; Campelo, 2000; Buckley, 2004; Donohoe et al, 2006; Giddens, 2009). In a more and more globalized world, the local feelings criticize a rigid specialization by proposing something completely new through which the appearance of new identities may put old theories at risk (Beck, 1992; Fafchamps, 2003; Sofield, 2003; Figgis & Bushell, 2007; Jessop, 2008).

In the past the offer had to do with everything being very similar and every sector had a rigid specialization, and this meant maximizing visitors in highly concentrated spaces, which were programmed for tourism. This had strongly social and environmental bad consequences. This led to socio-cultural conflicts and also to the misuse of touristic space. Nowadays touristic economy cannot be isolated from a socio-cultural context, environments and cultural behaviour, which sell a certain product (Vayda, 1969; Weaver & Lawton, 2007; Tainter, 2008).

According to a pattern of both production and touristic market, social tensions among the several actors, reflected on there own the inequalities inherent to the process of change and consume (Fafchamps, 2003; Jones, 2010). The local people received a part of the income held by the touristic operator to pay for services and environmental costs. And if this was evident in traditional tourism, where ecotourism was not practiced, nowadays it is impossible because the touristic product itself becomes an experiment and the whole society understand is as such (Tosun, 2003; Duroy, 2008).

Nowadays touristic operators are much more interested in practicing ecotourism which respects nature and sustainable tourism with evident benefits for local people (Weaver, 2006). They intend to develop specific local areas and avoid conflicts among local people. They also want to increase the sense of citizenship among local people. In this new model there are neither standardized products nor an enclosure of the benefits (Owen et al, 2008). The main aim is to offer a result, which may be more just and sustainable for all the intervening agents (Nunkooa & Ramkissoonb, 2010).

This is the case of rural communities. Long ago these spaces were not given due attention by touristic operators. Nobody found interest in him but the case is very different nowadays. The leisure has many variants in the contemporaries' societies (Urry, 1990). The tourism in rural spaces is a leisure and education opportunity. It is an economic chance, inserting the local economy in the global organization (Belsky, 1999; Bourn & Shiel, 2009). Furthermore, if we speak of ethics in the rural tourism, we speak about an integrative ethics. One is about a participation chance, transmitting knowledge, participating in the profits, dignifying the human been (Darby, 2000), and protecting the ecosystem. The ecotourism, when programmed in an educative logic, it is the great chance for the preservation of ecosystems (Campelo, 2004; Diamantis, 2004; Brightsmith et al, 2008; Buckley, 2009; Jickling, 2009; Lindemann-Matthies, et al, 2009; Læssøe, 2010).

The practice of the tourism in the contemporaries' societies must have the following scopes:

- A differentiation of actors' presents in the tourist experience (tourist, local population, professionals of the tourist economy, etc.), where it are valued in its varied expressions and participation;

- The space where the tourist experience elapses (either rural, either urban, either another anyone), it must be worked as space of reading and practical informed by their cognitive world (Bateson, 1980; Cairol, et al, 2009).

- A reflection on the ecological, economical and social support, because any practical, as she is the tourist one, has to be inserted in the sense of the risk lived for the modern societies;

- The tourist experience has of being thought as a pedagogical experience, where all must participate, but where youngest they have an irreplaceable role (cf. Beedie, 2003).

All this involves a completely different way of understanding local people and their traditions, the search for a new relationship with the rural world. Firstly, this new attitude highlights a sharing of know-how with the local people with mutual enrichment, either cultural or economic. Secondly, the space where these two worlds meet, meaning tourists and locals, must be carefully respected and analyzed by both communities. Thus the result of such touristic experiment will be sustainable and a dialogue between these two cultures will be productive. Those deciding about where and when tourism is going to take have to bear in their minds that the quality of life of the local people must be taken into account.

Innovating in traditional rural spaces

The two case studies, which are proposed, are Barroso Ecomuseum and the Protected Area of Bertiandos and S. Pedro de Arcos Lagoons lying in the Council of Ponte de Lima, both in the North of Portugal. The first in Trás-os-Montes, and the second in the province of Minho.

We made field research in both areas. The ecomuseum interested us because we were able to see how a cultural creation decides by local authorities contributed to the development of communities in a mostly rural region and with strong rural exodus. In the Lagoons, we were highly interested in the relationship of the local community with a rural marshy space, which was intended for the seasonable use of animals. Furthermore, this area is to be classified as a protected area involving a centre of ecology having both an entertaining and pedagogical use.

In the case of the Ecomuseum, it is based on cultural and ecological specificities of a given community. It is subjected to the space where it is going to be implemented a not the other way round. That area would be shaped by a succession of generations transforming it into a " practiced place" as Michel de Certeau (1995) put it. Humans impose an organization to what Nature offers, as well as senses and diverse uses (Geertz, 1989; Boyer, 1999; Moran, 2000). All this is done according to their economic and socio-political worries and of reproduction. Humans know they depend on Nature for everything and its success depends also on the care humans have with it (Adam, 1989; Atkins et al, 1998; Campelo 2004).

When investigating the cultural patrimony of Barroso, we meant to assess the affection local people had when acting in their daily lives. Any vision on Barroso space is a socio-cultural representation because its landscape appears as a place of aesthetical experience. It also shaped the people who lived there. Could an Ecomuseum in Barroso help to implement the idea of an ethnospace? To say ye was to run a risk of making a non-scientific work, and to ignore it would mean despising the relationship between space and social groups and their culture (Netting, 1977; Descola, 1994; Berglund, 1998; Ingold, 2000).

Table 1. The Ecomuseum Perception in the Barroso society[1].

The Ecomuseum, what it is for you?	Age: <20	Age: 20-35	Age: 35-50	Age: >50
It is our cultural heritage	17%	18%	23%	21%
It is a thing of the past	27%	11%	3%	5%
It is Barroso	0%	2%	7%	13%
It is good for local economy and tourism	4%	36%	44%	31%
Don't say nothing to me	11%	3%	4%	6%
It is a pride	7%	14%	11%	15%
It is a discovery experience	29%	14%	2%	3%
Don't Know /Don't answer	5%	2%	6%	12%
TOTAL	100%	100&	100%	100%

The relation with the ecomuseum and the material heritage (for the most rural) and immaterial (cognitive world related by the Barroso landscape and agrarian activities) is a relation that varies with the age groups. The importance of this heritage for the identity of the community and the local

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[1] Interviewed: 134 people on local communities with spaces of the Ecomuseum.

economy is for all designated, but its current experience, while emotional experience, is more alive in youngest. However, one ecomuseum as representation of the Barroso region is stronger in oldest people (cf. Table 1.)!

As to the Lagoons, we are in the presence of an ecosystem, which results from both natural, since it is a marshy zone along Estorãos and Lima rivers and socio-cultural landscapes. It was a zone of grazing cattle and fertilizing fields. Forestation was also very important. As local people are abandoning the area, the preservation of this ecosystem is put at risk.

In the sixties communities depended on agriculture to survive. Modernizing it was necessary. In this context the first project for enclosure appears in Portugal supported by Salazar's Portugal. However local people strongly resisted to it because their traditions were put in danger. New methods of production are put into practice as well as a new organization of work and production methods. All these had influence in social –economic relationships and in space configuration. The space of the Lagoons has recently been delimited by the government, according to a proposal of the Ponte de Lima Town hall, as Protected Area.
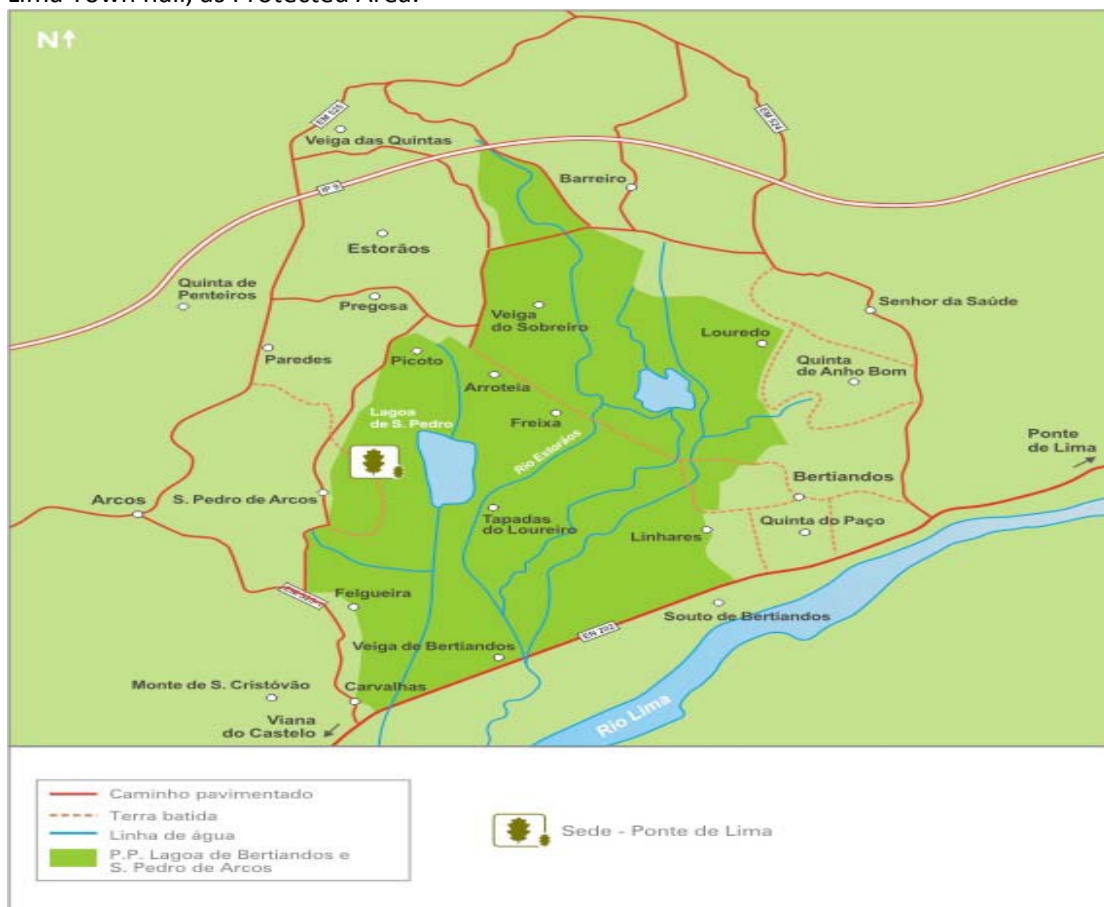

Figure 1. Protected Area of Bertiandos and S. Pedro d'Arcos lagoons.

In the beginning of the sixties, Estorãos river basin had a population density of nearly half the one of its council (the average of the four parishes is 65,3 inhabitants per km2 and the one of Ponte de Lima Council is 120,2 inhabitants per km2). The greatest part of these people lived on agriculture. There were small strips of land where few products were cultivated (Manique 1935). Old practices were repeated throughout generations. They cultivated maize, some olive oil a vineyard along with forest exploitation and fodder. These people, unlike others in other regions, were landowners (Manique, 1935; Ribeiro, 1945; Baptista, 1993).

The patrimony at the service of tourism was modelled according to the "good visitor" to the imposing rules of economic income, not inciting the contact with the creator and space. It's very important to develop a participative ecotourism, because the local communities knowledge are a

precious source of contents for the rural tourism. The anthropology is a science that much will be able to make possible the negotiation of the knowledge between the local community and the tourists. The anthropology can manage the social and economic powers in conflict and help in an education for the ecological sustainable. And this in both the fields: tourist and local community (Lazarev, 1993; Escobar, 1999; Bramwell & Lane, 2000; Alonso, 2004; Schusler et al, 2009; Buckley, 2009; Lee & Chang, 2010).

The spirit of a place to be is gaining sense again due to ecotourism in which respect for nature and is benefits is being valued. Local people know what to call each animal or plant and this know-how may not be contemplated in a scientific taxonomy. There techniques used for approaching an animal may well be lost for ever if there is not an ethnoecological approach.

Work was done according to genre, men being attributed the harshest jobs. There was a social organization in the division of work. Every member of this society had its own role, man, woman or child. There were social rules to be followed. The use of certain spaces obeyed to strict rules. Only men could go to the lagoons in certain occasions ant to do certain tasks. Also teenagers could go to the lagoons and there they invented games.

Later in the seventies a new mentality was born and the agriculture for the future appeared. However it wasn't successful as to the point of creating new techniques of cultivation such as greenhouses. Nor did it cause to appear new products. Nowadays there are only two important products: corn for animal feeding and wine. With the introduction of machinery and the enclosure system, the fields of the lagoons were abandoned. The lagoons fields are not what they used to be anymore even in terms of landscape. However as a forest reservation it is still being cultivated. The land was so divided that 57% of the peasants had less than 1 000 m2, and only 2,7% had more than 5 000 m2. The net of paths and roads was absolutely inefficient. The enclosure system brought about problems to technicians because people – mainly women – didn't accept the fact that their traditional property should be integrated in larger fields very well, losing the idea of family heritage and land owning. A legal procedure was necessary to divide the property and a new education for the new systems of production. Even the mass media had their attention on this event as well as the neighbouring parishes. A society was formed in the 60´s – about 250 partners – of farm machinery, and later it started sell seed and fertilizers, too. But it was finished in the 80´s.

Once the expectation of development through agriculture is gone, tourism appears to be the solution. The lagoons have all the assets to attract tourists. A patrimony to be preserved as protected area. If before patrimony meant the existence of an old know-how of the peasants, today it means family heritage with which we can identify ourselves. Patrimony means above all the social relationships and cultural ones, too. It must be understood and felt as something that belongs to us as a people.

Today, due to the fact that Man only wants to take profit from everything, the magical space no longer allures people as such. How interesting it would be if the lagoons space could still be an area open to discovery and creativity. Probably to understand the lagoons we will have to understand the people who lived there and gave sense to them, and this is the logic between dwelling and skill (Ingold 2000).

Table 2. Knowledge and source of information (between 6-13 years)[2].

Activities /	Source of information /			Knowledge degree:		
	School	Friends/ Family	Local Staff	Web	Other	Total
Guided visits	47%	12%	11%	5%	0%	75%
Works in laboratory	21%	2%	37%	1%	0%	61%
Camping	0%	2%	15%	5%	1%	23%
Activities with animals	52%	17%	19%	5%	2%	95%
Rural activities	17%	11%	16%	5%	2%	51%
Radical sports	0%	3%	2%	1%	0%	6%

Currently the great interpreters of this space are the children in school age (see Table 2). For them the staffs organize many activities. We verify that they have an excellent knowledge of two activities: the guided visits (75%) and the contact with the animals (95%). And the big source of information is the school! In other age groups, the information comes for the Internet (for example, between 20 – 35 years group, about 49% take the information, in all activities, by Web). One of the points that more we verify in our fieldwork was the absence of the local community in the educative strategies.

Conclusion

The local authorities of Ponte de Lima and Montalegre, when proposing a Protected Area Region and an Ecomuseum were aiming at valuing the natural/cultural patrimony making of it an opportunity to develop and fix their populations.

From the analysis we made to these aims we concluded that they would only be achieved when both those who can actually decide and those who can plan those projects in the future assume new sustainable tourism patterns. And those patterns include a global vision of the agrarian and ecological patrimony, involving the participation of the local communities, the promotion of shared knowledge, the honouring of the local communities.

For this goals, is necessary to value: the local community and its knowledge; the age of the people and its objectives (leisure, knowledge, etc.); a distribution of the economic benefits; to promote a participative and pedagogical ecotourism, because only it defend the sustainable local societies and ecosystems.

We think that it is in this context that tourism in a rural space will contribute to its being sustainable.

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[2] Landscape Area activities of the Bertiandos and S. Pedro de Arcos Lagoons. Visitors Knowledge and source of information. Number of interviewed people: 116 (Age between 6-13: 19; 14-20: 32; 20-35: 27; 35-55: 21; with more than 55 years: 17).

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