

El espacio público en los cascos históricos. El caso de La Plata, Argentina.

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Introducción

El espacio público ha ocupado un lugar preponderante en la teoría y la praxis de la conservación urbana. Entendido como un sistema que incluye componentes de diversa índole y dimensiones, el espacio público incluye tanto las vías circulatorias como las plazas y áreas destinadas a la recreación y el esparcimiento de la comunidad. Se encuentra asociado, en ocasiones, a edificios monumentales a los que sirve de marco y, en general, constituye el espacio social por excelencia de la ciudad. En este sentido, el espacio público, al igual que las actividades que alberga, tienen una notable incidencia en la identidad de la ciudad.

Jorge Benavides Solís (1999: 91) cita en su *Diccionario razonado de bienes culturales* una definición de Zarza Ballunguera, en la que se proponen algunos atributos del espacio público: “(...) *nos pertenece a todos como colectividad organizada, claramente definido por las alineaciones que lo separan del espacio parcelado, interconectado y continuo, permite la comunicación urbana*”. La cita hace referencia a un aspecto funcional básico: la comunicación, lo cual implica circulación de personas y de vehículos pero, además, intercambio, lenguaje y código compartidos. El espacio público es por lo tanto el espacio de la comunicación social, que puede manifestarse de diversas formas como el comercio, la fiesta, el paseo, la asamblea. La vinculación de estas ideas con el concepto de lugar, en el sentido de lo propio, del espacio dotado de identidad, surge entonces de manera directa. ¿Qué más representativo que la plaza o la calle para definir el espacio donde la comunidad expresa y encuentra su propia identidad? Podemos afirmar que el espacio público resulta, por excelencia, un lugar. Por contraposición al espacio privado, fundamentalmente doméstico, en el que se expresa la identidad del individuo y del grupo familiar, el espacio público es el lugar de la vida comunitaria. Durante las últimas décadas, algunos aportes provenientes del campo de las ciencias sociales proponen nuevas miradas sobre la relación entre lugares, espacios públicos e identidad. Marc Augé toma de Michel de Certeau el término “no lugares”, a los que define como espacios del anonimato, propios de la sobremodernidad, espacios no antropológicos referidos a dos realidades complementarias pero distintas (Augé, 1998: 81 y ss.). Autopistas, grandes centros comerciales y aeropuertos constituyen típicos “no lugares”, opuestos a los lugares de la ciudad tradicional, como calles y plazas, cargados de historia e identidad.

La consideración del espacio público en calidad de patrimonio lo resignifica como referente fundamental de la identidad de la ciudad. El carácter patrimonial del espacio público es reconocido por varios documentos internacionales sobre conservación del patrimonio. Al promediar la década de 1970, la Recomendación de UNESCO sobre conjuntos históricos establecía que los mismos incluyen tanto construcciones como espacios “cuya cohesión y valor son reconocidos desde el punto de vista arqueológico, arquitectónico, histórico, estético o sociocultural”; por su parte, la Carta de ICOMOS sobre ciudades históricas (1987) define, entre los elementos a conservar, “*la relación entre los diversos espacios urbanos, edificios, espacios verdes y libres*”. Este

documento reconoce también la relación de los espacios públicos con componentes de un patrimonio inmaterial, al establecer que también deberán ser objeto de protección las funciones adquiridas por la población o la ciudad a lo largo de la historia. La Convención para la salvaguardia del patrimonio cultural inmaterial, adoptada por UNESCO en 2003, incluye a los espacios inherentes a las manifestaciones incluidas en la definición de patrimonio inmaterial.

Dado su carácter funcional, simbólico y patrimonial, el espacio público es por lo común objeto de mantenimiento y cuidados especiales, que incluyen no sólo la preservación de sus componentes materiales (pavimentos, forestación, mobiliario urbano) sino también su mejora a partir de la provisión de infraestructura y equipamiento que contribuyan a su calidad y funcionalidad. Sin embargo, en algunos casos se ha prestado menos atención al papel que el patrimonio edificado juega en su definición, cuando, en realidad los edificios que definen sus límites tienen una incidencia directa en la escala, proporciones y percepción del espacio público.

En este marco, presentaremos el caso de la ciudad de La Plata, un caso particular de casco histórico en Argentina por las razones que promovieron la fundación de la ciudad y por sus características urbano-arquitectónicas originales. Durante los últimos años, se han encarado acciones de mejora y equipamiento de varios espacios públicos del casco fundacional. Pero, simultáneamente, las políticas de desarrollo urbano han alentado la densificación del tejido, particularmente en el área central de la ciudad, con las consiguientes consecuencias en la pérdida o desprotección de edificios de carácter patrimonial y en la caracterización y escala del espacio público. Este contrapunto entre cuidado del espacio público y negligencia por el patrimonio arquitectónico, que se verifica también en otros casos de ciudades argentinas, pone en riesgo el éxito de políticas públicas en relación con la protección y conservación de cascos históricos.

El caso La Plata

La ciudad de La Plata fue fundada en 1882 con el fin específico de dotar de una nueva capital a la provincia de Buenos Aires y materializada en base a un proyecto integral en que el espacio público juega un papel esencial en la identidad de su casco urbano. Este está definido por un bulevar de 90 metros de ancho que encierra un cuadrado de 5 Km de lado; en su interior, un sistema ortogonal de calles retoma la tradición de las ciudades hispanoamericanas, con la inclusión de una avenida cada seis calles y una trama de calles diagonales que enriquecen y complejizan el modelo. Una banda central, definida por dos avenidas contiguas, concentra los principales edificios institucionales, actuando como una suerte de eje monumental. Un sistema de espacios verdes, formado por un parque urbano y veintitrés plazas y parques menores permitiría, conjuntamente con el profuso arbolado de todas las calles, garantizar la higiene y calidad de vida en la ciudad. (Fig. 1). El sistema de espacios libres incluye también a los espacios abiertos que circundan a los principales edificios institucionales y las plazoletas que, producto de la superposición de las calles diagonales sobre la trama ortogonal, se reparten en toda la geografía de la ciudad con diversidad de tratamientos y equipamiento.

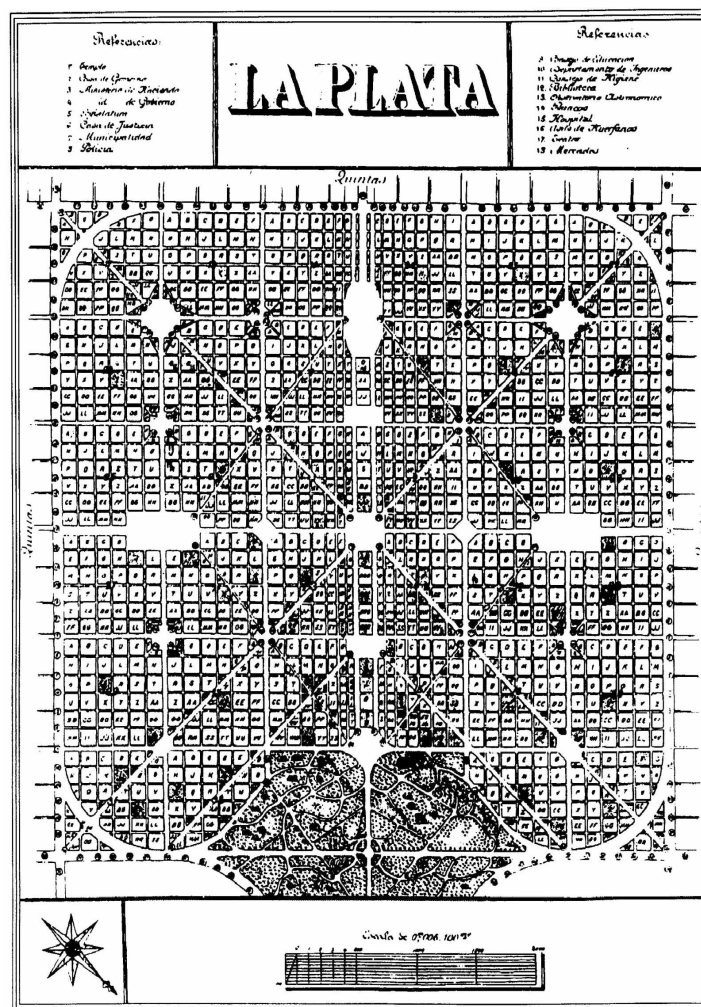


Figura 1: Plano del casco urbano fundacional de La Plata.

En esta ciudad, cuidadosamente planificada, el sistema de espacios públicos juega un papel fundamental en la identidad urbana. Además del reconocimiento obtenido en su propia época como un ejemplo de modernidad urbana, que incluye una distinción en la Exposición Universal de París de 1889, el valor patrimonial del casco fundacional de La Plata fue reconocido tempranamente; en 1949 normas locales establecieron su carácter histórico y el compromiso de las autoridades en su protección y conservación. En otras instancias gubernamentales, fue protegido por una ley provincial en 1998 y declarado Bien de Interés Histórico Nacional en 1999.

En su evolución en el tiempo, el trazado urbano fundacional de La Plata no ha pasado más que por mínimas y escasas modificaciones, lo que implica que el sistema de espacios públicos se conserva en lo que concierne a presencia, localización y dimensiones de sus componentes. Los aspectos más importantes a señalar son, en primer lugar, la desafectación de más del 50% del parque urbano para su dedicación a otros usos (campus universitario y dependencias oficiales) y la reducción de uno de los parques menores, cuyas tres cuartas partes fueron enajenadas. Se observan, no obstante, otros tipos de intervenciones que, en el tiempo, cambiaron los rasgos de estos espacios en relación a su concepción original. En lo que concierne a espacios circulatorios, los cambios más notables se dan en el sistema de avenidas; muchas de ellas estaban dotadas

de una generosa rambla central, que permitía la existencia de forestación. A efectos de facilitar y agilizar la circulación vehicular, muchas ramblas desaparecieron o fueron reducidas notablemente en su ancho.

El cambio más significativo en la calidad del espacio público proviene, sin embargo, de las sustanciales modificaciones del tejido urbano, particularmente en el área central de la ciudad. La concepción original de La Plata preveía dos situaciones básicas para la ocupación de los bloques urbanos: los principales edificios institucionales ocupan una manzana completa, lo que permite la existencia de jardines en su entorno, en tanto que las manzanas destinadas a la edificación privada están parceladas de modo que los edificios se localicen en el frente de los lotes, constituyendo una fachada continua que marca enfáticamente el límite entre los espacios público y privado. Según los tipos arquitectónicos predominantes en la época de la fundación, la altura de los edificios raramente excedía los dos pisos. Todo esto conformaba, en conjunto, una morfología en la que los edificios públicos se desatacaban por sus dimensiones y lenguaje arquitectónico respecto a un tejido residencial homogéneo en términos de volumen y expresión.

Los cambios más importantes se dieron a partir de la década de 1950, con la incorporación paulatina de edificación en altura, sobre todo en el área central de la ciudad. Además de la ruptura de la escala fundacional y de la pérdida de rol de referentes urbanos por parte de los edificios institucionales, en el tema que nos ocupa, esta renovación tuvo y tiene un impacto en la escala y calidad del espacio público. Algunas calles del área central en las que se verifica una mayor concentración de edificios altos han cambiado notablemente sus condiciones de escala, asoleamiento e iluminación, temas significativos en la concepción higienista original de la ciudad (Fig. 2). La escala de algunos espacios libres de mayores dimensiones, como plazas, ha sido también modificada por la mayor altura de los edificios que las rodean y enmarcan.

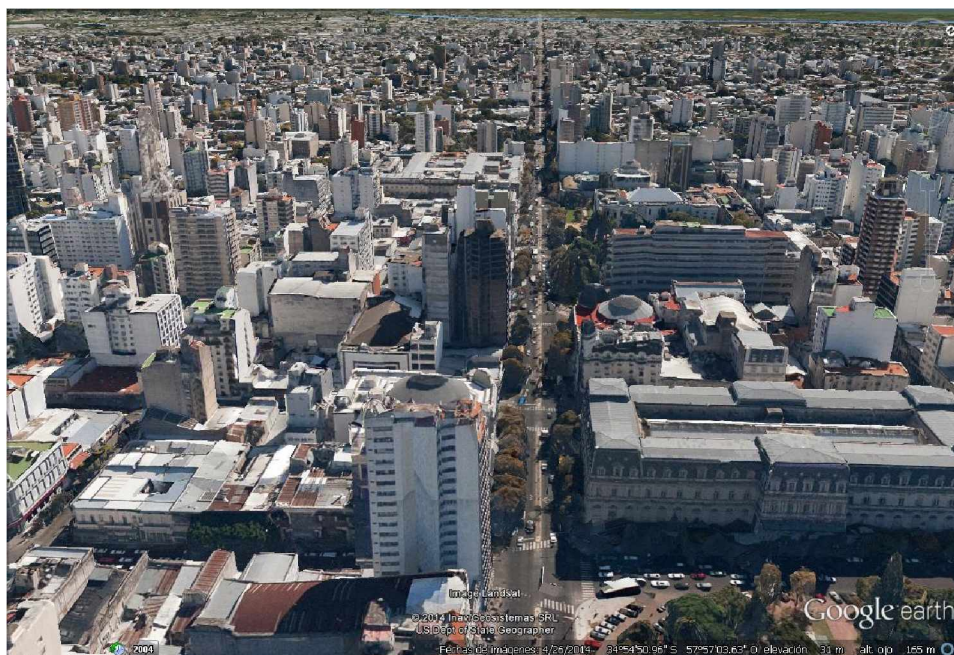


Figura 2: Area céntrica con edificación en altura.

Parte del proceso reseñado puede considerarse natural, en el sentido que la ciudad es un organismo vivo en cambio permanente, a la vez que buena parte de los cambios se dieron en momentos en que la variable patrimonial no era considerada en la planificación urbana. De este modo, la ciudad llegó a fin del siglo XX, en que el tema patrimonial se afianzó paulatinamente en las instancias públicas, en las agendas políticas y en la misma sociedad, conservando casi intactos algunos rasgos significativos de su situación original a la vez que con modificaciones importantes en otros. Las evaluaciones técnicas realizadas en las dos ocasiones en que el casco fundacional fue nominado a la Lista de Patrimonio Mundial de UNESCO hicieron hincapié en la alteración irreversible de algunos atributos esenciales que incidían en la identidad de la ciudad y en la autenticidad de su trazado fundacional.

Las acciones durante los últimos años

Durante los últimos años asistimos a una situación de dualidad en relación con las políticas de desarrollo de la ciudad. Por un lado, se hace evidente la preocupación por la mejora de las condiciones de los espacios públicos, sobre todo espacios verdes, que son equipados y mantenidos para su uso recreativo por parte de la comunidad.

Uno de los conflictos principales que presenta la ciudad está vinculado con el tránsito vehicular. El crecimiento explosivo del parque automotor verificado durante los últimos años hace que muchas calles y avenidas de la ciudad estén en el límite de su capacidad de carga, sobre todo en horas de funcionamiento de reparticiones públicas, bancos e instituciones educativas, a la vez que la carencia de espacio para el estacionamiento vehicular se agrava día a día prácticamente en todo el casco fundacional. Frente a esta situación, sin duda de difícil control y manejo, persisten algunas prácticas como reducir el ancho de ramblas para obtener mayor espacio para la circulación vehicular.

El paseo del Bosque, parque urbano de La Plata, fue motivo de una controversia que llegó hasta las instancias judiciales por el proyecto de construcción de un estadio de fútbol por parte de un club de la ciudad. Si bien parte de la construcción se encuentra avanzada, un acuerdo entre los actores sociales involucrados, entre los que se encuentran los gobiernos provincial y local, los clubes que ocupan espacios del parque y algunas organizaciones no gubernamentales relacionadas con la defensa del ambiente y del patrimonio, se orienta a elaborar un plan de manejo integral del parque para optimizar y racionalizar su uso. Se trata de un acuerdo reciente, por lo que hasta el momento no se han realizado más que algunas reuniones preliminares para la elaboración del plan de manejo. Las autoridades provinciales, por su parte, se han comprometido a retirar reparticiones que ocupan espacios del parque de modo de restituirlos al uso público en su carácter de espacios para la recreación.

El aspecto más conflictivo en relación con la preservación de la ciudad y de sus espacios públicos se relaciona, una vez más, con la regulación de la edificación en la ciudad. En el año 2010 fue aprobado un nuevo Código de Ordenamiento Urbano que promueve la densificación del área central de la ciudad en mayor medida de lo que hacían ordenanzas anteriores de usos del suelo. La aprobación de esta norma implicó la derogación, con el fin de su revisión, de un decreto que protegía edificios patrimoniales en la ciudad. Si bien se mantiene vigente la protección de inmuebles monumentales de significativo valor histórico o arquitectónico, muchos edificios privados, originalmente

residencias construidas durante las primeras décadas de la ciudad, fueron demolidos durante los dos últimos años para dar paso a edificios en altura, por lo general destinados a vivienda. Esto tiene un impacto en varios sentidos: por un lado, la pérdida de edificios o conjuntos edilicios que tenían una incidencia en la identidad y carácter de La Plata, por otro, el impacto funcional, por la mayor concentración de personas, actividades y vehículos en el área central de la ciudad, con los consiguientes efectos sobre la circulación y el estacionamiento de vehículos y, finalmente, el impacto sobre la escala y condiciones del espacio público.

De concretarse la renovación total del área central según los parámetros establecidos por el nuevo código, se alteraría notablemente la proporción entre ancho de las calles y altura de los edificios, con el paso de una situación de espacios amplios y bien iluminados y ventilados, característicos de la condición higienista propia de la concepción original de la ciudad, a espacios encajonados entre altas paredes edilicias, donde no sería posible la buena incidencia del sol. La profusa forestación que caracteriza a las calles de La Plata se vería sin duda afectada por las nuevas condiciones del tejido urbano.

Más allá de la pérdida irreversible del patrimonio edilicio, que se agrava día a día en La Plata, la implementación de este nuevo Código pone en riesgo la calidad de vida de sus habitantes y, con ello, uno de los componentes más caros del patrimonio inmaterial de la ciudad. La situación complicada que se vive en la actualidad respecto al patrimonio y a cuál será el futuro del casco urbano fundacional es producto del enfrentamiento entre intereses económicos, sociales y culturales diversos y opuestos. Un acuerdo social en que todas las voces sean escuchadas y tenidas en cuenta aparece como una condición necesaria para equilibrar las presiones desarrollistas con la preservación de identidad de la ciudad expresada en su patrimonio material e inmaterial. En este marco, la discusión sobre el patrimonio se ha instalado fuertemente en la ciudad, a la vez que han comenzado a actuar grupos comunitarios de defensa del patrimonio, cosa que hasta el momento no era común en La Plata.

Conclusión. La contribución del enfoque del paisaje histórico urbano

En lo que va del siglo XXI se perfilan nuevos enfoques y orientaciones en conservación urbana. El tema más notable al respecto es la introducción del concepto de paisaje históricos urbano, a partir del año 2005, que motivó un interesante debate durante estos últimos años. Las reuniones realizadas entre 2010 y 2011 concluyeron con un proyecto de Recomendación que será sometida, para su adopción, por la Conferencia General de UNESCO de este año.

El paisaje histórico urbano, entendido como enfoque para la conservación y gestión de ciudades y áreas urbanas históricas, se orienta a superar la visión más particularmente arquitectónica que los textos derivados de la Convención del Patrimonio Mundial proponían durante los últimos treinta años. El paisaje histórico urbano implica la superación de nociones como centro o conjunto histórico para extender el objeto de estudio y protección a la ciudad y su entorno natural o construido, a la vez que incorporar los componentes inmateriales que, conjuntamente con los materiales, inciden en la identidad y autenticidad de las áreas urbanas. Se trata, en síntesis, de una visión

más integral que conduce a repensar las estrategias de acción y participación así como las herramientas jurídicas y técnicas para la gestión.

Entendemos que esta nueva visión constituye una contribución significativa para la conservación y la gestión urbana. En el caso de La Plata, la consideración de componentes intangibles del patrimonio implica tener en cuenta la calidad de vida que aparecía explícitamente incluida en las influencias higienistas de su modelo fundacional. Implica también imaginar nuevas estrategias e instrumentos para la gestión urbana, en los que la conservación del patrimonio se erija en una variable fundamental para contribuir al desarrollo integral de la comunidad.

De este modo, La Plata puede conservar la riqueza y variedad de sus espacios públicos entendidos como “lugares” en los que se desarrolla la vida comunitaria y que resultan esenciales para la identidad de la ciudad, y no como meros resultados de la acción de renovación del tejido urbano.

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NEW FRAMEWORKS FOR COMMUNITY-BASED CULTURAL TOURISM

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Abstract

Cultural heritage becomes an asset which allows widening the tourism offer or developing tourism in places where the activity had not been traditional. Local communities play a significant role in the development of tourism, especially in those cases where tourism is perceived as an instrument for local development. The implementation of community-based tourism requires planning and capacity building among all stakeholders. In this framework, the purpose of this paper is analysing a community-based tourism programme, Tourism Villages, implemented in the province of Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Key words: heritage, cultural tourism, community-based tourism, Argentina

Cultural heritage and tourism

Cultural heritage constitutes an important resource for the development of tourism. Françoise Choay (1992: 25) proposes that the concept of “historic monument” was a creation of the Renaissance; the valorization of the Roman culture in the 15th Century induced travels from different parts of the Italian peninsula, and later from other European countries, to Rome, with the purpose of a direct contact with the relicts of the past. This was the root of the *Grand Tour*, which is considered the anticipation of tours as we know them today (Patin, 2012: 19). In modern language, the *Grand Tour* was a product of cultural tourism, reserved for economic and social elites. Mass tourism, which became predominant over the second half of the 20th Century, was based on holydays, sun and beach rather than on cultural experiences although the visit to museums and monuments could be a secondary aspect of the trips. The traditional definition of “cultural tourism” focused, as expressed in the ICOMOS Charter of 1976, in the knowledge of historic and artistic monuments and sites.

Several important changes occurred over the last decades in the fields of heritage and of tourism. The concept of heritage was notably extended and encompasses today a wide range of interrelated natural and cultural, tangible and intangible components that act, as a dynamic system, as the symbolic referent of the cultural identity of communities (Prats, 1997: 22). New heritage categories, as cultural landscapes or cultural routes, extend the notion of heritage to a territorial scale and stress the relationship between tangible and intangible components. At the same time, the conceptualisation of heritage as a social construction considers local communities as a main stakeholder in the identification, protection and management processes.

Mass tourism based on sun and beach has been complemented by a significant development of alternative modalities, such as, among others, ecotourism, cultural, religious, gastronomic or health tourism. The long summer holidays have been generally replaced for shorter periods distributed throughout the year. Travellers seek new experiences, sometimes during weekends or short breaks and not far away from their everyday habitat; planned group trips are replaced for self-planned ones since the development of TICs facilitates information and booking of services.

In this framework, the consideration of local heritage as a main tourism resource contributes to widening and diversifying the tourism offer and becomes an opportunity for integral development of involved communities. The model of community-based tourism places local population as a main actor in the processes of heritage management and provision of services for visitors; the ICOMOS International Charter on Cultural Tourism, 1999, focuses in the role of local communities and in the role of tourism as an enabler for local development.

The extension of the definition of heritage and of tourism modalities has led to new definitions of cultural tourism; the World Tourism Organization expressed in 2005 that cultural tourism consists in the movement of people to cultural attractions with the purpose of achieving new information and experiences and satisfying their cultural necessities. Marketing studies tend to replace the term “necessity” by “motivation”, which, according to Amirou (2012: 41) is placed in the realm of imaginary rather than in the reality.

The implementation of a heritage and community-based tourism scheme requires not only planning but also capacity building among decision makers, investors, heritage experts, tourism professionals and local communities. It is usual that heritage assets, in their role of tourism resources, are included in the tourism offer without the necessary steps that include the elaboration of tourism products.

In this theoretical framework, the purpose of this paper is analysing a specific community-based tourism programme, *Pueblos Turísticos* (Tourism Villages), designed and implemented by the tourism agency of the government of the province of Buenos Aires, Argentina, with the aim of answering some questions about new frameworks for community-based cultural tourism.

Tourism resources of the province of Buenos Aires

The province of Buenos Aires is the largest in Argentina, 307,571 Km² and 16, 5 million inhabitants, more than a third part of the population of the whole country. The provincial territory belongs to the area of the vast plains of central Argentina and is limited to the east by the Plata River and the Atlantic Ocean. Two ranges of hills, in the south, are the most remarkable geographical accidents of the huge plain.

Only the northern part of the territory had been occupied by the Spaniards between the 15th and the early 19th Century. After the independence of Argentina in 1816, the plains were occupied and colonized in a short span of time, especially by immigrants that arrived in Argentina from several European countries. This process was facilitated by the extension of the railway and many villages flourished next to railway stations. Argentina underwent several political and economic crises from 1930 onwards. As a result, agricultural activities decayed, most railway services were interrupted and rural villages started a process of economic and social stagnation and depopulation.

The countryside, especially large farms known as *estancias*, was the traditional place of summer holidays for wealthy families of Buenos Aires over the 19th Century. By the end of the century, it became fashionable for upper social classes to spend the holidays by the sea. Over the first half of the 20th Century, several resort cities flourished along the sea shore of the province, facilitated by the extension of the rails and the construction of accommodation facilities (Wallingre, 2007). Rural tourism had an impulse since the 1980s. For the owners of large *estancias*, opening them to the visitors implied the possibility of balancing the decay of agriculture (Schlüter, 2001: 163). The tourist offer is wide and diverse: from a day in the countryside to spending several days lodging in a historic *estancia*, participating in rural activities and enjoying the peaceful landscape; gastronomy has also become a main tourist attraction (Schlüter, 2003). (Fig. 1) The expansion of tourism took to several local governments to seek the possibility of becoming part of the offer, especially for weekends or short breaks, and local heritage became an asset for the development of tourism activities.

The “Tourism Villages” Programme

This Programme, launched by the provincial Secretary of Tourism, aims at promoting and encouraging the development of sustainable tourism activities and enterprises in small towns of the Province of Buenos Aires, creating identity, sources of employment and resources and stopping depopulation by encouraging the sense of belonging. The basis of the programme is enhancing heritage assets existing in small towns and generating self-sustainable tourism enterprises where the local community is the main stakeholder of the process. It is interesting mentioning that the Programme is identified with the motto “Find the authentic”.

Besides sustainability, the Programme aims at equity, in the sense that tourism services are provided directly by local residents and benefits must be integrated into the town’s economy, fostering redistribution and generation of value. It is addressed to small towns, which implies rural, coastal or island settlements less than 2000 inhabitants, which possess potential tourism attractiveness and a wish to develop tourism activities.

The Programme consists of five sub-programmes which are articulated and include a series of planned and measurable actions:

- a.- Survey: it includes the identification of existing cultural, natural and human resources and of the population’s expectations. This stage allows identifying products to be developed and the potential of the town as a tourism destination.
- b.- Capacity building: creation of awareness of local population on the importance of tourism, creation of local working groups and training human resources on specific aspects of tourism.
- c.- Development: establishment of criteria for the elaboration of tourism products, study of the possibilities of integration with neighbouring areas to generate a regional tourism offer, foster the development of required tourism infrastructure and promote rooting by the enhancement of cultural heritage.
- d.- Promotion: creation of communication methods and instruments, participation in tourism fairs and workshops, creation of a local websites.
- e.- Integration: this stage is oriented to the articulation among different governmental agencies and the network of villages participating in the Programme.

Presently, 20 villages participate in the Programme, most of them small rural settlements. The products depend of the nature and characteristics of each of the villages but cultural heritage appears as a main attraction. Depending of the specific village, main heritage assets are the rural cultural landscape, traditional or vernacular architecture, railway stations and intangible components such as handicrafts, rural activities and gastronomy.

The success of the products depends on several factors, among them the distance between the village and the main emission centres, which are the large provincial cities. It is worth mentioning that the most usual way of visit is the daily excursion and that, except food, visitors do not spend much money.

It is difficult to establish a conclusion on the success of the Programme; there are partial statistics and the situation varies from village to village. It becomes clear, nevertheless, that this programme has widened and diversified the tourism offer at provincial level and, for some villages, it implies a new, though weak, source of economic revenue and creation of employment. A very specific case is the village of Isla Santiago, located some 15 Km from La Plata, capital city of the province and next to the La Plata port and to the shore of the Plata River. It is a small village populated by farmers and fishermen, which was practically isolated over decades and only reachable by water. The village is characterised by narrow pedestrian streets and pile-dwellings constructed in wood and corrugated iron. (Fig. 2) A paved road linking the island to the regional network was habilitated some ten years ago and in 2011 the village entered the “Tourism Villages” Programme. Infrastructure in the village is basic to satisfy the necessities of visitors and some inhabitants found in informal commerce, especially related to gastronomy, a source of additional revenues. Although the area of the banks of the Plata River is protected on the basis of their landscape values, there is no specific protection for the architectural heritage. The impact of visitors is low but the lack of appropriate planning is evident; the facilitation of the accessibility, the incompleteness of protection measures and the ongoing works of extension of the port become factors of risk for the integrity and authenticity of the site.

Conclusions

The confrontation between the theoretical framework and the reality of some villages integrated to the Programme allows some conclusions related to community-based tourism. The Programme is based on the current concept of cultural heritage since it includes a wide range of tangible and intangible components and on the active role of local communities in the development of tourism activities. Nevertheless, from a tourism point of view, most of the heritage assets located in the villages have local values and few possibilities of attracting visitors by themselves, especially considering that in some cases the villages are located far away from large cities that constitute the main emission centres. According to studies on tourism demand, most visitors are not especially motivated by cultural heritage but by enjoying an experience in places different from their everyday milieu. It is also evident that there is a lack of adequate heritage protection and tourism planning. According to Troncoso and Almirón (2005), the existence of cultural heritage does not imply its tourism activation; what is generally promoted are cultural resources which are not always provided with the necessary infrastructure to become tourism products.

This situation should not be perceived as negative but as an opportunity to enhance efforts to a deeper work that allows at the same time heritage protection and valorization and adequate tourism exploitation with the active participation of local communities. In this sense and within this specific geo-cultural context, it seems that new frameworks for community-based cultural tourism must include reinforcement of some tasks; among them more specific heritage protection measures, adequate budgets for heritage conservation and a more planned participation of communities in the processes of decisions making and of provision of tourism services.

This case can also lead to some reflections on the very concept of cultural tourism. Tourism is a cultural practice *per se*; in contemporary urban societies, the motivation to break with the everyday routine and to live new experiences becomes evident; tourists are not always motivated by visiting components of cultural heritage, but their desire of new experiences take them to enjoy cultural features of the visited sites, be a local museum or traditional food. According to Amirou (2000: 1) it is the imaginary that can transform a neutral place in a tourism destination. The awareness of local communities regarding their own cultural values and their active participation in the tourism activation of those values become the basis for new frameworks of cultural tourism and can contribute to consider heritage and landscape as instrument for sustainable development.

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Figure 1. Historic rural establishment, *estancia*, opened to visitors.



Figure 2. Corrugated iron piled-dwelling in Isla Santiago village.

NEW FRAMEWORKS FOR COMMUNITY-BASED CULTURAL TOURISM

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Abstract

Cultural heritage becomes an asset which allows widening the tourism offer or developing tourism in places where the activity had not been traditional. Local communities play a significant role in the development of tourism, especially in those cases where tourism is perceived as an instrument for local development. The implementation of community-based tourism requires planning and capacity building among all stakeholders. In this framework, the purpose of this paper is analysing a community-based tourism programme, Tourism Villages, implemented in the province of Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Key words: heritage, cultural tourism, community-based tourism, Argentina

Cultural heritage and tourism

Cultural heritage constitutes an important resource for the development of tourism. Françoise Choay (1992: 25) proposes that the concept of “historic monument” was a creation of the Renaissance; the valorization of the Roman culture in the 15th Century induced travels from different parts of the Italian peninsula, and later from other European countries, to Rome, with the purpose of a direct contact with the relicts of the past. This was the root of the *Grand Tour*, which is considered the anticipation of tours as we know them today (Patin, 2012: 19). In modern language, the *Grand Tour* was a product of cultural tourism, reserved for economic and social elites. Mass tourism, which became predominant over the second half of the 20th Century, was based on holydays, sun and beach rather than on cultural experiences although the visit to museums and monuments could be a secondary aspect of the trips. The traditional definition of “cultural tourism” focused, as expressed in the ICOMOS Charter of 1976, in the knowledge of historic and artistic monuments and sites.

Several important changes occurred over the last decades in the fields of heritage and of tourism. The concept of heritage was notably extended and encompasses today a wide range of interrelated natural and cultural, tangible and intangible components that act, as a dynamic system, as the symbolic referent of the cultural identity of communities (Prats, 1997: 22). New heritage categories, as cultural landscapes or cultural routes, extend the notion of heritage to a territorial scale and stress the relationship between tangible and intangible components. At the same time, the conceptualisation of heritage as a social construction considers local communities as a main stakeholder in the identification, protection and management processes.

Mass tourism based on sun and beach has been complemented by a significant development of alternative modalities, such as, among others, ecotourism, cultural, religious, gastronomic or health tourism. The long summer holidays have been generally replaced for shorter periods distributed throughout the year. Travellers seek new experiences, sometimes during weekends or short breaks and not far away from their everyday habitat; planned group trips are replaced for self-planned ones since the development of TICs facilitates information and booking of services.

In this framework, the consideration of local heritage as a main tourism resource contributes to widening and diversifying the tourism offer and becomes an opportunity for integral development of involved communities. The model of community-based tourism places local population as a main actor in the processes of heritage management and provision of services for visitors; the ICOMOS International Charter on Cultural Tourism, 1999, focuses in the role of local communities and in the role of tourism as an enabler for local development.

The extension of the definition of heritage and of tourism modalities has led to new definitions of cultural tourism; the World Tourism Organization expressed in 2005 that cultural tourism consists in the movement of people to cultural attractions with the purpose of achieving new information and experiences and satisfying their cultural necessities. Marketing studies tend to replace the term “necessity” by “motivation”, which, according to Amirou (2012: 41) is placed in the realm of imaginary rather than in the reality.

The implementation of a heritage and community-based tourism scheme requires not only planning but also capacity building among decision makers, investors, heritage experts, tourism professionals and local communities. It is usual that heritage assets, in their role of tourism resources, are included in the tourism offer without the necessary steps that include the elaboration of tourism products.

In this theoretical framework, the purpose of this paper is analysing a specific community-based tourism programme, *Pueblos Turísticos* (Tourism Villages), designed and implemented by the tourism agency of the government of the province of Buenos Aires, Argentina, with the aim of answering some questions about new frameworks for community-based cultural tourism.

Tourism resources of the province of Buenos Aires

The province of Buenos Aires is the largest in Argentina, 307,571 Km² and 16, 5 million inhabitants, more than a third part of the population of the whole country. The provincial territory belongs to the area of the vast plains of central Argentina and is limited to the east by the Plata River and the Atlantic Ocean. Two ranges of hills, in the south, are the most remarkable geographical accidents of the huge plain.

Only the northern part of the territory had been occupied by the Spaniards between the 15th and the early 19th Century. After the independence of Argentina in 1816, the plains were occupied and colonized in a short span of time, especially by immigrants that arrived in Argentina from several European countries. This process was facilitated by the extension of the railway and many villages flourished next to railway stations. Argentina underwent several political and economic crises from 1930 onwards. As a result, agricultural activities decayed, most railway services were interrupted and rural villages started a process of economic and social stagnation and depopulation.

The countryside, especially large farms known as *estancias*, was the traditional place of summer holidays for wealthy families of Buenos Aires over the 19th Century. By the end of the century, it became fashionable for upper social classes to spend the holidays by the sea. Over the first half of the 20th Century, several resort cities flourished along the sea shore of the province, facilitated by the extension of the rails and the construction of accommodation facilities (Wallingre, 2007). Rural tourism had an impulse since the 1980s. For the owners of large *estancias*, opening them to the visitors implied the possibility of balancing the decay of agriculture (Schlüter, 2001: 163). The tourist offer is wide and diverse: from a day in the countryside to spending several days lodging in a historic *estancia*, participating in rural activities and enjoying the peaceful landscape; gastronomy has also become a main tourist attraction (Schlüter, 2003). (Fig. 1) The expansion of tourism took to several local governments to seek the possibility of becoming part of the offer, especially for weekends or short breaks, and local heritage became an asset for the development of tourism activities.

The “Tourism Villages” Programme

This Programme, launched by the provincial Secretary of Tourism, aims at promoting and encouraging the development of sustainable tourism activities and enterprises in small towns of the Province of Buenos Aires, creating identity, sources of employment and resources and stopping depopulation by encouraging the sense of belonging. The basis of the programme is enhancing heritage assets existing in small towns and generating self-sustainable tourism enterprises where the local community is the main stakeholder of the process. It is interesting mentioning that the Programme is identified with the motto “Find the authentic”.

Besides sustainability, the Programme aims at equity, in the sense that tourism services are provided directly by local residents and benefits must be integrated into the town’s economy, fostering redistribution and generation of value. It is addressed to small towns, which implies rural, coastal or island settlements less than 2000 inhabitants, which possess potential tourism attractiveness and a wish to develop tourism activities.

The Programme consists of five sub-programmes which are articulated and include a series of planned and measurable actions:

- a.- Survey: it includes the identification of existing cultural, natural and human resources and of the population’s expectations. This stage allows identifying products to be developed and the potential of the town as a tourism destination.
- b.- Capacity building: creation of awareness of local population on the importance of tourism, creation of local working groups and training human resources on specific aspects of tourism.
- c.- Development: establishment of criteria for the elaboration of tourism products, study of the possibilities of integration with neighbouring areas to generate a regional tourism offer, foster the development of required tourism infrastructure and promote rooting by the enhancement of cultural heritage.
- d.- Promotion: creation of communication methods and instruments, participation in tourism fairs and workshops, creation of a local websites.
- e.- Integration: this stage is oriented to the articulation among different governmental agencies and the network of villages participating in the Programme.

Presently, 20 villages participate in the Programme, most of them small rural settlements. The products depend of the nature and characteristics of each of the villages but cultural heritage appears as a main attraction. Depending of the specific village, main heritage assets are the rural cultural landscape, traditional or vernacular architecture, railway stations and intangible components such as handicrafts, rural activities and gastronomy.

The success of the products depends on several factors, among them the distance between the village and the main emission centres, which are the large provincial cities. It is worth mentioning that the most usual way of visit is the daily excursion and that, except food, visitors do not spend much money.

It is difficult to establish a conclusion on the success of the Programme; there are partial statistics and the situation varies from village to village. It becomes clear, nevertheless, that this programme has widened and diversified the tourism offer at provincial level and, for some villages, it implies a new, though weak, source of economic revenue and creation of employment. A very specific case is the village of Isla Santiago, located some 15 Km from La Plata, capital city of the province and next to the La Plata port and to the shore of the Plata River. It is a small village populated by farmers and fishermen, which was practically isolated over decades and only reachable by water. The village is characterised by narrow pedestrian streets and pile-dwellings constructed in wood and corrugated iron. (Fig. 2) A paved road linking the island to the regional network was habilitated some ten years ago and in 2011 the village entered the “Tourism Villages” Programme. Infrastructure in the village is basic to satisfy the necessities of visitors and some inhabitants found in informal commerce, especially related to gastronomy, a source of additional revenues. Although the area of the banks of the Plata River is protected on the basis of their landscape values, there is no specific protection for the architectural heritage. The impact of visitors is low but the lack of appropriate planning is evident; the facilitation of the accessibility, the incompleteness of protection measures and the ongoing works of extension of the port become factors of risk for the integrity and authenticity of the site.

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