

## **Cultural Landscapes, conservation and spirituality: tourism approach in a Brazilian study case**

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### **Abstract**

Spirituality is a key value during the interaction between many cultural groups and biodiversity in different areas of the planet. Considered as a cultural ecosystem service, spirituality appears as a crucial element in the processes that draw the uses and management of cultural landscapes. In this context, this paper presents preliminary results of a theoretical/empirical PhD research developed in a nature reserve in the state of Minas Gerais / Brazil: the Sanctuary of Caraça (inserted in the Biosphere Reserve of the Atlantic Forest and the *Espinhaço Sierra*). In an interdisciplinary context of environmental sciences, under a qualitative approach, narratives of stakeholders involved in the planning, management and tourism uses of the area, dialogue with the theory of cultural studies presenting results that indicate the importance of spirituality in the conservation of natural areas with the presence human through tourism. We intend to collaborate with studies that seek to integrate the variables of sustainability in contemporary uses of heritage sites characterized by cultural landscapes as well as the UN organizations initiatives concerned with the issue, such as UNESCO / IUCN (Sacred Sites) and UNWTO (tourism and Pilgrimages).

**Keywords:** *Spirituality, Tourism, Sustainable Development, Conservation, Sanctuary of Caraça*

### **Introduction – Heritage in the sustainable debate**

The concept of heritage along its historic path, has experienced a dynamic process of concepts and uses. Initially designed and linked to the materiality and the past, it faces new challenges in the context of sustainability in the contemporary world. As stated in Funari

and Dominguez (2009), the term heritage is associated with the Latin languages to derivatives *patrimonium*. Here the idea that permeates the concept has been inheritance, as property inherited from parents and / or ancestors. In the German language, the term used is *Denkmalpflege*, considering the care that must be given to the monuments that make us think. In the English, the use of the term heritage also brings together what has been and can be inherited. In all these understandings we observe an appreciation of aesthetic bias inherent monumentality and untouchability. Inside the conceptions of the natural heritage, for example, there is the perception that if they could freeze and save great testimonies of nature (Scifoni 2006).

Inside the shares of Brazilian cultural patrimony, the aesthetic ideal was closely associated with the national elite. The common people of the country was not incorporated into the debate resulting in a contempt for roots that made up the nation's training before and after colonization, such as Indians, blacks, and poor mestizos (Dominguez & Funari 2009). However, these visions plastered on what makes up the heritage in its different facets, have been challenged by scholars and also the global agenda linked to sustainability. It will be important to understanding and involvement of different voices that make up the heritage, as well as the relationship between communities and their natural environments throughout their historical processes. Within the environmental debate, Boccardi and Duvelle (2013) emphasize the inclusion of the cultural axis in the debate on sustainable development at Rio + 20. On a more fundamental level, the cultural heritage is now also recognized for his evidence on mutual adaptation throughout history between human groups and the biophysical environment. It reflects the individual and collective subjectivity, as well as the interaction of human groups with their own context. The heritage protects the indissoluble link between cultural and biological diversity over the complex co-evolutionary processes.

Thus, the concept of heritage becomes part of a focus not only of the past but also the present and the future. Associate it with other social, economic, political and inheritance practices can provide conditions to work a desired future (Holtorf 2012). The notion of heritage complex involving natural assets, historical, cultural and archaeological start to have relevance and are opposed to the fragmented and autonomous visions of equity (Funari, Pelegrini & Rambelli 2009).

Seen in this way, heritage could act as a bridge, mediating the dimensions commonly been treated as oppositions in modern science - the material and the immaterial, the subject and object, body and spirit, the sacred and the profane, the past and this, as reports the studious Paes (2009). We observed, however, an advance in the discourse of monumentality to the daily life in which cultural values are recognized before the effects of the diversity of nature and societies and mutual form are built in polished processes for individual and collective memory (Scifoni 2006).

Paes (2009) argues that heritage is not only the expression of society, but it moves, enlivens, highlights the passages, the process of interaction between the material and the symbolic, between the subject and his environment, between reason practical and a symbolic reason. Under this conception equity is understood as a social fact, that is, as a cultural value.

To consider it this way, their conservation would be mediated processes and not by the freezing of a past. The elements such as heritage, maintaining a sense of place, cultural identities, as well as the experience of a historical continuity of space and its cultural practices, mediate the longing for conservation (Taha 2014). This dynamic character of vision and complex involving equity, has facilitated the protection of property related to daily life and the intangible nature productions, such as knowledge, expressions, practices and representations (Funari et.al., 2009). In this context, scientific challenge runs through the search for a critical understanding of what makes up the common heritage. That is, the development of sensitivity to the dominant narratives (Dominguez & Funari, 2009). One possibility for this range, indicated by Silberman (2007) is the practice of multivocality.

With it, we would have an alternative to the creation of spaces in which to understand the different dimensions involving the heritage would be facilitated. However, it is worth mentioning that these environments are not absent from conflicts, but are interesting opportunities to contemplate participatory projects in which the diversity of values involved in the heritage gain voice and alternatives.

The current design heritage as a cultural value (discussed along the formatting of the Nara Document + 20 in Nagoya, Japan - 2014) has become increasingly important in the sustainable development strategies and poverty reduction. Therefore, strategies involving it, need to take into account cultural values, processes, community concerns and administrative practices to encourage the equitable sharing of economic benefits. Thus, studies that address the role of cultural values in sustainable development initiatives are welcome.

It is within this context that this paper establishes its theoretical and practical connections. By analyzing data from a master's and doctoral study (in progress) will seek to broaden the debate on the involvement of different voices involved in a Brazilian heritage complex and spirituality as a cultural value that intermedia the same uses. From a tourism perspective, we will concentrate three different actors. They are, tourists, local management and environmental coordination of the heritage concerned.

## **Connections between spirituality and conservation**

According to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005), spiritual and religious values are linked to ecosystem cultural services. These, in turn, are directly related to human well-being, the basic material for a good life, health and good human relations. For this reason, conserve natural heritage means also protect the cultural values inherent in many communities throughout the world.

Studies demonstrate how from spiritual values, traditional cultures resguardaram many of its natural areas. In tribes like Carajá; Mehinake and Desana, the mythological figure of Sucupira contributed to the creation of prohibited hunting areas in their regions Araguaia; Upper Xingu, north of the Amazon, Moran (2010). In the equatorial Amazon, the indigenous group Achuares believes that flora and fauna have a soul (wakan) that look like human leading them to a sociabilities relationship with humans, Descola (2000). About spiritual values and Western religious, we can mention the ethno-ecological studies of Marques (2000) on the relationship between the conservation of natural areas and the Brazilian popular Catholicism in the state of Bahia. From a perspective of environmental history, Frascaroli (2013) also shows links between the Catholic religion and sacred natural sites in Italy. Berkes (2001) calls attention to the fact that it is not religion itself, but emotionally powerful use of cultural symbols that help maintain a sense of sacred about the environment.

For this reason, the symbols and cultural values are the guiding elements of the relationship between man and nature and consequently the use of physical space. Among them, the figure tourism as one of contemporary activities draw cultural landscapes around the world. Considering this context, UN bodies such as UNESCO and IUCN have been producing together reflections on the so-called sacred natural sites as well as the heritage spaces with religious interests. In a more particular level the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has also dedicated hard on this issue, as shown by its Annual Report 2014, in which the theme of Tourism and Pilgrimage is addressed.

## **Developing**

This article aims to bring the preliminary results of a survey that has been carried out in a Brazilian protected area called the Sanctuary of Caraça. With data from the master's (Frederico, 2013) and doctoral thesis on Environment and Society (University of Campinas) in progress, is intended to contribute to debates about the relationship between spirituality and heritage conservation in natural areas with human presence through tourism. Field research has been conducted in the area since 2011, with a qualitative approach. They were combined using two methods: participant observation and semi-

structured interviews with actors related to the management and tourist use of the unit. Until now, we interviewed 27 guests tourists from three different Brazilian states: Sao Paulo (16), Rio de Janeiro (4) and Minas Gerais (7) state in which the shrine is located. The age group with the highest expression was between 20 and 60 years (with a sample of 18 respondents), all with higher education. Guests were addressed by the contact opportunity and opening them to participate. They were also interviewed three actors involved in the local management (2 priests and environmental coordination). Regarding the sample, it is noted that the decision was in accordance with statements and interviews that would generate enough data to develop the theme and not by certain pre set number of respondents. Data were analyzed in conjunction with data from bibliographic research, documentary and participant observation conducted. We attempted to establish what Strauss and Corbin (2009) call the Based Theory. This is based on data of great importance to the process of building during its structuring. It is important to mention that after finding the relevant role of spirituality in the design space, as well as in current use (tourism), research is still in progress seeking to deepen the theme. Preliminary results will be disclosed below are divided into a presentation of the history and the space of the sanctuary, so that we can understand the relationship that the cultural value linked to spirituality was related to unit since its foundation and finally the narratives of visitors will be systematized into thematic categories, so that the relationship between culture and nature in the context of the experience of visitors is explained.

### **The Sanctuary of Caraça: a dialogue between culture and nature**

The Sanctuary of Caraça, is a Brazilian protected area of approximately 11,200 hectares. Located 120 kilometers from Belo Horizonte, capital of Minas Gerais, in the southeast of the country. The area is located in the Espinhaço Sierra (current UNESCO Biosphere Reserve), with a mountain range with altitudes up to 2072 meters. With a significant biodiversity from the meeting of two major biomes (Atlantic Forest - hotspot and cerrado), the area is home to endemic species like the maned wolf. Part of the unit is also under the protection of a second UNESCO Biosphere Reserve - the Atlantic Forest. Inside, the unit features a rich potential of minerals, resulting in operating features from the colonial period, with gold. Currently, once protected by federal law, the area is shown as an island in a region with strong traces of ecological destruction result from the exploitation of large corporations linked to mining activity. In relation to its history, Caraça has traces of religiosity / spirituality from its beginnings. During the Brazilian gold cycle in the eighteenth century, the area that now comprises the sanctuary received the first human traces of occupation in 1774. This year, the unit comes a man hermit of Portuguese origin (Lourenço) who founded a baroque chapel in valley surrounded by mountains. With the idea to receive pilgrims and travelers, the space gets his first linked religious connotation to

silence and isolation from the existing natural landscape. With Lourenço's death, the land was donated to priests Vicentina newcomers religious congregation in Brazil. The desire of Mr. Lourenço was that the space was a venue of education and thus the Vincentian priests founded called Caraça College in 1820. Important establishment of Brazilian education in the nineteenth and twentieth century, the area received important national figures such as former President Afonso Pena. During this period, the Baroque chapel undergoes some changes and is then built on this, a neo-Gothic cathedral, dedicated to *Nossa Senhora Mãe dos Homens*. The college functioned until the year 1968 when by an accidental fire, was faced with a scenario of uncertainty about the continuity of its activities as well as the existing natural space. This is an important moment for the research in question, it was constituted in a delicate process, in which tourism is inserted through the activation of cultural values linked to the history of the Sanctuary. Under equity purposes during the period of the school, the architectural and material structure was listed by the National Brazilian heritage body, in 1954.

### **The inclusion of tourism and spirituality as mediator**

To be affronted by the fire, the religious management of the Sanctuary had no idea about the future of the area that makes up the Caraça. The activities of the college were no longer possible and the uncertainty of the existing assets, as well as the intangible values of the space and the activities that made up the daily, was present among its members. At this time, they started curious visits and people in the area to visit the site and the issue of tourism, even though informal and unplanned been developing and opening avenues for further reflection on the uses and conceptions of the existing asset set. Tourist activity was seen as an important opportunity to follow safeguarding not only the territory, but also as the values in the religious community. However, not being familiar to the management of the congregation, nor expected, tourism has brought a number of impacts for both the historic buildings as to the nature of the site (Palú 2012).

At this time, in 1974, religious management meets with other stakeholders involved in the Caraga, as the old FCBN (Brazilian Foundation for the Protection of Nature), researchers, members of the society and the government of Minas Gerais and create the call "the Pro Caraça". In order to conserve the natural environment and local culture, define three areas of work in which the restructuring of the space would hold. They are: "Irradiation Spiritual Center", in which the sanctuary would act as a center of religious gatherings and retreats "; "Cultural Center" with the release of mission of biodiversity and history in the context of research, as well as a new disclosure format of education and mining culture. Finally, the "rest center and tourism", considering the increase of visitors who came to the site (Zico 1982). With that tourism becomes a solution thought among multiple actors who had their voices involved with the book together.

In this context, another important topic to be addressed is the meanings and values of Caraça in relation to natural space. Quite an integrated way, the cultural values that were present from the foundation of the sanctuary, were related to the surrounding nature, so that the temple of the landscape is in an integrated manner both instances, allowing not only the architectural materiality could be saved, but also existing ecological wealth. Under national protection since 1994 as a protected area, has attempted records in this direction since the 1970s the natural environment, according to the historical site, is part of the performed human activities, such as the pilgrimage in the eighteenth century. At that time the mountains made up the isolation and silence intended by its founder. Currently, according to interviews and observations made during the field research, spirituality is a key value for the motivation and tourists coming to the unit.

Understanding this value have been doctoral study object the author here present. However, it is important to mention that the conservation of natural areas of Caraça, as well as its cultural materiality, is closely linked to tourism. This has, according to reports of the unit's managers, provided the economic viability of continued place amid a geographical territory highly threatened by mining. Understanding the values of visitors in relation to this spirituality mentioned in their reports, is therefore an important tool for the future of the unit, as well as planning and actions to be organized by the management. During the preliminary analysis of the speeches of visitors and some priests management, we noted that contemporary spirituality of visitors shows hybrid. Beyond the walls of Catholicism and reflects important interactions between the precepts of this doctrine with the ecological aspects and contemporary search of being. We observe visitors who do not call themselves Catholics, but to have contact with the substance and the symbols of this religion and the surrounding natural landscape, claim experience a spirituality in moments of introspection. Some elements could be categorized. The following will point out some of them and stretches of visitors reports that indicate the occurrence of the same.

### ***Environmental preservation***

"Here you do not see much human interference, something seems untouched. And spirituality here. Regardless of religion, I think that only you remember that God is here with the issue of preservation of nature, makes this very special place." Tourist

"Here it is a place where we can see a future with more hope. Because in spite of capitalism; industry; trade; the growth of cities, we have hope that things can minimally be preserved." Tourist

### ***Perception of time decelerated***

"I like the aspect of nature. We go away now and then thoughts: ahh now we're getting into the rhythm, let's get a little more. We keep walking right here close, already help. This calm

right, you do not have to keep running. In large centers we are always running. And tourism today also have to think about it because you do all the rides running, I needed something as a spiritual tourism." Tourist

"Peace, peace of mind, preservation, silence. I'm trying to find myself in my religion and the act of staying all day doing walk in contact with nature, arrive at night, eat that dinner and then immediately see the wolf, Mass. That there is a very nice sequence to try to break through the madness of the big city. This attracts me a lot, you can not do without coming here at least their times a year. My son has been here since childhood. We need to go back ever." Tourist

### ***Contemplation***

"I come here because here always brings me great peace. From that gate to front I forget everything, where I work, my problems, I get spiritualized. Not only the church, but to be just that and nature, brings me a very great peace of mind." Tourist

"It's special because here I can relax, I'm a very anxious person, from little child. And here I can keep looking, i lay myself in the sand little beach [small river] and I can relax, sleep, because in the normal beach, I can not. That energy of being alone is one thing I really miss, and here I can practically all the time." Tourist

### ***Relationship of communion between the local culture and nature***

"This relationship with the Catholic Congregation know, it is not only tourism, has the part of religion. People meet to chat. This is more than the trails, you have this legacy of Sir Lourenço. This makes the place special, is a religious communion with nature." Tourist

"That's what makes the place special, is a communion. How to speak here, it is a sanctuary. It is a place reserved, without much interference. You have Mass every day. The relationship established with people today is very consumer right. People today tend to go somewhere consume and go and here is something that goes beyond that, this relationship only consumption with the customer. Here is the relationship of communion, of nature with religion, what religion has to offer. Nowadays religion left a little aside this thing of power, she came back to its origin with virtuous things." Tourist

"Although the nature, I can not separate. I can not think of Caraça and not think about the food; into bed; the people who will be here; in buildings; the ruins and the wolf itself." Tourist



***Openness to other religions***

"To rest your head. Here comes a lot of people with depression. I have met many people with depression. I have met many people. In this psychological part is a lot of people here to talk (...). They seek. If they do not look I do not play in the matter, because it depends on the person wanting to help. Sometimes or religion or anything, here people come from all kinds. It came those times behind a rabbi here. We talked a lot." Priest Manager

"Well, I'm not Catholic and do not like religion. But I like this isolation. Of course, temporarily I like a lot. Has nothing to do with Catholicism, it has to do with the environment."Tourist

The five categories presented (environmental preservation, contemplation, openness to other religions, the relationship of communion between the local culture and nature and perception of time decelerated) were organized from the collected reports and observations. We brought some excerpts collected as a way to illustrate the narratives studied. However, still comes up preliminary results which further deepening is being conducted by the author Isabela Frederico, under the supervision of Pedro Paulo A. Funari (both authors of this article). However, the historical and explanatory data allow punctuate the existing direct relationship between spirituality and the design of the cultural landscape of the Sanctuary of Caraga. From its beginnings with the choice of location as a pilgrimage center and today with the arrival of tourists, the environment is shown cut by a dynamic story, live and continuous. In this, the involved actors play an important role not only with the existing materiality dialogue (as its different uses: pilgrimage, college and tourist destination), as well as the subjective relationship with the natural space.

**Considerations in process**

We call this item process considerations as similar contemporary interpretations of the concept of heritage, the reflections on the Caraça Sanctuary follow, however, its dynamic and continuous character. Our goal in this article, in a broader approach was to expand the look of the living dimension of heritage as well as the complexity of the involvement of different voices that make up a heritage complex. The Caraça Sanctuary is a very rich study space in the proposed approach for the design of cultural landscape, showing only traces of interaction between culture and nature through intangible values such as spirituality case. The bibliography presented at the beginning of this work, offers a heritage of vision no more in a cast and dedicated exclusively to the past. Sustainable debate requires an approach in which heritage allows alternatives to the present and future of the communities involved in their sets. One of the activities that emerges in this scope is tourism. How wisely point Ballart and Tresserras (2008: 139), tourism can favor or threaten the resilience of heritage spaces, depending on how it has been made to manage the changes that will

internalizing with the activities. Managers should seek a balance between protection and accessibility, according to the authors.

In particular, the history of Caraça shows an insertion of the initially unplanned tourism. What actually resulted in mentioned impacts. However, in a process involving the different voices related to the set in the 1970s, tourism was being reorganized according to the existing tradition and innovation brought by visitors. In the context of spirituality, as shown in the qualitative research, the values initially conceived by Catholic religious bias was opening and resulting in a more open and linked phenomenon in the resulting elements of the encounter between religion and the surrounding nature. The expansion of this spiritual subjectivity within the motivations of tourists is also mentioned in other studies around the world, such as Valiente (2006) in Montserrat, Catalonia, Spain.

Finally, we emphasize that this renewed and contemporary spirituality has redesigned tourist activities around the world and made it possible for many property sets have the economic ability to conserve heritage sites. The Sanctuary Caraça shows quite particular way the inclusion of spirituality as asset value since the occupation of the area. The unit had its restructuring after the 1970s, sustained by tourism. As our analysis showed, the motivations and the imaginary that permeate the local tourists have deep relationship with elements that shape contemporary spirituality, traces of which demonstrate a dynamic relationship between past, present and future.

The next stages of our study will be linked to understanding that spirituality within the theories that focus on the relationship between religion / spirituality and ecology as well as conducting anthropological depth analysis of the dimensions that make up the spiritual tourism in the unit.

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