

PARADORES, POUSADAS AND HABAGUANEX. RESTORATION IN THE PUBLIC HOTEL INDUSTRY

María José Rodríguez Pérez

Universidad Politécnica de Madrid
mariajose.rodriguez.0000@gmail.com

The management of national heritage for tourism purposes has become the effective formula for restoring real estate properties that were not in use. This formula is being used in Spain through the unique hotel chain Red de *Paradores* (a network of castles, monasteries, palaces...), which has its origins in the second part of the 20th century and is still currently in use nowadays. Spain has lead the market as far as public hotel industries are concerned as its business model has not only been maintained with certain improvements throughout the years but has also been replicated at both a national and an international level.

The pubic hotel industry has emerged as a response to the joint needs of asset management and hotel capacity, aimed at touristic uses. It is the government who develops and manages the commercial use of the properties, and who manages the restoration of the properties taking into consideration different property procedures throughout the years, where architectural interests have not always been prioritized above touristic interests. The business management can be carried out directly or through external agents. It was usually the case that direct models were used in the past while nowadays businesses are run through indirect or private management models.

These characteristics have typified the creation and development of similar hotel chains at an international level, which have received different names depending on each country. The Spanish one is the aforementioned *Paradores* Network, initiated with the first property in 1928 and which now includes buildings of new construction as well as historic properties. From the early days, restoration became the fingerprint of *Paradores* Network, although the construction of new buildings has surpassed the ones with historical characteristics.

The creation of the Spanish chain happened without any global vision as the first hotels in Gredos and Mérida had different motivations for their creation. It was clear from the first restorations that it would be difficult to reutilize properties with limited space and which needed to be expanded so that they could fit a given number of rooms and services. In the first restoration the project took on a functional approach without actually being creative, but as demand increased and mass tourism emerged the project specialized in

creating attractive scenography for tourists as well as preserving the historical buildings in harmony with local features and universal archetypes.

Initially the running of the properties was carried out through leasing contracts with third parties, although from the 30's it was the tourism state office, which started taking care of the properties without the help of any third parties. In 1958 the hotel management was done as a whole and clearly differentiated from the promotion activities (acquisition and construction of properties) through the local body Spanish Tourism Office (*Administración Turística Española*, ATE) which is part of the State General Administration (*Administración General del Estado*) which in 1991 was replaced by the current national office, *Paradores de Turismo de España*, S.A.

The Portuguese experience became a reality with the chain *Pousadas*, started in 1942 with the opening of the first property and composed of buildings, which had similar characteristics to those of the Spanish *paradores*. Even though Portugal arrived later than Spain in the public hotel industry it evolved much quicker in the latter years. In Portugal the running of these hotels was initially done in a similar way to the Spanish one but from 1976 was unified, differentiated and given to the government office *Empresa Nacional de Turismo* (ENATUR), which became a public limited company in 1992, so that they could look after it.

Unlike the *paradores* the *pousadas* were created with a global view when in 1939 a first package of six new constructions was planned countrywide, which responded to the “regional *pousada*” model.

During the 50's the restoration of medieval buildings was enhanced with a similar scenographical meaning to the one given to the Spanish model. The castles, fortresses and monasteries helped to promote a new type called “historical *pousadas*”, which became part of the chain in accordance with the objective of making practical use of the monumental properties which had just been restored.

From 2003, the Portuguese hotel chain started a mixed management formula combining public and private management through the current hotel management agent: *Grupo Pestana Pousadas* (GPP). In this operation a significant number of properties were lost as they were not very profitable and as a result the dimension and importance of the *pousadas* were redefined as the majority of the properties removed were new constructions with the exception of some of the *pousadas* from the first wave, which were maintained because of their symbolic value.

The possibility of privatizing the Spanish chain has been discussed but has not yet been carried out, although the adjustments that were made in the Portuguese case, like the reduction in the number of properties, were also tried in the Spanish model, with one notable difference; that in the Spanish case some *paradores* became seasonal properties.

The most recent public hotel chain has been developed in Cuba with the Red Habaguanex, opened in 1994 and composed of a group of hotels, restaurants and commercial premises, situated in restored colonial buildings in the historical centre of La Habana, whose management is carried out by the public company *Compañía Turística Habaguanex*, S.A., which belongs to the *Oficina del Historiador de la Ciudad* (Office of the City Historian).

The heritage intervention criteria initially tended to aim at idealizing the recovery of Cuba's lost colonial glory, as part of its national identity, which allowed them to distance

themselves from the period of American control. Each Habaguanex had its own personality; there were no common characteristics among them as a chain as the only constant item was the architectural type: the integration of the property in consolidated blocks of the historical centre or nearby, and the planning of the space according to a central patio which could remain open or be covered with a roof-light.

This original hotel type is the counterpoint to the experience of the *paradores* and *pousadas* as they revitalised the existing concept with a new approach.

The peninsular models of public hotels have more things in common than the Caribbean one, as they are geographically nearer to each other, started at the same period and were created consecutively. Nevertheless, all of them share the same objective: the restoration of a heritage, which would otherwise disappear, by providing them with a commercial purpose, which makes them, once they have been restored, tourist accommodation owned and run by the state. The initial public investment is compensated by the economic activation of the place or region where it is located, the recovery of a property with heritage value, often linked to the urban recovery of a rundown area and finally creating a productive property from an abandoned one and thus making it available to the tourist market.

The broad experience obtained from the public hotel sector has meant that nowadays it is possible to consider it a valid instrument of the government's economic policy for the management of heritage sites in a productive way, which happens to be profitable and sustainable as time goes by. If we compare the public hotel sector with the demands of a private company, the profitability of the properties may not always be as good as we would like, and there could even be losses. The government objectives with this hotel chain go beyond economic matters although in both the Portuguese and Spanish chains some properties have been removed, generally as a result of profitability issues. This situation was evident during the privatization process of the *pousadas*, in which the number of properties was significantly lower before they started being managed by the private sector.

In Spain the initial model had consequences later on, even at a regional and local level, with examples such as the regional guesthouses.

The restoration for hotel use in Spain and Portugal happened in different decades under different national premises that nevertheless presented similarities, which operated in an untimely way. Spain carried out its interventions prior to the Athens Charter (1931) and this is why it could not apply its criteria, even if it was only some interior remodelling in some properties where the interior design was very important. In the 50's Portugal tried to reflect the exaltation of the historical national triumphalism in its first heritage interventions. The case of Cuba was completely different as it happened in the 90's even if there was direct contact with the hotel manager, *Paradores de Turismo de España, S.A.*, which acted as the adviser to the Cuban government for the implementation of hotels in the old colonial buildings in La Habana. This was a first experience of the nowadays so-called know how.

In the 40's in Spain the tourism office intervened in the monuments as the Portuguese did ten years later, although in the Spanish case all the restorations happened at one time and with a hotel purposes while in Portugal they first restored the properties and then they decided to use them for hotel purposes.

Once the tourist boom started, Spain restored, through the tourism office, historical structures and expanded on regular bases the *paradores* that were in use. Meanwhile Portugal was testing a new kind of property called “historic *pousada*”.

The Spanish hotel chain grew enormously, both in volumes of properties as well as in rooms' capacity in each *parador*. The *paradores* experienced expansion works, which ended by deforming the properties, while the Portuguese chain adopted a more moderate position in its expansion development plans, and asked for a smaller number of rooms in each property.

The public hotel chain in Cuba is currently working in the restoration from its core, while the Spanish and Portuguese hotel chains have jointly developed the restoration of historic structures although from the 80's they were focused in this last one. The current trend in Portugal and Spain has been in which the existing building is seen as an opportunity to create a modern work, which gains importance over historic relevance. This tendency in the Portuguese case is already in place, and in the Spanish case is seen as an alternative to the well-established model of “classic *parador*”.

Cuba seemed to be still absorbed in heritage interventions forms linked to idealization or monument “thematic”, similar to those carried out in *paradores* and *pousadas* in previous times in which the restoration and interior design aimed to create a atmosphere tourist-focused which exaggerated real elements or added some invested ones so that the property would look more attractive. In the last works in Habaguanex Network one can see similarities with the current Spanish and Portuguese model of “new *parador*” and “architect *pousada*”.

The public hotel sector evolution is created as a result of the original heritage intervention way of each period, in which the architectural values and the hotel values always conflict with one another and the winner is not always the heritage. The continuation of the management model linked to tourism has been able to take the most out of the concept of “cultural tourism” as beyond the simple tourist visit one can stay overnight and eat in the monument itself. Nowadays there are rumours about the privatization of the public hotel sector; this is well known for having been able to survive over the years with very different types of government and administrative regimes. The public hotel sector is considered to be an effective instrument to revitalise the historical heritage managed by the public power.