

# TOURISM, NATURE AND CULTURE: DISPUTES FOR “HERITAGE SITES” IN “PARTICIPATIVE DEBATES” IN ILHA GRANDE, STATE OF RIO DE JANEIRO (RJ), BRAZIL

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## Introduction

In 2007, a restructuring process was initiated in Ilha Grande involving the advisory councils of two important conservation units: Ilha Grande State Park and the Tamoios Environmental Protection Area. At the same time, other working groups were established such as the Sustainability Working Group, an initiative of the Rio de Janeiro state government, as well as the Master Plan Core Management Group, set up by the Municipal Authority of Angra dos Reis. Subsequently, at the beginning of 2008, discussions started regarding a proposal for reclassifying part of the State’s Biological Reserve of Praia do Sul, where a group of people known locally as “caiçaras” have been living for over four generations. The purpose of these forums was to create “participative spaces” in which various social actors and agents (for example, representatives of local and state authorities, the local population, scientists, representatives of the third sector and agents both directly and indirectly involved with tourism) could debate the innumerable issues which have emerged in relation to the conservation units, contribute to drafting legislation and regulations and propose a planning process for tourism activities on the island. Negotiations regarding the future of Ilha Grande in terms of heritage and tourism involved various actors/agents. In this process, each of the above mentioned groups sought to legitimize their own value systems, views and practices.

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In Ilha Grande, the idea of protecting nature has become familiar. It is now part - albeit in different ways - of the imaginary and the discourse of public institutions, organized civil society, the tourism market and, more generally, it is part of common sense beliefs. The concept of heritage is associated to this idea, itself imbued with notions of legacy, the need to safeguard and maintain elements and resources belonging to the past and protect them from the destructive forces of the present.

During the 1970s, many nature conservation units were implemented. It was also a period in which a large number of norms and laws were drafted in order to protect the “natural and cultural heritage” of the region, represented by the remaining areas of Mata Atlântica forest and associated marine ecosystems, as well as archaeological sites, monuments and ruins. Although the advisory councils of nature conservation units have been inscribed in law since the National System of Nature Conservation Act - SNUC - was passed in 2000, the political impact on Ilha Grande was only felt in 2007, when debates brought together the preservation of the natural and cultural heritage and the development of tourism.

Conservation units emerged on the island at the time tourism was being developed in almost all localities, resulting in the continuous migration of people in search of work and business opportunities and involving almost all human resources available on the island. Ilha Grande went through various economic cycles during its settlement and occupation process, such as the cultivation of sugarcane and coffee (from the 19th century onward), and subsequently (from the 1920s) the production of tinned sardines in a number of factories established by Japanese immigrants on some of the island's beaches, though by the 1970s these had nearly all disappeared. Coffee and sugarcane cultivation was abandoned due to soil exhaustion and the high cost of transporting products from an oceanic island to the mainland. During most the 20th century, in addition to the sardine factories, Ilha Grande's economy has been mainly centered on subsistence agriculture and fishing. However, the amount of fish available along the southern coast of the state of Rio de Janeiro was greatly reduced due to the predatory methods employed by the large fishing companies (BASTOS *et al.*, 2009).

Tourism started on the island with the growth of the Costa Verde region and the building of the BR-101 road linking Rio de Janeiro and Santos. Tourism development was slower on Ilha Grande than on the mainland due to the fact that there was a maximum security prison on the island, the Instituto Penal Cândido Mendes, though this closed in 1994. From then on, all local communities saw a growth in tourism, in particular on the side of the island facing the mainland, specifically in Vila do Abraão. The number of guesthouses, restaurants and shops grew continuously, on the whole employing local people, but also attracting an influx from the mainland. According to the Angra dos Reis Tourism Inventory (TURISANGRA, 2013) there are 460 tourism establishments on the island, including food and accommodation, of which 95 are found in Vila do Abraão. There are a total of 890 rooms available on the island.

The heritage discourse is frequently used in tourism, both in relation to developing attractions, products or routes, as well as in planning new destination projects. Within the context of heritage and conservation, discussions on alternative ways of conducting

tourism are rooted in the concept of sustainability and a paradigm of development based on the local area or community, as well as in the value of the local, traditional and rural cultures. The process of heritage creation, promoted by both “environmentalism” and tourism, brings together differing conceptions and visions of the world as well as different and competing practices, expressed within the “participative forums”.

The purpose of this study is to consider both the relationship between tourism and environmental/cultural protection and the idea of heritage imbued within the debates that take place in these forums.

This article used a qualitative methodology and an ethnographic approach which were the basis for a doctoral thesis. It involved a field study which lasted three and a half years, consisting of participation in and direct observation of the forum meetings mentioned above, as well as in-depth interviews with various social actors such as members of the forums, staff of the environmental bodies working in the area, local residents and representatives of neighborhood associations.

## Nature as heritage

The concepts of nature protection present in the environmentalist discourse encompass ideas of heritage and, therefore, of ownership and belonging. Although the notion of natural heritage was disseminated by Unesco from the 1970s onward, it has much older origins going back to the concern for protecting monuments, initially with a historical or artistic value, which subsequently came to encompass the idea of natural monuments. “From the point of view of natural heritage, monumentality reflects a spectacular and grandiose concept of nature, almost absent of humans. It is untouchable and only available for visual enjoyment” (SCIFONI, 2008, p. 17).

In Brazil, the term natural monument appears for the first time in the 1937 Federal Constitution. Article 134 established that attacks on historical, artistic and natural monuments were equivalent to those perpetrated against national heritage. The perception of natural monuments as predominately aesthetic seems to have single-handedly inspired the development of protection legislation in Brazil. This perspective can be contrasted with the notion of heritage, more focused on tradition, customs and collective memory. Therefore, it was by “focusing on the monument, characterized by its aesthetic value which could not be violated, that the notion of natural heritage was internationally formulated and recognized” (SCIFONI, 2008, p. 22). This concept was clearly expressed in the “Convention on World, Cultural and Natural Heritage”, a Unesco document which was the result of a conference held in Paris in 1972.

The idea of “non-material heritage” emerged in Brazil in the Federal Constitution of 1988 and focused on popular customs, knowledge, legends, rituals, language, myths, traditional technologies and know-how. Thus, “nature” became strongly linked to “culture”, in that these customs, knowledge, legends, rituals and technologies are the product of the interaction between these fields (ABREU and CHAGAS, 2003).

However, it was only during the Conference on the Environment and Development - ECO 92 - that notions of genetic heritage and intangible heritage came to light. The

Convention on Biological Diversity, signed by the countries present at the conference, established the norms to regulate the use and protection of biological diversity in each country. From this moment onward, the sustainable use of natural resources becomes a constant topic of national and international debate.

In the discourses on nature protection, which fostered legislation, regulation and public policies, heritage was explicitly referred to both directly and indirectly in terms such as legacy, natural heritage and natural resources. A new topic was introduced to discussions on biodiversity - the rights of indigenous populations and so-called traditional peoples. This was due to their knowledge about natural systems. A new vision, therefore, emerges in which the conservation of nature, and fauna and flora resources, are intrinsically linked to the maintenance of the culture of these populations which is also understood as heritage. This issue is currently being intensely debated. Nevertheless it is not consensual. Some researchers and writers on the “natural sciences” deny the knowledge, vision and rights of these populations<sup>1</sup>.

However, the “Brazilian natural heritage” is generally seen as a very valuable resource. The country is considered to be a world bio-economic powerhouse. The great diversity of Brazilian fauna and flora ecosystems is a genuine “biological treasure trove of genes, molecules and micro-organisms” (ABREU, 2003, p.37). It reflects an unexplored chemical heritage which may be used to develop medication and other essential items (*idem*).

If, on the one hand, attributing economic value to the “genetic heritage” associated to the knowledge “traditional people” possess about the cycles and elements of nature means that this knowledge is valued, on the other, it turns these populations into mere guardians of this knowledge-resource. That is, they are seen as part of an external, economic or environmentalist conception. Whilst these populations are considered in relation to conservation policies, they may also be, and frequently are, dispossessed. In this case, the process of de-territorialization means that they are not allowed to use land in their habitual way. The feeling of belonging to the land and their own way of relating to it are not understood/accepted by the social actors/agents who are responsible for preserving “natural heritage” or “genetic heritage”. Land usage practices which these populations argue for are seen as backward or inappropriate.

This is the basis of the conservation units established on the island and, above all, in the case of the Praia do Sul Biological Reserve (a more restrictive type of reserve), in an area inhabited by the residents of Vila do Adventureiro. From the point of view of those who created the conservation unit, the type of agriculture residents employed was not appropriate. Furthermore, the forest area used for exploitation activities was considered “uninhabited”. Therefore, the preservation of “natural heritage” is in contraposition to the preservation of “cultural heritage”, which involved the customs and practices of the local residents.

## **Heritage, preservation and tourism**

There has been much debate concerning notions of heritage, both material and non-material. This phenomenon is closely associated with the globalized era, in which

cultures very quickly become “hybrid” (CANCLINI, 2006), where the re-discovery of the past, culture and nature is associated to the value attached to memory and tradition. These topics are recurrent in various academic fields. We have observed in a number of localities on the island the emergence of studies and projects related to the reconstruction of memory, the production of inventories of natural and cultural elements, as well as the systematic classification of data in order to make them comprehensible and attractive to a public interested in consuming recollections of the past and nature.

Alongside the so-called heritage destruction which occurs because of the priority given to dominant economic interests, other policies emerge aimed at its protection. Furthermore, there has been an increase in private investment in the area. This has brought a new significance to natural and cultural heritage in addition to its scientific, documental, symbolic and affective meanings: market value, much in evidence in tourism.

Another change in the notion of cultural heritage relates to the anthropological conception of culture. Here nature is conceived through culture. It could be said that the field related to “cultural heritage” also encompasses the field of “nature conservation”.

The idea of cultural (and natural) heritage is currently undergoing great change, a process initiated during discussion groups, part of the Constituent Assembly for the 1988 Constitution. New ideas of heritage were instilled in articles 215 and 216 of the Federal Constitution and established the protection of material and non-material natural assets. This process gathered speed from 2000 onward when inventory and registration procedures for “non-material and intangible cultural heritage” were established (ABREU e CHAGAS, 2003, p.11). Previously, the main focus was the preservation of architectural heritage representing specific styles, as well as turning material assets - known as “bricks and mortar”, such as churches, forts and monuments - into heritage sites. From that period onward, value was attached to non-material legacy represented by popular customs, knowledge, legends, rituals, language, myths, traditional technologies and local know-how. Thus, “nature” is strongly associated with “culture”, in that these customs, knowledge, legends, rituals and technologies are the products of the interaction between the two fields. Changes in definition also involved the concepts of “bio-heritage” and “genetic heritage” which proposed modifications to the way the nature/culture relationship and “natural heritage” are seen to fall within the field of intangible heritage (ABREU e CHAGAS, 2003).

This process can be observed in Ilha Grande, given that it lies at the heart of a large number of discussions taking place in the forums. With regard to the conservation units, although debates initially referred more to “nature preservation or conservation”, once discussions included the rights of the “caiçara” population residing in these areas, the issue of cultural heritage became closely associated to the idea of natural heritage.

An interesting concept which contributed to this discussion is that of “historical landscapes” (ARANTES, 2004). This term refers to peoples and territories where the natural landscape or cultural heritage are identified as being distinctive and deserving of preservation. They can also be transformed into resources for developing market products. In this way, local communities and social groups integrate social spheres which

can transcend the local and the regional, penetrating globalized cultural and economic spheres such as tourism, the cultural industry and the media.

Disseminating and consuming cultural goods is crucial for transforming lifestyles and establishing symbolic borders across the world (Arantes, 2004). Thus, the global market is fed on cultural differences, promoting the generation and circulation of resources. Contemporary cultural products are both global and rooted in the local, creating “global meanings of place” which interact with identity, memory and tradition (ARANTES, 2004, p.3).

In the contemporary capitalist world, tourism is a powerful economic activity. It tends toward flexible specialization, breaking down into different segments in order to meet the needs of niche markets and a wide variety of interest groups, developing products rooted in cultural, geographic, social, ethnic, historical and ecological diversity. The tendency to develop segmented tourism products such as ecotourism, cultural tourism, ethnic tourism and community tourism means that different social groups within different historical, ethnic and social realities are immersed within a socio-economic and political dynamics reaffirming and re-developing identities, reconstructing memories and “inventing traditions” (HOBSBAWM, 2002). This movement originated both from a search for answers to the innumerable external expectations in relation to cultural preservation stimulated (though not exclusively) by tourism, and from the need to address ongoing changes.

For example, in Vila do Aventureiro reclaiming/recreating the caíçara identity has been important to keep the local population (albeit provisionally and conditionally) within the biological reserve (not legally permissible), with the potential continuation of some practices and customs, made possible by reclassifying the area as a Sustainable Development Reserve (SDR). Furthermore it has also been important to develop a differentiated touristic product. Similar processes have occurred in various other localities in Ilha Grande, though in different ways. The legislation in force which protects nature and culture has established specific ways in which local residents can defend their rights to remain in their territories and make cultural use of the land. In general, the “traditional” uses of nature such as hunting, fishing, agriculture and exploitation activities are inhibited or restricted by legislation. The formulation of rights related to “traditional cultures” is a powerful argument in the political dispute within this field. On the other hand, by appropriating some cultural specificities to develop attractions, destinations and routes, some tourism segments reinforce the need for preservation/conservation<sup>ii</sup>.

It is within this context that the idea of maintaining an apparently “cultural essence” lies, where the “new uses” - represented by interests related to nature and culture such as tourism and even preservation policies themselves - are important promoters of change.

The symbolic borders of some cultural aspects of groups living in “historical landscape” areas are more “porous” than others and, therefore, are more susceptible to innovations when in contact with other social groups (Arantes, 2004). However, other spheres and activities are more imbued with a sense of identity, reflecting what the groups consider to be “tradition”. It is precisely these elements, perceived by external actors as “references” of a group’s social identity, which are the main object of cultural policies. The potential of “heritage assets” to differentiate the group without making it impermeable

to outside demands affects the likelihood and effectiveness of a group’s relationship with the market. It may be that this “porosity” is not due to “inherent” or “essential” group characteristics, but to the possibilities which have been historically woven and the groups’ social organization.

## The “rhetoric of loss” and the “allegory of nature”

In his book “A retórica da perda” [The rhetoric of loss], José Reginaldo Gonçalves argues that the heritage discourse which emerged in Brazil during the 1930s was, and still is, closely linked to the continuous construction and reconstruction of national identity. He shows that, in addition to its cognitive dimension, heritage has also had symbolic consequences, that is, it has a political dimension.

Basing himself on the ideas of Hayden White and James Clifford, Gonçalves (2002, p.21) argues that the “theory of a fictional construction of the ‘past’ by historians and of ‘culture’ by anthropologists” is used to interpret narrative strategies in discourses about national identities and memories in general, and the Brazilian identity and memory in particular, so that the nation and its culture seem to be imbued with coherence and continuity (GONÇALVES, 2002).

The work of developing national narratives is therefore endless, as can be observed, for example, in myths. Whilst anthropologists and historians are charged with descriptively setting out this heritage, other actors pragmatically collect, restore and preserve heritage sites so that they can be enjoyed in the future and can fulfill their educational and political purposes, as a second nature. These practices are permeated with ideas about saving these objects from disappearance. The theory which underpins this idea is that history is an inexorable process of destruction in which values, institutions and objects tend to be lost. Therefore, objects that deserve to be preserved “are conceived within an imaginary and original unity permeated with attributes such as coherence, continuity, totality and authenticity” (GONÇALVES, 2002, p. 23).

By establishing a parallel between the heritage questions described by Gonçalves and so-called natural heritage, nature conservation units can be seen as heritage collections which need be recovered and preserved. An analogy can be established between activities such as reforestation, ecosystem recovery projects, the reintroduction of species, and the process of restoration and recovery of heritage goods.

Similarly, underpinning conceptions of nature preservation and conservation is the idea that the various social uses of these areas, that is, the appropriation by different social groups of heritage, is seen as loss, destruction or degradation by others. The recovery and preservation of assets is, therefore, the other side of the coin.

The distancing process produced by time and space transforms objects and collections into “objects of desire” (GONÇALVES, 2002). Therefore, protected areas are not only interesting to those who wish to protect nature because of its intrinsic value but also because they are also real and symbolic “objects of consumption” which deserve to be “recovered/rescued”. Thus the idea of preserving natural heritage is instilled within the discourse on sustainable tourism.

The heritage dynamics which include conceptions of loss and recovery can be understood as allegories (*idem*). Allegories involve a narrated historical situation which expresses “a strong feeling of loss and transition, together with an insatiable desire for recovery (...) and a permanent expectation of a redeemed future” (p.27). Similarly, the constant movement between disappearance and reconstruction expressed by the conservationist discourse and local narratives on destruction and preservation of nature can be seen as an allegory which presupposes the essential unity of nature, woven together by integration and integrity. “Seen as allegories, national narratives about cultural heritage have a moral and political message: if the nation is reflected within the process of losing its cultural heritage, its own existence is put at risk” (p.32).

### **Heritage: a non-consensual category**

Heritage is an important theoretical category of social life, because it clearly determines the boundaries of subjective areas in contrast to the “other”. However, its different forms are not held together by consensus and homogeneity (GONÇALVES, 2003). On the contrary, they make up symbolic elements which are socially appropriated in different ways, and above all, permeated by a dynamics involving power. They are made up of visions, values, options, hierarchical classifications, processes of remembrance, and forgetfulness, where meanings, seen as symbolic capital, are in conflict. They determine the existence of hegemonic and subaltern elements. Heritage, therefore, is seen as a “space for conflicts and contradictory interests” (ABREU, 2003, p.41).

In Ilha Grande, the heritage sites which have been set up by the legislation and norms which regulate both the “environment” and tourism at times complement each other, but sometimes are in conflict.

Heritage is a space for the material and symbolic struggle between groups (CARAL, 2004). Here, the political and economic elites are hegemonic and it is evident that they have the power to determine which assets are important and whether they should be preserved, often deciding on the destruction of anything that undermines their interests and objectives. Furthermore, technical and sectorial points of views often clash. Despite having similar objectives, they frequently conflict in terms of comprehension and their interests are contradictory.

For example, the Penal Institute Cândido Mendes was knocked down on the behest of the state government of Rio de Janeiro who wished to “delete” a part of history. It was seen as a blotch obfuscating the dazzling beauty of Ilha Grande (landscape heritage), not in concert with the clear touristic vocation of the island. However, the State University of Rio de Janeiro - UERJ - occupied the prison site and, out of the rubbles of the implosion, set up the Museu do Cárcere (Prison Museum) signaling that this denied history was another type of heritage that should be protected.

Within the environmental/cultural/historic and touristic debate, different and conflicting visions of heritage are explicit. Heritage is often employed to designate belonging, as well as individual or collective ownership of material and non-material elements. To talk about heritage, therefore, is to make reference to the presence of individuals (or



groups) within a history which links the past to the present and the future. At the same time, heritage signifies rooting in space by designating specific territories where different heritage communities exist (BARRÈRE *et al.*, 2005).

Far more important than its symbolic, representative or communicative roles is the idea that heritage leads to action. It serves as a basis for legislation, decrees, and protection and preservation policies. It can also be used to underpin proceedings regarding claims of rights to property and land ownership (GONÇALVES, 2003).

Thus, we can talk about a “constituting tension” within the field of heritage between the “particular and the universal, as well as between the private and the public” (ABREU, 2003, p.30). The preservation of universal, global or human heritage is in conflict with other heritage conceptions, as for example in the case of the nature conservation units. Here the native communities use unit areas as a matter of course and see them as part of their ancestors’ heritage which needs to be preserved so that the culture of the group can continue to exist. In fact, for some, heritage is not simply something which belongs to them, but to which individuals belong. A fisherman (and craftsman) interviewed during this research stated that he wished that the island “would stay as it used to be in the old days, with not so many people and where they could fish, or cultivate or cut wood to make oars for their boats”. The sea, fishing, the forest, cultivation and woodcraft are seen by him as heritage, that is, as something which has this double meaning of belonging and which he wishes to preserve.

This tension between heritage conceptions can also be seen in the discourses of the “owners” of land which now constitutes conservation units. Here, there is a different sense of loss relating to the possibility of transforming land into economic value.

Private property, which has “unquestionable value” within the capitalist conception, relies on the supremacy of private patrimony or heritage. Within the liberal or neoliberal conception, this comes over and above the public interest. Thus the conceptions behind the preservation of collective patrimony or heritage conflict with economic property interests. During a council meeting, the representative of an association defending the interests of “land owners” who were questioning areas included within conservation units argued that the State was behaving “illegally, immorally and criminally” when it expanded the limits of conservation units to include areas considered to be private.

From the point of view of “nature protection” these areas are important ecosystems, that is, areas of endemism or under threat of species extinction. For this reason they mainly serve the public interest and are therefore liable to be transformed into conservation units. Although in theory private property has to be expropriated and compensated when setting up a public heritage site, in practice, *de facto* expropriation is immediate in terms of monitoring and usage, whereas compensation depends on the internal possibilities and conceptions of the State.

Article 225 of the Brazilian Constitution which came into force in 1988 relates specifically to the environment, which from that point became public property for collective use. Thus, it has to be safeguarded and protected for everyone. The establishment of nature conservation units, therefore, is seen as the creation of public areas and is a prerogative of the State.

This issue becomes more complex when dealing with populations which use and have an identity relationship of belonging with land, but do not own their land. We note therefore that while, on the one hand, the policy of creating/expanding conservation units - particularly those part of the Integral Protection group (SNUC, 2000) - preserves the public interest over private property, on the other hand, as procedures are not sufficiently democratic, turning private ownership into collective ownership ends up adversely affecting a part of the population. What is at stake in their case when land is turned into heritage sites is not property accumulation but their ability to make a living.

Issues of power are at the core of these discussions. The power to determine what is to be preserved and to decide how this is to be done. Preservation mechanisms choose assets according to their importance in relation to hegemonic values and based on the idea that it is possible to “freeze” them and block their patterns of change. In nature conservation policy and in particular in theories employed in the management of conservation units in the state of Rio de Janeiro, preservationist conceptions, that is, banning any usage of these territories, still hold sway. Integral Protection units (SNUC, 2000) are predominantly set up in which heritage assets are the fauna, flora and ecosystems. Although there are different types of Environmental Protection Areas (APAs) in the state, an Extractive Marine Reserve (RESEX) and a project for a Sustainable Development Reserve (SDR), both falling within the Sustainable Use group (SNUC, 2000), these categories are not sufficiently valued. The Rio de Janeiro state government does not favorably view the struggle for the recognition of the knowledge of the local population.

Through its environmental bodies, the State monopolizes the power to decide what is to be protected in Ilha Grande. The tourism and property markets (which are related) fight over this hegemony by negotiating areas or even disrespecting legislation. However, it is important to note that hegemonic powers do not act alone. Counter-hegemonic forces which emerge in subaltern environments can become associated to forces which arise within the State itself or even the market. This turns issues of territorial belonging and heritage development into complex phenomena.

### **Tourism and heritage dispute in participative forums**

Tourism is one of the main topics addressed in the forums in Ilha Grande. The view that it needs to be conducted in a different way is clear. One of the objectives of participative spaces is being a vector for change. These forums, therefore, together with conservation units, are responsible for regulating local touristic activity.

The various forums in Ilha Grande are very different. However, they are all spaces for promoting the idea of popular participation and shared management. They include advisory councils of conservation units, working groups and public consultation meetings, among other arenas.

The most prevalent type of tourism in the island is “mass tourism” which brings an excessive number of people to the same places in particular periods of the year - and in the case of Ilha Grande, in summer - because of its natural attractions. It is associa-

ted with the symbolic production of "preserved nature" and at the same time with the idea of risk and danger. These relate to both the process of environmental degradation because of the increase in tourism influx which is seen to be uncontrollable and also to the latent danger which, due to the island's mix in geological characteristics, leads to the emergence of risk areas.

Tourism demand in the region has always been associated to the beauty of the landscape produced by the contrast between the Mata Atlântica rainforest and the sea. The establishment of the first conservation unit in the region, namely the Ilha Grande State Park in 1971, was associated with tourism, as the first organization to manage the unit was (the now defunct) FLUMITUR, the State of Rio de Janeiro Tourism Company. As already described, fishing - once the island's main economic activity - has decreased and tourism has taken its place. It involves a considerable amount of people, both as workers and consumers, as can be seen by the large number of businesses in this sector (four hundred and sixty, according to TURISANGRA) mainly concentrated in the small villages around the island, in particular Vila do Abraão. Furthermore, interviews with community members and the observation of forum meetings also confirmed the importance of tourism for Ilha Grande today. This was the main topic referred to during all the interviews.

Since the 1970s, a number of conservation units were set up and this has certainly been a limiting factor in relation to both tourism and property speculation. Although many of the numerous environmental regulations in the area are constantly flouted, forest recovery is both extensive and visible. In earlier periods the forest almost disappeared through logging and agricultural activities.

Furthermore, despite the fact that building activities are intensive throughout Ilha Grande, larger business ventures, resulting from more powerful economic interests, have been kept at bay. Many localities have been the site of disputes regarding the construction of huge tourism facilities. However, these ventures have been prevented by the political action of movements involving the environmental sectors of the state, NGOs, associations, universities and the local population.

At the same time, the number of small accommodation establishments has soared. This process started in the 1990s, particularly after the prison complex was shut in 1994.

Although this may appear more democratic in that it provides opportunities to a larger number of less wealthy people, it is disorganized and has caused enormous changes which have had significant impact on the landscape, environmental conditions and on the lives of the local residents.

Despite the fact that the authorities have seen unprecedented growth in tourism, they have not provided the necessary infrastructure, planning and land use regulations to address the new demands. Therefore, problems have increased despite all the regional planning which has taken place and continues to take place. Most of the social and environmental problems produced by this situation relate to an increase in sewage and waste. According to SILVA, p.77 "the production of solid waste in Vila do Abraão is equivalent to between 15 and 18 tones/day during the high season and between 5 and 6 tones/day during the low season. This amount is based on boat tonnage of waste", and

results from deforestation and construction in prohibited areas and the large quantity of people concentrated in small localities during certain periods of the year.

In interviews for this study<sup>iii</sup>, replies such as “tourism is good because it creates jobs” or “we have greater opportunities for making money through tourism” are recurrent and are given so much credence that it is claimed that there are no employment opportunities in the area except for tourism.

This positive image of the sector predominates over that of an activity which fosters “pollution, noise, drugs, strange people, the destruction of nature, violence, thefts and muggings, and waste” which is also a common view in discussions about the growth of tourism on Ilha Grande. These ideas are frequently mentioned during forum meetings<sup>iv</sup>. On the other hand, it is also possible to hear the view that tourism can potentially save local culture and even nature. This idea of saving what is conceived as the “natural and cultural heritage” of Ilha Grande goes hand-in-hand with the conception of its destruction.

In Praia de Parnaiooca (ocean-facing), for example, most of the population had emigrated due to the dangers of being close to the prison and the constant attacks by escaped prisoners. Once the prison was closed some ex-residents returned, attracted by the work opportunities tourism provided. In this case, tourism emerges as an activity which “has revived almost dead local communities” (according to an interview with a resident of Ilha Grande, member of the Ilha Grande State Park advisory council).

Environmental bodies, usually very critical of tourism, also believed in its “saving” capacity, pointing to ecotourism as a possible means of organizing visits in a better way, improving relations with the local communities and a source of fund-raising. However, it is also argued that “it is not possible to survive exclusively on tourism and alternatives need to be found”. The greatest concern is its seasonality. Some forum participants believe that “year-round attractions need to be developed”, particularly events. Others talk about diversifying the local economy by developing mariculture and craft, but then realize that these activities are also partially dependent on tourism.

For most interviewees, since tourism started on Ilha Grande in the 1970s, it “has not stopped” and it is “out of control”. The most frequent complaint during interviews and meetings is that the local authority “does not control building activities, which are taking place higher and higher on the hills”. People are fearful of Ilha Grande becoming like Angra, surrounded by built-up hills on all sides (PRADO, 2003). The need to establish control by assessing a ‘load capacity’, though no one can precisely define this, is discussed. Many are quite certain that this would be the answer to the island’s problems. The most important challenge, however, is restricting the arrival of people. Not only tourists, but in particular, those in search of work or investment opportunities.

The different models of tourism most frequently practiced on the island are mainly related to nature. A large number of forum members highlight this issue, where their wish is to invest in certain types of tourism whilst “divesting” the island of others. Tourism activities can be classified as follows:

### Types related to nature tourism in Ilha Grande

Environmental tourists	Tourists who visit conservation units and are concerned with protecting nature. This category is further subdivided as part of these tourists are also interested in “cultural heritage” represented by “caíçara culture”, including their myths, crafts, knowledge, old buildings and ruins. A more predominant group is mainly interested in natural attractions (such as landscape, vegetation, fauna, geological and geographical aspects).
Sporting tourists	They enjoy long walks and climbing high hills amongst other activities which present physical challenges such as trekking to Pico do Papagaio, touring the island on foot and surfing on the beaches of Lopes Mendes, Parnaioca and Aventureiro.
Tourists interested in leisure associated with nature	Here the main natural attractions are beaches and boat trips. There is also a marked interest due to it being “a fashionable place”

Currently this last type predominates although the tourism master plan of Ilha Grande (TANGARÁ, 1998) associates this type of tourism to “mass tourism” and sees it as being inappropriate for the area, in particular due to the high level of rainfall in the region. Although it is recognized that it is impossible to stop it, given that it occurs relatively spontaneously and most of the tourism system is based on it, this phenomenon urgently needs to be controlled.

The first two types fall within the ecotourism sector, which is a type of tourism that most participants in the forums expressed preference for, despite divergences in relation to its meaning. Generally speaking, environmentalists believe that it is crucial to have a smaller number of visitors and their impact needs to be effectively controlled. Businessmen believe that ecotourism leads to “selected” and selective tourists who are willing to pay more. Indeed, a common view found in these forums is that this type of tourist would be more sensitive to environmental education, which according to forum members is a fundamental factor. Many also use national parks in Brazil and abroad partaking in activities such as going on long walks, treks and climbing.

There are a further two categories associated to natural attractions which involve other motives.

## Types of Tourists in Ilha Grande indirectly associated to natural attractions

<i>“Low income” tourists (as they are called particularly by guesthouse owners and other tourism entrepreneurs).</i>	They come to Ilha Grande attracted by cheaper types of accommodation such as “units at the bottom of the garden” and camping sites. There are also day-trippers.
<i>Event tourists</i>	Participants in events who come to festivities such as “festa junina” [June parties], the “Ilha Grande Music and Ecology Festival” or the “Forró Dance Festival”.
<i>Cruise liner tourists</i>	Cruise liner passengers who land at Vila do Abraão and spend a few hours there, generally looking for boat trips to other beaches on the island.

These three types of tourists divide the opinion of forum participants. With regard to “low income” tourists, some participants believe that they should not be encouraged at all, given that they only have a negative impact on the island, “producing waste and causing problems without bringing in money”.

One of the most frequently cited ways of discouraging this flow is limiting the number of ferries of the Barcas S.A. company which brings in a large number of passengers, in particular during public holidays, when extra boats are put in place. There are other types of boats such as sailing boats, small speed boats, schooners and trawlers which also function in the Ilha Grande Bay area. However, the ferries are the only regular transport and have been granted a license by the state government to make the crossing. They can bring approximately 1000 passengers to Vila do Abraão at one time and therefore have become the main focus for actions of control.

Another option would be to control the cheaper type of accommodation, some of which is illegal. However, some forum members believe that cheaper tourism is important since it provides a service to the poorer population. However it should be better organized and regulated by law. The poorer “native” population which is not well represented in the forums tends to defend more informal types of accommodation, criticized by guesthouse owners, such as bed and breakfast, this being their main link to tourism.

Event tourism has also been debated in the councils and most participants believe that it is important for reducing seasonality. However, a considerable amount of organization and monitoring would be needed. Celebrations which are traditionally organized in different local communities, usually in honor of patron saints, are well regarded within the forums as they “preserve the island’s culture”.

Opinions diverge in relation to the passengers of cruise liners anchored in the bay of Ilha Grande who land on the quay at Vila do Abraão. Some forum members are in favor of these tourists, “as long as there is organization - which is lacking at present”. Others are completely against them as they “have a large impact on Abraão whilst not

bringing any benefits to the community". Almost all agree that cruise liner operations need to be studied because there is a lack of data as to their positive and negative effects. Nevertheless, there are those who totally condemn this type of tourism, arguing that it should be banned as it only causes problems. Indeed, this topic is quite polemic and therefore avoided by forum participants.

As can be observed, the relations each social segment in Ilha Grande establishes with tourism and with environmentalism reflect the central focus of the topics discussed within the participative forums. The part different sectors play in relation to tourism varies, just as their roles vary within the forums, and this relates to the social arrangements which are in constant evolution.

## Conclusions

One of the main objectives of this research was to chart the different understandings with regard to what is thought of as heritage and what is important to protect. It also looked at the sources of the many difficulties in terms of mutual understanding among actors/agents in the scenario analyzed.

The imaginaries of each group and their representations about Ilha Grande take shape in the discourses and practices of everyday situations and are reflected in the negotiations that occur within the forums. However, there is no homogeneity even within each group. The experience of popular participation in the forums is characterized mainly by the diversity of social meanings. The different actors and social groups involved understand these differently and attribute different meanings to them.

The State controls the decision-making process as the forums are merely consultative and its projects mainly express a biocentric conception of conservation, corroborated by civil society actors who share the same paradigms. These conceptions of heritage result in the exclusion of subaltern populations, often naturalizing these conceptions as if they were common to all actors involved.

The planning and zoning proposed and applied impose a spatial conception/understanding based on the use of rationalized objectives which conflict with native conceptions. Although the idea of encouraging the presence of actors in meetings may be imbued in the participation discourse, these forums are perceived more in the sense that hegemonic theories are assimilated rather than a real exchange of knowledge takes place. That is, forums are seen as a way of "educating" or making the population "aware" of the "truth", which is the hegemonic position. Thus, implicit within this conception is the idea that once everyone is "well informed" they will agree with the position and reach a consensus. This presupposes intellectual emptiness on the part of the other actors.

However, despite all the difficulties which are historically reproduced, delineating disputes and differences in perspectives, even within governmental bodies, it can be observed that forum activities are educational because different conceptions are exchanged, producing learning and theorization about the heritage process.

Another significant aspect is the development of networks which can promote the dissemination of information and an approximation on important issues, bringing

together different groups, thus changing, even if momentarily, the correlation of forces, allowing for new power structures.

## Notes

- i I am referring here to the position of researchers as observed during interviews and meetings in Ilha Grande, in particular during the (ongoing) process of re-classifying part of the Praia do Sul biological reserve (REBIO) into a Sustainable Development Reserve (SDR). This is also observed in Fábio Olmos (2001) *et al.* “Correção política e biodiversidade: a crescente ameaça das populações tradicionais à Mata Atlântica” [Political Correction and biodiversity: the growing threat of traditional populations to the Mata Atlântica].
- ii In environmentalist terms “preservation” and “conservation” have different meanings, the former relates more to the non-usage of resources, whereas the latter supposes controlled use.
- iii Members of the above-mentioned forums were interviewed, as well as members of resident associations, local NGOs and residents from a number of different localities in Ilha Grande, in particular residents from Vila do Abraão and Vila do Aventureiro. Staff from IEF [State Institute for Forests], FEEMA [State Environmental Engineering Foundation] (both now extinct), INEA [State Environment Institute] and some tourists participated in the interviews. In addition to twenty-five formal interviews which were duly recorded, an indefinite number of informal interviews (which were subsequently noted down) were conducted via conversations during boat trips and in local bars, restaurants, guesthouses and shops and at other times. The identity of interviewees was kept confidential.
- iv Opinions which emerged during the meetings were collected directly, by means of observation/note-taking, participation and recordings. Approximately 60 meetings were recorded in three and a half years in the different forums studied.

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# TOURISM, NATURE AND CULTURE: DISPUTES FOR “HERITAGE SITES” IN “PARTICIPATIVE DEBATES” IN ILHA GRANDE, STATE OF RIO DE JANEIRO (RJ), BRAZIL

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HELENA CATÃO HENRIQUES FERREIRA

**Resumo:** Os “fóruns participativos” da Ilha Grande, reativados/reestruturados desde 2007, acionaram debates e disputas acerca das concepções sobre conservação da natureza/cultura. O turismo, principal atividade econômica local e importante fenômeno sociocultural na Ilha, tem provocado inúmeras transformações na região, constituindo um dos principais temas debatidos. Em seu âmbito, muito tem se utilizado do discurso sobre patrimônio, no que concerne à criação de atrativos, produtos e roteiros, e também nos projetos de planejamento. Este trabalho reflete sobre as relações entre o turismo na Ilha e as ideias de patrimônio discutidas nesses fóruns. Baseia-se em trabalho de campo com abordagem etnográfica, desenvolvida entre 2007 e 2010, envolvendo participação e observação direta em reuniões dos fóruns e entrevistas com atores sociais envolvidos.

**Palavras-chave:** Turismo; Conservação da natureza; Patrimônio; Participação local.

**Resumen:** Los “foros participativos” de Ilha Grande, reactivados y reestructurados desde 2007, han conducido debates y controversias que hablan sobre las concepciones de la conservación de la naturaleza/cultura. El turismo, principal actividad económica e importante fenómeno socio-cultural de la isla, ha provocado muchos cambios en la región, lo que constituye uno de los principales temas tratados en los debates de los foros. En su ámbito, mucho se ha utilizado sobre el discurso acerca del patrimonio, en su relación con la creación de atractivos, productos y visitas turísticas y también en la planificación de proyectos. Este trabajo tiene como objetivo reflexionar sobre las relaciones entre el turismo en la isla y las ideas de patrimonio que son discutidas en estos foros. Se basa en el trabajo etnográfico hecho a partir de una investigación de campo llevada a cabo entre 2007 y 2010, con la participación y la observación directa en las reuniones de los foros y también usando entrevistas con los actores sociales involucrados en el proceso.

**Palabra clave:** Turismo; Conservación de la naturaleza; Patrimonio; Participación local.

**Abstract:** The “participatory forums” of Ilha Grande were reactivated and restructured in 2007. They stimulated debates and disputes in which the very concepts of preservation of nature/culture are at stake. Tourism is the main local economic activity and an important sociocultural phenomenon on the island. It has brought about innumerable changes to the region and is a much debated topic. Discussions on heritage have been effective in establishing attractions, products and roadmaps, as well as playing a key role in project planning. The aim of this article is to reflect on the relationship between tourism on Ilha Grande and the ideas of heritage discussed in these forums. It is based on an ethnographic study which was researched and developed between 2007 and 2010. It encompasses participation in and direct observation of meetings held during the forums as well as interviews with the parties involved.

**Key-words:** Tourism, conservation of nature, heritage, local participation.

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