Identity and Intercultural Exchange in Travel and Tourism

Edited by
Anthony David Barker

This book looks at the relationship between questions of identity, tourism and cultural change. Unprecedented levels of mobility and the realities of global and personal identities are now raising questions about the nature of behaviour and self-realization. The volume will consider these issues and the challenges they create in various geographical contexts (Germany, Spain, Romania, Italy, Africa) and concludes with a number of case studies from the Portuguese context, where the revenues from tourism are integral to its economy and a life in the current economic crisis.

"This book provides an exciting discussion of travel and tourism, and the rich diversity of places. It is a must-read for those interested in exploring the intersection of tourism, culture, place and identity. Researchers interested in exploring the cultural and political dimensions of tourism will find this thoughtful volume well worth reading."

Carla Costa, University of Aveiro, Portugal

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Jenny Campos, Maria Manuel Baptista and Larissa Latif

Cultural Tourism and Identity

In the 1970s, cultural tourism was defined as the type of tourism that included picturesque vestiges of traditional peasant lifestyles (typically textiles, pottery and buildings); it was associated with attempts to approximate or otherwise recreate past cultures themselves. By the 1980s, the World Tourism Organization (WTO) was stating that cultural tourism was an increasingly widespread movement, driven essentially by cultural motives, which included such activities as study tours, cultural tours, festival attendance, visits to historic monuments and pilgrimages (WTO, 1985).

However, as Jenks (1993) argues, this type of definition can be seen as redundant, the concept of culture being equated with that of civilisation. In this sense, the author affirms, a definition which states that cultural tourism is merely tourism involving culture (the latter being understood as tradition, fine arts and heritage) does not really clarify the matter. Jenks goes on to say that several authors have contributed other definitions of culture, making this concept much wider than the one considered by the WTO. The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), for example, defines cultural tourism as an activity concerned with the discovery of places and monuments, but exercising a considerable positive effect on them, as it aims to guarantee their protection and preservation (ICOMOS, 1976). Cunha (2007), on the other hand, points out that it is impossible to separate history from culture. One must include in the definition of cultural tourism the travelling involved in the desire to see new things, to increase one’s knowledge, to understand the particularities and the habits of other people,
to get to know different past or present cultures and civilisations, or even to satisfy spiritual needs. Finally, Barreto (2004) states that cultural tourism is based on the seeking out of cultural heritage, where this is understood as both tangible and intangible heritage.

Thus, the most recent theoretical contributions seem to agree with the need (indeed the urgent need) to value ‘place’ through the preservation of its assets and the recovery of its local culture, but also by avoiding the repetition of themes and motifs that might tend to its trivialisation. This can easily happen, especially with mass tourism, and can compromise the complex historical character of a given heritage. The intimate relationship that is created with the history and the heritage of a particular location, especially when it really interacts with people and with their immaterial realities, is what allows us to find value in it. This relationship of reciprocity with our heritage gives legitimacy to initiatives that address the legacy our predecessors have left us.

Many studies agree about the growing global importance of this type of cultural tourism. This importance stems not only from the fact that the demand for this type of tourism is one of the fastest growing, but also because cultural heritage is related to the identity of a people. Awareness of the importance of valuing a heritage that embodies the intangible values of a culture has increased with every passing decade and tourism with a cultural focus is one way to maintain and raise awareness of the heritage and identity of a locality. Cultural tourism is therefore currently a very practical concern for many municipalities aiming for sustainable development and seeking ways to add value to their territory. By enhancing the cultural visibility of a city or municipality, cultural tourism can also contribute to raising the self-esteem of local people. However, in attracting visitors, cultural tourism should involve the whole community in its objectives, not just with the intention of developing the local economy, but mainly by viewing the exploitation of cultural tourism as an engine of community spirit which can and should improve the quality of life of the population.

What we set out to do in this chapter is to construct a cultural tourist itinerary which would allow people to appreciate and draw value from the intangible heritage of the district of Valpaços in northern Portugal. This is a place associated with Moorish legends, as well as containing material assets related to these legends. This is one possible way of preserving the culture memories of this community. The constructions of which these legends speak are not merely inert objects and buildings: they seem to bring with them a distinct aura of legend that each of these places is provided with a unique atmosphere. Much of this charm emanates from the mythological corpus that the community associates with these constructions.

The concept of ‘intangible heritage’ was first used in UNESCO’s documents from the Mexico Conference of 1992 on cultural policies, at which the so-called Declaration of Mexico originated. After a long process of reflection, the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage was drawn up in Paris in 2003. Since then, the designation ‘intangible heritage’ has included oral expressions and traditions in addition to languages, performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, and traditional craft-related skills, among many other things.

It is reasonable to affirm that the valorisation of the intangible cultural heritage from a given location can contribute to the strengthening of that location’s identity and that, when combined with tourist activity, it can promote the conservation of festivals and traditions, as well as the improvement of the population’s living conditions. Caponero and Leite (2010) state that the safeguarding of intangible assets is needed to support the continuation of communities and an important part of improving a people’s social conditions. The transmission and reproduction of intangible assets allow for their continued existence.

Despite all the difficulties that have stood, or still stand, in the way of including intangible heritage as a fundamental element in attracting tourist activity, there are several cities that have managed to overcome these obstacles and have gained a profile in the market for cultural tourism. Many of them have been recognised by the European Commission not for their monuments or other infrastructure, but for their traditions. According to the Commission, this intangible living heritage can bring people together, giving them a sense of identity and continuity; it features culinary arts, handicraft traditions, legends, local arts and rural life. An example of this kind of city is Belogradchik in northern Bulgaria, which received the title of European Destination of Excellence in Local Intangible Heritage (2008), as it has based its whole cultural tourism strategy on the various myths surrounding the city. There is also a tourist route between Düsseldorf and Mainz based on visits (usually by hiking or cycling) to sites of local legends, involving elves and Lorelei, among others. The award for European Destination of Excellence in Local Intangible Heritage (2008) was also assigned to the town of Corinaldo in Italy, where, in addition to displays of traditional craftsmanship, the visitor can see several monuments and gardens.

All these destinations have in common the fact that they understand cultural tourism as being predicated on local personality and rooted in an authenticity that comes only when local people understand who they are and where they have come from. The personality of a place, its unique productivity, is what gives that place its atmosphere and special flavour. It
is the local culture, given substance in the built heritage, urban morphology, local rites, rhythms and the popular imagination, that makes such places unique. As Ortiz writes:

when you think of the memory of a people, the social movements of historical heritage maintenance are considered fundamental, where the entire population joins in the pursuit of a single goal, seeking to save the past in order to offer it to those who come after. For this to occur, the collective memory can only exist as part of living experience, as a practice that is manifested in the everyday life of the people. (Ortiz, 1994: 138, our translation)

Myths of the Moors in Valpaços

When we think of tangible or intangible cultural heritage, we immediately associate it with another concept: collective memory. Memory and perception of the collective are inherent in both aspects of cultural heritage. In this regard, Halbwachs (2004) differentiates individual memory (related to one's psychological development), memories relating to the individual, (recollected of how he or she has lived) and collective memory (related to joint action). For Duby (1976), the collective memory is a continuous stream of accomplishments and thoughts that we learned about, having no beginning and no end. In this sense, intangible heritage is presented both as living heritage and as an important instrument of identity. Intangible heritage, revealed in festivals, rites and traditional knowledge, is indisputably composed of inseparable cultural references from physical heritage, of monuments, streets and public spaces.

A good example of this connection is the municipality of Valpaços, which was founded in 1836. Its history includes the histories of the smaller municipalities that gave origin to it. In its territory there are prehistoric, Celtic and Roman remains, among others. Although there are no records to show that Muslim invasions were part of its history, the collective memory has preserved a rich mythological corpus associated with enchanted Moors that the population believes to be connected with the Muslim community which once inhabited the region.

In territorial terms, Valpaços is located in the interior part of northern Portugal and integrated in the region of Trás-os-Montes. In administrative terms, the 553 km² of land are distributed into 31 parishes, where around 17,000 inhabitants reside (this information is from 2011). According to the website of the municipality (http://valpaços.no.sapo.pt), the climate of Valpaços is characterised by severe winters and hot and dry summers.

The municipality has a rich and varied material heritage, mostly featuring civil and military architecture. The main gastronomic delicacies are: world-renowned and international award-winning olive oil, sausages, cozido and feijada à transmontana (two kinds of stew with meat and vegetables), honey, almonds, chestnut soup and wine. The most distinctive and widely regarded handicrafts are those of blacksmithing, basketry, the manufacture of spirits and embroidery.

The way the local population interprets history (this being a fundamental process in the construction of their identity) has a special interest for us. According to Jodelet (1989) and Moscovici (2001), social representations are a form of socially established and shared knowledge, contributing to the perception of a reality shared by a certain group. These social representations constitute, therefore, the way in which individuals appropriate the world around them, helping them to understand and to act within their society. They can be seen as symbolic elements that individuals express through the use of words and gestures, in conjunction with local contexts, that is, the conditions under which individuals are seen to fit in and belong to a community. Understanding identity (or identities) as a process that emerges from cultural attributes is crucial for conceiving the role that representations play in building up the meanings of said identities. One might say that only from these representations is it possible to conceptualise identities, to explain their importance in contemporary society and in cultural and social domains.

The mythical Moors to whom we refer 'fit in the mythology of the enchanted, which from a legendary/historical perspective transforms these ancient peoples into marginal and clandestine archetypes, thus hidden and magical' (Lopes, 2007: 3, our translation). According to Lopes, these beings are 'legendary medieval reminiscences of the time of the Moors, this being an era of prosperity, whose remains are buried or hidden in remote and mysterious places' (Lopes, 2007: 8, our translation). Their relevance in the context of Trás-os-Montes is explained by the opposition between Moors and Christians, underlining the antagonism between the 'Other' and 'Us' and highlighting that, in terms of the imaginary and the symbolic, the Moors in Trás-os-Montes are associated with the 'Other', independently of historical chronology, and conflating enchanted Moors with the ethnic group which occupied part of area from the 8th century on (Frazão & Morais, 2009). Martins Sarmento (1902) argued that the term 'Moors' became used to designate 'pagans' and that such traditions existed many centuries before the Arab invasion. According to this author, the Moors of the legends are actually the pagans of the local hill forts, tumuli and fountains, in fact all and any pagan beings.
The mythological corpus associated with the Moors of Valpaços places great emphasis on enchanted female Moors; however, it is still possible to trace the profile of the mythical male Moor. He is seen as the warrior, the attacker and sometimes the keeper of treasures. These characters are traditionally associated with such places as bridges, stairs, sinks and fountains. On the other hand, enchanted female Moors are characters of rare beauty. They usually have long black hair and they live in hidden underground palaces. There are several legends that report romantic relationships between Moors and Christians; there is even a legend that says a Moor was the king's mistress. The female Moors are sometimes described as hybrid characters (half woman, half goat or snake) who are longing for someone to break the spell that keeps them in this state. Such legends are explanations for the unexplainable and establish the difference between the sacred and the profane. They are an attempt to explain the origin of parts of the world, of objects, characters and phenomena, without seeking recourse to historical fact. Eliade (1989) notes that these myths relate to events that took place in a primordial time.

They can also be narratives of the exploits of supernatural characters that feed and give meaning to the culture and life of certain social groups, becoming a constitutive part of their reality. They are like a vertical dimension that stands against the horizontal dimension of human chronology and fact. In this sense, these myths make us understand everyday time and space through the prism of sacred time and space. These myths are stories told from generation to generation; they reportedly occurred at a time of yore. They seek to give meaning to human experience, contributing to the understanding of country and community. It is precisely the belief in a common imagined past that guides individuals in the history of their community and gives meaning to their sense of identity, leading to the idea of imagined communities, just as Benedict Anderson (2008) conceived them.

In the next section, we propose a cultural itinerary that reveals something of this link between the people of Valpaços and their legends of the Moors, via visits to the places with which these legends are associated. The following would be an actual tourist route.

A Cultural Tourist Itinerary

We tried to be methodical in designing this itinerary. We sought to conceptualise the best way to address the subject, so we first analysed the places to visit individually, seeking both geographical and thematic cohesion, but splitting the journey in order to facilitate the visitors' reading of the elements, allowing them at each staging point to absorb the experience that the route provides. The criterion of geographical proximity proved to be important in the drawing up of much of the itinerary, for distance between the sites is obviously an important factor in the journey of a tourist. Total travelling time was another important factor in the construction of the route we propose, since this itinerary should be implemented in harmony with other existing tourist offers and cultural assets of the district.

The constituent parts of the itinerary are classified according to the means of transport (car or on foot), the duration (one day), the destination (Valpaços), the market segment (inhabitants and visitors to the municipality), the number of participants (groups of up to five people), the geographical base (the municipality of Valpaços) and the cultural artistic value of each part. In short, this itinerary is composed of various stops, all related in some way to the mythical Moors of Valpaços, and is an attempt to make the intangible tangible, and in so doing to give some idea of the identity of Valpaços. This theme allows visitors to encounter such different cultural values as the historical, the ethnographic, the geographical, the architectural, along with traditional and artistic activities, all constitutive of the identity of the place.

Starting the route, we propose a stop in the parish of Sonim, where, after a 10-minute walk, you can visit the Perna do Mouro (Leg of the Moor – place names in this context are extremely evocative). According to the local community, the carved images found at this rock serve to remind you that within the rock lived (and maybe continues to live) a mythical Moor (represented by the leg) who kept a great treasure (represented by a chalice), both inscribed in the stone (as a kind of drawing or engraving). The little slit on the left side of the rock is the place where the mythical Moor entered and exited. The website Valpaços Online (http://valpaços.nosapop.pt/sonim.html) states that the rock has a prehistoric anthropomorphic engraving, discovered in 1879 by Marcelino S. de Sautuola. For its part, the study PNTA/2000 – Rupetrian Art Sites in Valpaços, made by IGESPAR (Instituto de Gestão do Património Arqueológico e Arquitectónico – the institute that manages Portuguese heritage), points out that:

the front surface was intentionally prepared. One can observe in the remains of this preparation a clear intentional delimiting of the panel surface ... its meaning is impossible to be determined. The panel is composed by 9 figures, among which the figure of a leg stands out, as well as circular motifs and an anthropomorph. (http://archeologia.igespar.pt, our translation)
The itinerary continues on to the parish of Lebução. Legend has it that:

under Ponte da Pulga (Flea Bridge) ... is a golden enchanted lamp concealed for centuries, which was left by the Moors. And that the spell can only be broken by a farmer who has a cow, which would give birth to two calves on a night with a full moon and they would suck all the milk she had.... the farmer cannot take advantage of the milk for any purpose, and for an entire year. (Farafita, 2006: 147, our translation here and below)

According to local authority, the River Calvo, which starts in the municipality of Chaves, acquires the designation of Ribeiro da Pulga (Flea Creek) after passing under Ponte da Pulga. The same source states that ‘this bridge was destroyed by a violent thunderstorm that occurred on 17 June 1939’. In following this creek one can also visit the Arquinho (small arch) Roman bridge, a watermill and several windmills in the area. This creek, Ribeiro da Pulga, is also associated with legends that state that the rivers of Valpaços have their origin in the tears wept by enchanted female moors.

Leaving Ribeiro da Pulga behind, it is a short journey to the parish of Alvarelhos, where we suggest a visit to the Fortim da Coroa (Fort of the Crown). The legend associated with this place says:

near the village of Alvarelhos there is a ruined fort called A Coroa (the Crown). It is said that in it lived a Moorish king. And there is another site, between Alvarelhos and Orcides, called Vale da Batalha (Valley of the Battle), where it is said there were many battles against Moors who were always defeated because S. Tiago, mounted on a white horse, helped Christians, killing Moors without pity or mercy. (Farafita, 2006: 141)

Fortim da Coroa (a designation assigned by locals) is also known in the district as Castro (hill fort) da Lama de Ouriço or Cabeço da Murialha, this being a prehistoric fortified settlement surrounded by rows of walls (Martins, 1978; Montalvão, 1971). Traces of circular and rectangular constructions are preserved. Another outer wall has element of buildings which have so far not been identified.

Outside the village an image of a wine press has been carved into the rock.

Still in Lebução, and based on the same legend, we move on to Vale da Batalha. According to the monograph on Valpaços by Veloso Martins (1978), this place, located between Alvarelhos and Orcides, has its name because locals say that there were several battles between Christians and Moors (or Saracens), the latter being vanquished by Christians with the help of an unknown knight, presumed to be Santiago. For this reason, and in accordance with Cunha (2007), it is probable that this is the same apostle who is referred to as ‘Santiago Mata-Mouros’ (‘Moor Killer’). It is said that Santiago retreated after the battles into the valley, where there was later built a chapel in his memory. In 1873 there were still the ruins of the chapel, but today the chapel does not exist, the closest chapel dedicated to Santiago being located in Liono/Chaves (approximately 20 km away). Vale da Batalha is now a place where you can admire the broad and open landscape, as well as the varied fauna and flora.

Next on the route we visit the parish of Algeriz to see the Pia dos Mouros (the Moors’ Sink). Legend has it that:

near Algeriz, in the municipality of Valpaços, there is a place where you see two sinks, which the ancients called Pia dos Mouros (the Moors’ Sink). There are also some very deteriorated stairs which give access to underground tunnels where the Moors lived. The elders say that the location is enchanted. (Farafita, 2006: 149–150)

According to the IGESPAR website (http://arqueologia.igespar.pt), this place was classified as a national heritage site in 1984. It is known as the rock art shrine of Algeriz but it is also known by the local population as Pia dos Mouros (Moors’ Sink) or as Altar dos Sacrificios (Altar of Sacrifices) (the name that appears on official signs). It was probably built in the Roman period. It consists of two parallel rectangular cavities and some small stairs. One can also identify slots that must have supported the foundations of a structure which has collapsed. Another website (Sigilum Militem Christi, 2010) reports that the finds from this site included ‘two copper axes, a copper pin, a brass band, indigenous and Roman ceramic pottery’. These remains show that those who lived here were Romans and not Moors, despite legends to the contrary.

Several authors state that, on sunny days, you can see the Panöias Sanctuary (located in Vila Real), a national monument also built by the Romans, and where demonic cults held their initiation rites. Although experts have not yet identified the purpose of the Pia dos Mouros (the Moor’s Sink), the structural similarities with the Panöias sanctuary are undeniable.

The next stop is Fonte da Urze (Fountain of the Heather) in the parish of Carracedo de Montenegro. The legend says:

there is a fountain hidden in the bushes which is known as Fonte das Urzes. The elders say that in it there is a treasure and a snake. And that the snake is a female enchanted Moor. This snake usually appears at
midnight to whoever passes by. And if the person who passes does not fear it, the snake takes them to the treasure. They say that many went there and found the snake, but they were always frightened and fled immediately. Therefore no one has ever found the treasure. (Parafita, 2006: 148)

Very little is known about this fountain except that it has a rectangular tank covered by a roof. We were unable to gather any information about this site, beyond Correia’s recording of the myth, but even so we believe it is an interesting stopover because of the magic and mysticism that the community associates with this place and the eerie idea of a treasure which no human has ever had the opportunity to see (a rare feature in the mythological corpus we reviewed) but which in theory any fearless prospective visitor might.

Conclusions

It is clear from this research that heritage, tourism and identity are complex, interconnected concepts. The literature and fieldwork review we conducted revealed that the identity of Valpaços, associated at many points with the mythical Moors, has been conserved as a set of beliefs and practices anchored not only in material history but also in the continuous imaginary, symbolic construction of cultural dynamics. So, as a community’s intangible assets are constantly being reprocessed and are renewing themselves, the collective notion of identity also undergoes transformations as the future is built by rediscovering and recreating the past.

In this sense, the collective imagination in rural communities is constituted by mental representations generated by social interactions in all their complexity. One can see that, through these forms, the population holds symbolic capital, which is characterised by the effort to achieve distinction from other social groups, and the converting of certain spaces into places of conviviality. People find meaning in the quest for territorial distinctiveness if it is perceived and accepted by the whole community.

According to Eliade (1965), the whole region has one (or several) centre(s), meaning a sacred place or places par excellence. It is in this place, here understood as associated with legends, that the sacred fully manifests itself. As this is a sacred space, which is given by a hierophany, we are confronted with a sacred and mythical location and not an unholy land. The religious man has then need to consecrate the space or build it ritually, revealing that the world can become sacred to him, even though suffering profane influences. What defines the place as sacred is the perception of the group involved, the belief system differentiating one group from another. The question of the authenticity and the uniqueness of each region is of crucial importance, since this is what will allow the visitor to select what specific region to visit. We believe, however, that for a set of legends to be part of an attractive and sustainable tourist product, the existing resources (material and immaterial) must be properly preserved. Tourism can benefit from the informed cultural appreciation of a locale, encouraging the recognition and prestige of cultural forms and ways of being without threatening them or the lifestyle or the interests of the community. To maintain the cultural identity derived from components of local culture is to keep safe the elements that constitute rich intangible heritage (transmitted from generation to generation). This heritage is constantly recreated in accordance with its environment, its interaction with nature and its history, generating a sense of identity and continuity. These practices of preservation promote respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.

The intangible heritage of Valpaços is thus more than just a tourist attraction; it is an element capable of highlighting, preserving and offering assistance to understanding and appreciating the cultural identity of the community. The development of tourism in the district should at every level be reconcilable with the preservation of heritage, the everyday use of cultural assets and the enhancement of local cultural identities. One of the main difficulties in pursuing this research was the physical degradation of some of the places discussed, which is an indication of the neglect the authorities have shown these important sites.

However, there is a growing awareness of the importance of protecting local cultural heritage; happily, some recent timely interventions have been made in this respect. There has been some safeguarding of places with special value, as in the case of the studies conducted on Fia dos Mouros. However, there remains a clear absence of sign-posting, for example. Access to the various sites on our proposed route is, in most cases, acceptable, but there are serious problems in how to find your way to these places (the exception being Fia dos Mouros). As well as the lack of information signs along the roads, they are also absent from the monuments themselves. There are no placards, pamphlets or other texts available where tourists can gather information about what they are seeing. Visitors would, therefore, need to engage a guide to provide the necessary contextualisation. The guide would also be responsible for relating not only the legends associated with these places, but those versions which find some confirmation in recorded history as well.

In the further development of tourist routes, it would be necessary to identify which roads or trails should be used, as well as bringing together
information about the hostels, restaurants and bars that can be frequented along these itineraries. The cultural elements which are inevitably the highlights of these itineraries should be integrated in a package of activities that are pleasurable and relaxing as well as instructive. It is also essential that any future itineraries seek feedback from users and visitors, to test their appeal and in order to understand what their strong points of interest are.

References