Tourism Against Soul of Heritage City

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Abstract
The objective of this paper is to analyze the influence of tourism on the disappearance of the traditional soul of a city and the emergence of a new one, a “tourist soul”. In Latin America several heritage cities are experiencing urban transformations associated with tourism. This paper explores this trend in one of its most complete expressions: tourism as a transformative vector of the traditional built heritage. Through the case of Guanajuato (Mexico) and other Latin-American cities, this work identifies the main architectural and urban transformations that are derived from tourist use in the heritage cities. Data were collected on the base of a qualitative research (theatrical analyze, statistics, historic documentary and direct observation on the field). Historical archives of the twentieth century were consulted to evaluate the transformations. Finally, statistical information on uses of buildings and heritage landscapes was obtained from the city’s tourist office. The new tourist uses significantly change the patrimonial and traditional typologies, generating a new architecture thus a new soul. Tourism is seen as a transforming factor of the city, not without contradictions because the cultural, patrimonial and social resources, on which the prestige of the resort depends, can be altered by a “tourist soul”.

Keywords: preservation; heritage; urban planning; touristification; center

1. Introduction

One the concepts of urbanism that seems to concern architects, developers, politicians, journalists, students, artists and many other people who are interested in cities, is the “soul of a city”. The soul of a city has almost been taken as a synonym of to beautify, the conservation of heritage, that is associated with façadism and it serves to improve sales in the municipalities. Trash cans, bollards or lampposts can be seen as the established urban image of distinguished towns among many other uses.

The concept of the soul of a city can be interpreted from various urban studies from the idea of urban art and its main aesthetics (Sitte, 1996) to the idea that some classics that are related to it with the legibility that has been provided by the visual quality of the urban landscape (Lynch, 2012, 11), from the colours, posters

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and light (Kahn, 2008), within the urban scene that includes its inhabitants and its movement in order to determine the character of towns and cities. (Secretaria, 1993).

For the purpose of this work we will explore the concept of the soul of a city and how it can evoke its essence, its characteristics, its uniqueness and its inheritance to the identity of one urbanisation that is well located in its time and in its geography. This essence is transmitted by the medium of space and preferably by the medium of the public space in the city. We go further in the conception of the idea of a reduced spirit of the city, how uniquely it is beautified. For us the concept of the soul of a city is more complex so that it interweaves the interests of the individual and the small community and beyond, so that it is at the same time personal and of the community, without being able to determine the borders of those areas. The soul of city change with evolution on the physical composition, social activities, memories, histories, frustrations, urban processes. Adding to them the soul of a city change with the evolution of image as a memory of what exists there, why it is linked to the site, even though it may not be “visible”. The collective imagination and what the people select that should be in the image, give structure to the soul with those premises that now correspond to the site.

Transformation is a characteristic of the society and also the area that it occupies, so there is not one city or space that can maintain the same state for long periods of time, it can become a space that is now unrecognisable which was before familiar to us and that we can stop decoding. Dealing with the unreal permanence, the need of adaptation of each individual person and that of a group to the public space and the continuous transformation of the soul of the city, they both are a constant.

If changes in the materiality of the public space are continuous, the soul that derives from the practice of that space is in that way equally mutable. The resistance to change and the fact of reaching a state of the public space that are considered habitual, and that therefore do not need to be reinterpreted constantly, determine some transformations which are considered like conditions that force the reimagining of the image of common user. Among those transformations we consider those that are related to tertiarization, vandalism, negligence and deterioration and natural evolution on history of urban space. The incorporation of new elements forces us to re-read and to re-construct a new interpretation of the site, therefore it can be viewed the same as alien or strange in the eyes of those who are supposed to have dominated space.

Tertiarization is characterized by changes in land use that transforms the city, it evolves to a new stage, where the uses linked to the services become predominant and generate artifices that allow businesses to become visible and integrated into the local economic trends causing visits of the inhabitants and the tourists to the place.

This transformation has an impact on the perception of the soul of a city. The adaptation of the spatial supports and the socio-cultural practices of a neighbourhood generates a mutation in the essence of the place, introducing a “tourist soul”. This new soul is built with the concept of: “The packaged city which is the set of elements that articulate tourism promotion in brochures, oriented maps, official publications of tourist agencies, promotional web page contents, press, family trips, etc. from the concept of a packaged city and the links between companies, tourist planners, and residents are synthesized, shaping the image of the city, the tourist uses and the functional and social uses of it. These relations, in their extreme possibilities, can be articulated in a synergistic way or, the opposite, assume spaces of conflict” (Rausell, 2006, p51).

The process of constructing the image of a city that then becomes a tourist area, through the tourist soul would be the antithesis of the complex process of the urban images that are constituted on the premise of the permanence and dwelling of the inhabitants. Equally in terms of the transformation of the soul of the city, the tourist seeks above all to idealize the order of spaces and the society visited. In order for the tourist to
confirm and verify what he has read or heard about the experience of visiting the city. In tourism terms it is about meeting the expectations of the travel consumers.

2. Cities heritage and tourism

The build heritage appears as a key element of the emergence of the tourist soul of a city and is perhaps the element that accounts for most of its emergence at the same time as it becomes its maximum representative or inductor. The work presented here explores one of the most complete expressions of the tourist soul as a transforming heritage. This is analysed for the reuse of protected housing buildings for hotel use in the city of Guanajuato (Midwest Mexico) and being more specific, it was analysed for the reuse of patrimonial spaces in hotels of category of greater luxury, the one of the boutique hotels and the top hotels in the area which have received 5 out of 5 stars (15 units in total).

A mixed research was carried out on the urban-architectural transformations associated with high-end hotels in the historic centre of the city of Guanajuato. The study was also based on documentary work and consultation of statistics of various local and state bodies, associated with tourism and heritage conservation. The case of Guanajuato is considered symptomatic of what happens in several Mexican cities declared World Heritage Sites by UNESCO and aspiring to build a tourist soul. In such cases, we have cities like San Miguel de Allende, Santiago de Queretaro, Morelia, Oaxaca, among others. On a Latin American level, we can cite other cases that are in clear processes of touristification of the soul of the city. This is the case of Cartagena de Indias, Valparaiso, Cuzco, Havana and Salvador de Bahia just to name the most important ones. Several of the processes can be identified here can be perceived in many other cities around the world.

Fig.1. Spatial distribution of heritage hotels in Guanajuato.

One of the main urban transformations that has led to the emergence of a tourist soul is the elitisation of an important part of the historical heritage built in the centre of Guanajuato, which has been the modification of land use, the habitational space, use of services, commerce and luxury lodging.

At this moment in time, all heritage properties of luxury hotels that have commercial use and housing have been extinguished. This is not only in regard to the property in question but in the immediate context. This is due to the dynamics of economic agglomeration of services that are generated around an establishment of this nature. We can point out a synergy that involves the installation of other luxury hotels, smaller hotels, restaurants, cafes, boutiques, among other shops and services that cause their surroundings to be also transformed.
It has been observed in our case study that after the installation of a luxury hotel in a patrimonial building, the bordering of the traditional business is replaced by others of tourist consumption and of high range price businesses. Likewise, in the streets and adjacent places there is a commercial mutation. In places of recent creation of luxury hotels, there is a significant substitution of traditional and proximity trade, specifically documented with the disappearance of grocery stores, butchers, hardware stores, stationary, bookstores and shoe stores. Instead, international food chains, convenience stores (Oxxo in Mexico), bars, luxury boutiques, art galleries, clothing stores and souvenir shops have appeared.

This transformation of use has not only been a sophistication of services, in the buildings that had traditional shops with coexisting housing uses. That is, to say, the upper levels were housing of our local families and / or students but in the commercial transition towards touristification, marks the upper levels that have been turned into warehouses, in respect to bars or in hotels or hostels. This represents a significant change and a clear trend over the detriment of housing and traditional soul of the historic centre of Guanajuato.

The new uses of heritage properties have also led to a privatization of urban space. Politicians are decisive because they show business favouritism, thus the mutation of the soul of the city does not end in the property that has been converted into a luxury hotel or restaurant, but delimits, uses, secures and controls the public space adjacent to its façade. In the case of Guanajuato Municipal power, it becomes a key in this phenomenon because despite international recommendations (UNESCO), local administration allows the use of sidewalks and plazas for restaurants, hotels and boutiques. By 2014, 1252m² of commercial use of “public” space rented to hotels and restaurants to the front of the buildings and adjacent streets had been registered according to the local municipal inspection service.

Finally, politicians and entrepreneurs are the principal elements in the recruitment of a tourist soul from the centre of the city, not only for consumption uses but also through the control and public security of the tourist areas where are installed the luxury hotels. The entrances to the hotel establishments are protected by private polices and the streets by “tourist” policemen. Its official mission is to regulate security but in practice it has become a factor of pressure on users for the good image of the city. Especially if they are in charge of regulating the presence of indigents, street vendors and passers-by from humble social classes. These groups experience a symbolic exclusion are represented by women, children, young people and older adults of indigenous origin, migrants from poorer regions of the state or inhabitants of marginal areas of the city of Guanajuato.

3. Losses and Emergency of Tourist Soul

Since the declaration of the city of Guanajuato as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1988, the perception of a tourist soul of the city has been increasing. In it different levels of government, both municipal and federal have participated so that in several cases, the touristification of the city is detrimental to the use of housing. These results from the urban architectural transformations of the heritage built of consumption purposes of the highest tourist category, show a series of relations that at present lead the socio-spatial transformation of a good number of historical cities in the world and that give a new, tourist character soul.

Firstly, the case of Guanajuato shows that the tourist soul of the city is essentially introduced when the use of land changes is trade and luxury services with a predilection for international or high-level tourist activities. The touristification observed here constitutes a reinsertion of economic activities of high profitability. The new users of central areas are tourists of greater purchasing power. This tourist soul deteriorates the social framework by putting pressure on activities of proximity and board.
Secondly, the touristification of the soul of the city is financed initially by the State. Capital, such as local and transnational entrepreneurs act in a second round to benefit from the governmental investments of patrimonial preservation of a city. In the historic centre of Guanajuato and in several Latin American cities, the State and international institutions have been the champions of introducing urban revitalization dynamics, financing with large sums of money restoration projects, protection and “rescue” of heritage, such as the level of a monument, public building and urban spaces. In the case studied here, national and international institutions (UNESCO World Tourism Organization and Inter-American Development Bank) have indirectly promoted the commercialization of cities and their patrimonial spaces. The interventions by these organisations have been exploited by mercantilist dynamics led by local and international economic elites, associated with the tourist exploitation of the soul of the city.

Thirdly, the reuse of build heritage as the main support of the city’s tourist soul is observed, where it takes on a real and tangible dimension of social, economic, cultural and spatial exclusion. Thus we can establish a relationship between tourism and urban-architectural mutation of city’s heritage. The emergence of tourist soul calls into question the perseverance of the cultural value of heritage buildings. This confirms for our case the patrimonial commodification of the soul of the cities pointed out by Choay (2009) for several European cases.

Finally, the emergence of tourism is characterized by the displacement of low-income people, though not in a significant way. Being a type of displacement based on tertiarization, we deprecate less or less profitable uses. It is observed in the tourist perimeters of implantation of the luxury hotel that the owners of the contiguous properties prefer to change the vocation of the building. In order to receive higher incomes, thus buildings previously used as rental housing, especially for students and popular classes, are remodelled and transformed for commercial use.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has shown how tourism gentrifies several of the most remarkable sites of the urban patrimony of a city. Their new soul is one of the consumer products for a market of visitors with high purchasing power. In this process the spatial transformations can contradict the conservation, the originality and the patrimonial value of the architecture and the urban space. Equally this process confronts the identity and appropriation of the local society that sustains the built heritage and paradoxically motivates the visit of tourists.
One of the objectives of this research was to explore other indicators of the emerging soul of a city, specifically those related to heritage architecture and gentrification. With the above, the discussion is opened towards how tourism introduces dynamics of social and territorial exclusion in Latin American heritage cities. The empirical referent here, that is to say the transformation of a heritage space into a tourist city, can be considered as a particular case. However, it can serve as a reference for the analysis of one of the many fronts of transformation of the soul of a city in Mexico and abroad. Thus, it opens up the possibility of establishing and exploring new relationships with tourism factors such as: the behavior of the real state of a city; the erosion of the social fabric in heritage centers; the limitation of the right to the historic city for the less fortunate; the limitation of citizen participation and a weak citizenship.

The soul of the city is, as part of the intangible heritage of the society, a social construction that feeds on what are material referents on the territory but which overlaps with a web of images and concepts which do not necessarily have a materialization, even if they correspond to this territory. Like all essence of the city, this layer of consideration is also changing by evolution, obscurity and renewal and it is mixed with other aspects of the intangible heritage to complicate what is perceived from the territory from the physical existence and the existence of values and particular considerations and from groups or communities on what they have and on what is known of the urban-architectural objects. It is so important to preserve those objects as part of the social order that produces cities and makes them habitable.

The tourist soul, ignoring all social strata that compose the city, puts at risk the conservation of the traditional soul, as once the public space is transformed to adapt to what the tourist expects to find, that space is no longer identifiable by the inhabitants and there is desertion. The myths, the festivals, the sacralisation, the daily ritual, the fear or the respect, yield their place to the tourist soul. The natural re-reading and re-interpretation of the site are replaced by superficial reading, false but attractive stories, invented traditions and by the appearance, which in the intermediate future can bring economic benefits to some, mainly to serve suppliers but in medium length terms which will cause substantial heritage and social capital losses.

References