

Collective Experiences with Heritage: tourist events and socializations in the Historic Center of São Luís

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Abstract

Discussion about tourist events and other forms of socialization that take place in the Historic Center of São Luís – located in the State of Maranhão, in Brazil – which, in turn, give rise to collective tourist experiences linked to Historical Heritage. The aim of our work is to highlight the role of these events in the composition of collective heritage interactions, enhancing the general notion about the importance of preserving historic spaces and monuments. It addresses concepts of themes such as experience, heritage, and tourism, with an emphasis on the narrative of collective experiences. With a descriptive and analytical focus, it uses bibliographic material from authors who address the issues pertinent to the study and also analyzes the data collected through field research made with residents who participated in tourist events and socializations in the Historic Center of São Luís. These gregarious interactions are believed to promote the materialization of a collective feeling of belonging with the heritage.

Keywords: Collective experience. Tourist events. Patrimony. Historic Center of São Luís.

1. Introduction

Experience is key to the materialization of the comprehension that an individual has over a certain theme. This happens because human beings are prone to overlook or disregard the value of things and facts that were not explained to them in a concise or detailed manner. However, once they experience these things, they acquire a greater propensity to attribute value and meaning to things. This happens frequently in the notion that people have regarding historical heritage, that, in turn, is articulated with the disposition – or not – of these individuals to patrimonial preservation.

The development of events focused on tourists and on other types of socialization actions in historical spaces allows people to build up experiences with the patrimony that are carried out in a collective manner and that, consequently, also materialize collective notions of patrimony preservation, since the individuals have access to the patrimony within the same activity and in a similar temporal context.

This study aims to analyze how these collective experiences provided by touristic events and other socialization actions in historic spaces can be significant for heritage preservation policies, considering the power of awareness that resides in collective movements of action on the patrimony. From this problematic, using bibliographical research – with a documentary research step and empirical work – we sought to comprehend the impact on the formation on patrimonial notion of people who were present in projects and events held on the Historical Center of São Luís, having as of object of the analysis the projects Quarta do

Tambor (Wednesday of the drums) and Sarau Histórico (Historic soirée), that take place in the space Casa do Tambor de Crioula and the Deodoro Square, respectively.

This study brings an important contribution to the debate on patrimonial preservation policies, as it embarks on a new path of understanding of experiences with the historic heritage, showing its interdisciplinary by incorporating the theme of tourism and its developments in the process of the scientific investigation of collective experiences within historical spaces.

2. The patrimony and the social experiences

The discussions about the historic heritage have deepened over the years and have always brought along with them countless meanings about their concepts, origins, and preservation policies. The intention has always been to establish for individuals, who by chance have access to historical heritage, ford of interaction with the historical monuments that were appropriate and cohesive to the function of patrimonial preservation.

The patrimony acquires a transforming function of the experiences of their visitors, giving authenticity to the visits to the Historical Centers of the cities. However, little is said about how the experiences of these individuals alter the collective perceptions regarding the patrimony, creating new forms of interaction with these historical monuments, in which the experiences are not only guided by the norms established for the preservation, but become themselves the new north of these policies.

Heidegger (1987), defines experience as a phenomenon that presents reflexive patterns and that has the potential to transform the human being, having the power of provoking significative effects on the manner those who suffer the experiences starts to face the events in their surroundings. Thus, the person who have the experience not necessarily it the active element of the happening. In many cases, the experience happens by means of an spontaneous process, in which the residents can be transformed by the way these experiences are presented to them.

It is important to highlight that, when speaking about experiences, there are a group of aspects that need to be further discussed, considering that inside the movement of experiencing that are countless theoretical and epistemological elements that need to be understood in order to comprehend in the existing dimension of the structure of the experience, one of the most important being the complex and non-linear issue of subjectivity

For Foucault (2004), the subjectivity is constituted through techniques of the self, in which the subject build himself up with experiences, inside a set of procedures in which the subject coexist with problems and constraints, which are capable of changing the subject. According to the author, the antipersonification is the first condition of the possibility of existence, even tough this condition brings, simultaneously, possibilities of resistance, in which the existence of other individuals is essential to the process of self-constitution. Therefore, the subjectivities are in constant transformation and have direct articulation with the historical and affective territory where they are located. (FOUCAULT, 2004).

Another major element in the experience is communication, being it, according to Mead (1992), a specific experience that helps in the construction of the subject according to their interactions with other subjects. Communication allows that the individuals give greater meaning to their experiences, expressing constantly

the notion of self and the notion that they have of others, They stop to have their experiences measured by their actions and start to measure them mostly by their interactions (SHEPHERD, 2005).

Thus, the experience developed within spaces in the Historic Center of São Luís tends to be more significant when shared among a group of people as it allows for the sharing of subjectivities through communication in this process of interaction with the built heritage. The collective experience materializes the sense of heritage according to individual subjectivities, which, through an intense process of living, are directed towards an exchange of significant experiences for the preservation of what they see as historical heritage. According to Poulot (2009), the history of heritage is intrinsically linked to the way society builds it and, therefore, it remains alive thanks to the practices of memory articulated with the identity processes that are transmitted. Thus, heritage becomes everything someone says and does in respect to it, expanding the sense of inheritances that were and are claimed or appropriated (NETTO, 2020).

Tourism enters this scenario as a support element for the dissemination of these experiences and collective experiences with the heritage, as it uses its dimension as a consumer of historic spaces to promote collective events and socializations that facilitate the gregarious experience and interaction with the built monuments, being able and constantly strengthening itself as a disseminator of heritage preservation within the Historical Center of São Luís.

3.The Historic Center of São Luís: tourist movement and preservation of historical heritage

The effects of modernization and urbanization in historic centers can be irreversible, and can cause many changes in the built heritage of these urban sites, mainly due to the fact that people value modernizing features much more than the historical aspects of buildings. In São Luís, although the Historic Center has preserved many of its elements that give it identity and uniqueness, especially with regard to its construction techniques – 17th century urban mesh and its original architectural ensemble (IPHAN, 2019) – the region had its preservation as the stage for countless moments of conflict, caused by the urbanization and modernization process of the city.

These urban interventions made in favor of the revitalization of the Historic Center of São Luís created a positive scenario for the incorporation of tourism, opening spaces for expressions of interest from funding bodies, which, consequently, brought new interventions and the strengthening of the preservation of the whole architectural complex (SILVA, 2009). Tourist events and activities come to live together, not only with the built heritage, but also has influences on preservationist policies.

In this context, the policies for the preservation of the architectural heritage of the Historic Center of São Luís started to articulate themselves with policies aimed at leisure and tourism activities. This has been evident since the 1970s, when, according to Aires (2007), the preservation of Maranhão's identity and the ideal of development based on tourism has come to figure, in a very articulated way, the focus of public policies.

In 1995, the Plano Estadual de Turismo (State Tourism Plan) was elaborated, favored by the context of advancing tourism in the northeastern region of Brazil. Created with the aim of raising funds from federal policies at national and regional levels, the plan is configured as a proposal for tourism planning for the

development of activity in the State. In 2000, the plan is presented again with the name of Plano de Desenvolvimento Integral do Turismo no Maranhão (Plan of Integral Development of the Tourism in Maranhão), popularly known as Plano Maior (Major Plan) (MARANHÃO, 2000).

With the creation of the Plano Nacional de Turismo (National Tourism Plan), at a time of great appeal for the development of tourism, the city of São Luís was among the most important tourist centers in the state. Shortly, the Historic Center, holder of a rich historical and cultural collection, started to have its spaces more and more appropriate for tourist purposes. According to Costa (2015, p. 20), the plans “therefore appear as instruments that drives the appropriation of these spaces by and for tourism, changing the use of the territory, producing new materiality and/or enabling new speculative arrangements.” .

Considering this, the Historic Center became strongly linked to the tourist activity, having its spaces more and more occupied by projects and leisure and tourism actions directed, mainly, for the consolidation of the region as a tourist attraction territory. This is still a reality in the region, constantly presenting a dichotomous scenario in the way that tourist activities and other socializations are linked to the historical heritage.

For this reason, while considering the negative transforming dimension of the space that comes with tourist activity, the study seeks to raise an alternate way to develop collective synergy during the socializations promoted by the tourism events and direct it to the formation of the also collective notion of patrimony preservation, where significant and gregarious tourist experiences will help to attribute value to the heritage of the Historic Center of São Luís, Maranhão.

3.1 Tourist events and socializations in the Historic Center of São Luís

Events have always played an important role in the socialization of individuals in a particular group or society. Through leisure, entertainment or even business activities, it allows a good number of people to interact with each other and with the spaces in the city where these events are held, enhancing the social experiences of these individuals. According to Dubar (2005, p. 23), socializations are not only about the transmission of values, rules and norms, but also englobe the development of some kind of representation of the world. Socializing “is a process of identification, of construction of identity or, in other words, of belonging and of relationship.” (Dubar, 2005, p. 23).

In the case of the events held in the Historic Center of São Luís, which are strongly articulated with the historic spaces, these activities allow local residents to develop intimate relationships with the spaces of this region, rediscovering their locality and assigning, through more sensitive and targeted processes of interaction, value to the historical monuments present in these experiences. For Hamam (2011), the event is characterized by being one:

[...] exceptional event previously planned, which occurs at a certain time and place and generates great involvement and mobilization of a group or community, seeking integration, diffusion, and awareness among the participants towards the intended objectives. These must be placed in a clear and explicit way, so that the target audience receives and assimilates the topics covered and the actions developed during the events (Our translation). (HAMAM, 2011, p. 130).

Thus, events in historic spaces can be directed towards creating a chain of dissemination and collective awareness about heritage. However, in a context where all sectors of society are affected by capitalist intentions, the heritage experiences provided by events and other tourist activities also tend to reproduce the fragmented and individualistic structures of this systematic type of content production and reproduction. For this reason, there is an inclination towards individualistic practices of interaction with historical heritage, which makes it difficult, among other elements, to form a collective belonging to the Historical Heritage of São Luís do Maranhão.

As Lima and Magalhães (2010) clarify, the new forms of sociability in the spaces of the modern city are incompatible with the transmission of experiences between new and old subjects, which favors the predominance of very individual experiences. Thus, experience is no longer the only way to get to know the modern city. Those experiences that referred to individual and collective memory and that, therefore, fostered reflection and feeling give way to experiences that rest on distracted attention, with absorption of passive, scattered and secondary knowledge. Tourist events and other socializations appear as an alternative for the promotion and development of collective initiatives to access historical heritage, constantly introducing meaning and value in the materialized interaction between individuals, tourist events and patrimony in their surroundings.

4. Methodology

Our research has a qualitative approach, since the qualitative research that is closer to the interpretive intentions of the study, according to Silva (2001, p. 20), “considers that there is a dynamic relationship between the real world and the subject, that is, an inseparable link between the objective world and the subjectivity of the subject that cannot be translated into numbers”. According to its technical procedures, the research required a stage in which documentary sources were used, since documents such as magazines, articles and public power notices were raised to analyze the selected projects. It is classified as an exploratory case study. Gil (2002, p. 41) points out that exploratory research “has as its main objective the improvement of ideas or the discovery of intuitions.”.

The object of our research are 2 (two) leisure and tourism projects that are carried out in the spaces of the Historical Center of São Luís. The projects Quarta do Tambor, with coordination at the state level through the (SECMA), and Sarau Histórico, coordinated in the municipal level by means of the Secretariat for Municipal Tourism (SETUR São Luís). The projects were selected due to their operating configurations that allow collectives of people to experience and interact with tourist and leisure events held in spaces in the Historic Center.

The study sought to address the local agents responsible for the appropriation of public spaces in the Historic Center of São Luís, who are the social beings (residents present during the realization of the projects). It also included the managers of state institutions that are responsible for planning and managing tourism and leisure projects directed to these spaces in the Historic Center of São Luís, represented here by a government employee from the Secretariat of State for Culture of Maranhão and another employee of the Secretariat for Municipal Tourism (SETUR São Luís).

The analysis procedure was done in a qualitative way, in which the analysis structure stipulated by Miles and Huberman (1994) could be used. The qualitative analysis is divided into three stages, denominated a) reduction (selection and organization) data);b) exhibition (classification and data layout) and c) conclusion/verification (review and validation, interpretation and analysis).

5. Collective Heritage Experiences: experience collectively to constantly preserve

In order to build a collective notion about the importance of heritage preservation, it is necessary that as many people as possible be subjected to processes of coexistence and social interaction that are significantly articulated with the built heritage. With an important contribution from the tourism sector, it is possible to create events and socializations in historic spaces in cities that guarantee the integration of diverse subjectivities through moments of communication and sharing of identity notions, which will certainly contribute to the strengthening of preservation of the historical patrimony policies.

Elias (2017) states that society only exists because there is a large number of people and it continues to function due to the inclination that these people have to crave and accomplish certain things. Within the spatial limits of a city, there are several political, cultural and social movements that reflect the way in which this particular society organizes, articulates and constructs its senses, both in relation to city spaces, as well as in the way the subjects themselves relate to these spaces and among themselves.

Individual experiences, although important for the construction of identity, may not be as effective in the process of materializing a general notion of heritage preservation, since subjectivity based on a social individualism makes it difficult to expand common goals in relation to the preservation of built heritage.

Based on this notion, an analysis is made of the contributions that tourist events and other socialization in the spaces of the Historic Center of São Luís bring to the notion of heritage preservation. To this end, a study was undertaken on tourism and leisure projects that give rise to meetings of large numbers of people who experience the spaces of the Historic Center and come into contact collectively with the historical monuments present in the region.

The project Quarta do Tambor de Crioula has two categories of activities, the workshops that contain practical and theoretical activities related to dance, singing and percussion, which aim to enable contact and experience with the theme of traditional knowledge of the practice of Tambor de Crioula typical of the state. And it also has the very manifestation of the Tambor de Crioula, which can be presented by groups of manifestations inspired by African culture, but that are also genuinely from Maranhão and present the particular characteristics identified in the way of doing of the State (MARANHÃO, 2019).



Figure 1: Performance of *Tambor de Crioula* in the space *Casa do Tambor de Crioula*

The project provides an individual experience that comes close to the other experiences of other individuals present and that are integrated by means of communication and interaction processes that take place among participants with their peers, in the relationship between tourists and local residents and also between the social beings and the spatial context where the manifestations are performed.

The Sarau Histórico is a project coordinated by the Municipal Government, by means of the Secretariat for Municipal Tourism. The project is part of the Reviva Program and consists of a cultural mix of literature, theater, music, and history, aimed at the local community, visitors and tourists (MARANHÃO, 2017). Within its structure, the event manages to gather a significant number of people in the Deodoro Square who then share an experience based in very similar contexts, in which they learn about the history of the city within an environment surrounded by historical monuments.



Figure 2: Presentation of the project Sarau Histórico in the Deodoro Complex

According to the government employee of the Secretariat for Municipal Tourism, the Sarau Histórico was started in 2016, idealized by the then Secretary for Municipal Tourism, Socorro Araújo, and during the execution of the project, actors are characterized with period clothes and make a poetic tour of the golden

past of the city. The manager points out that the activity started to take place in the Benedito Leite Square, another historic space in the city, and aims to convey a sense of nostalgia to the spectators, while promoting the learning of the history of São Luís and interaction with the surrounding historic spaces.

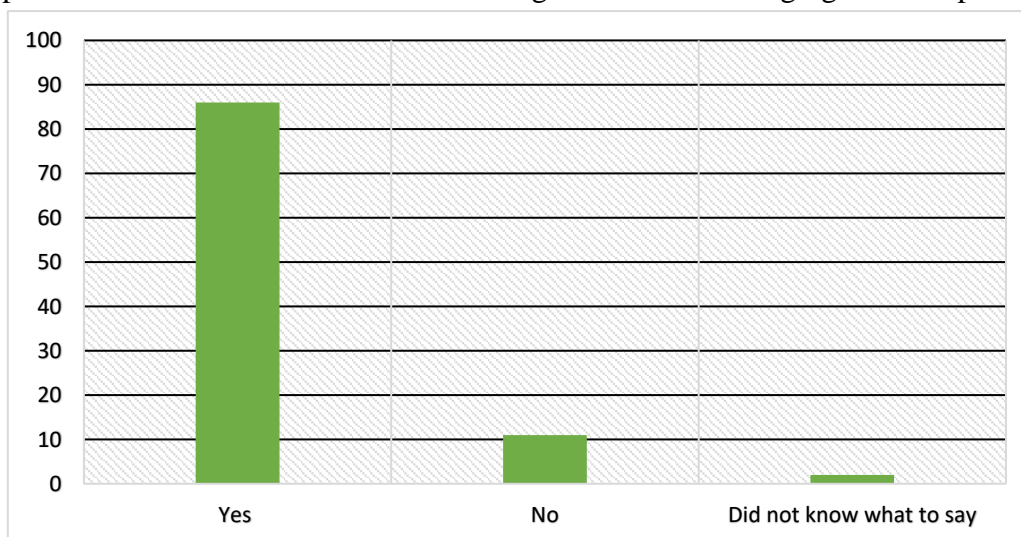
The Sarau Histórico is characterized as a thematization of the local history and culture with the purpose of benefiting the local tourism and leisure activities. According to Valls (2006, p. 32), thematization is based on the recreation of spaces and sensations based on intensive contributions referring to other areas, places or times. The most effective components "are the recreation and animation of characters, natural spaces and monuments, elements of traditional culture, art, gastronomy etc, which intertwine to provoke the experiences."

These projects became democratizing vectors of the spaces in the Historic Center of São Luís, enabling the expansion of access to these sites in the city. People start to frequent these spaces to honor events, which gives rise to the gregarious experiences that significantly contribute to the construction of the perceptions that residents and visitors acquire of the city, bringing them closer to the collective will to preserve the heritage present in the Historic Center of São Luís and that serves as a stage for the realization of activities such as the Sarau Histórico and the Quarta do Tambor.

This is a simple equation, because as Harvey (2000) says, urban projects must be more sensitive to local cultures and histories, conceiving specialized architectural forms that can vary from intimate spaces to spectacles, from the modern to the oldest. He emphasizes that the built environment constitutes an element of a set of urban experiences, vital to work on new cultural aspirations. The way in which the spaces of a city are organized forms a material basis from which it is possible to think and realize new social sensations and practices (HARVEY, 2000), among these new social attitudes, we can list the culture of preserving history reflected into historical monuments.

Asked about their agreements regarding the potential of the experiences lived in the projects Quarta do Tambor and Sarau Histórico as instruments to foster the safeguarding of the historical heritage, most of the participants present consider that events and socializations in the Historic Center bring residents closer to historical monuments, sensitizing them to the practice of heritage preservation.

Graph 1: Events in the Historical Center and generation of belonging with the patrimony



Source: Drawn up by the authors (2019)

In this sense, the use of tourist events and other forms of socialization in the Historic Center as an instrument for materializing feelings of belonging is a task that starts from the very capacity of city managers and agents who preserve the heritage to know the aspirations and perceptions of social beings on the built heritage. According to Lang (1987), the perception of space is articulated with the stimuli that guide the behavior of each individual, in which the spatial quality and attractiveness of a public space is measured according to the users' physiological, sociological and psychological needs who then shift to the use and appropriation of this space (HAAS, 2000).

The participants of the project understand that these initiatives promote changes in people's behavior in relation to heritage, because within a collective process of interaction with monuments their needs and subjective perceptions are integrated and can form a set of preservationist interests that, together with initiatives of heritage education, can give meaning to the execution of the projects carried out in the Historic Center of São Luís.

Thus, it is necessary to establish an intense link between the ordination of historic spaces and the experiences present in the routine of groups of individuals in the city of São Luís. In this more fundamental and everyday experience of public socialization, the demands of belonging are scattered and fragmented in the city space, "whose demands are associated with the ways of being in the city, of occupying places and transit in spaces that encode and make public these demands for rights and for the different meanings of belonging. (Our translation)" (LEITE, 2007, p. 46).

Therefore, the interactions between individuals at tourist events and other socializations in the Historic Center of São Luís are responsible for collective experiences that can be a multiplying factor in the culture of preserving historical heritage. This, because "the attitudes that the individual learns through socialization generally relate to broad systems of meanings and values, extending far beyond their immediate situation." (BERGER, P., BERGER, B., 1977, p. 214). These experiences are full of meanings and subjective processes that, if used correctly and directed towards a specific objective, can help to build a sense of belonging with the built heritage and lead to its constant maintenance by the local residents.

6. Conclusion

The importance given to the preservation of the built heritage is intricately linked to the ability to transform experiences in historic spaces into meaningful socializations. The collective interaction with the spatial dimensions of heritage enhances an expanded sense of belonging, as individuals present in this collectivity end up sharing subjectivities and integrating perceptions about heritage preservation, culminating in positive contributions to preservation policies.

Tourist events and other socializations that guarantee the contact of a large number of people within tourist spaces can be a first step in this process, which will be completed with processes of communication and sharing of values, meanings and identity elements that will favor the constant maintenance of monuments of the Historic Center of São Luís.

The projects Quarta do Tambor e Sarau Histórico are good and necessary initiatives that guarantee activities that lead residents, tourists, and visitors to live experiences within historic spaces. They are examples of methodologies that can contribute to the preservation of São Luís' heritage, giving space for many other

initiatives to promote collective experiences articulated with the built heritage, always developing new ways to make the most of social subjectivities.

The collective experiences with the heritage promoted by tourist events and other forms of socialization must be seen as effective tools in the construction of a solid culture of preservation of historical monuments, not only in São Luís do Maranhão, but in many other cities in Brazil, especially those that have Historical Centers and lack policies that innovate daily in the task of safeguarding historical heritage.

Tourism stands out for its aggregating and consuming character of spaces in historic cities that are tourist destinations, not only because it is a social phenomenon but also because it integrates different individuals worldwide, however, there are other alternatives of socializations that can promote experiences with the heritage, which may be the subject of further discussions within the context of heritage preservation.

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