

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

SALTA (ARGENTINA) AS A HERITAGE AND COSMOPOLITAN CITY: THE DEFINITION OF A “COMPETITIVE” TOURIST DESTINATION

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The paper deals with recent processes that have transformed Salta into an important tourist destination in Argentina. In the last decades, tourist arrivals have increased and this tourism growth was accompanied by an urban renewal program. Provincial government (together with entrepreneurial actors and cultural and scientific experts) has launched an urban renewal initiative to revitalize the historic district and improve infrastructures to stimulate tourism. This remodeling of the city center reinforced heritage aspects of Salta but the program also sought to show it as a cosmopolitan city. Distinguished and exclusive facilities and services were exhibit to attract selective tourists in order to transform Salta into an international city. As part of this process historic district has become a space of consumption for tourist but also for privileged local society.

The aim of the paper is to focus on this transformation process to define Salta as a cultural and heritage place, but also as a modern and cosmopolitan city desirable to distinguished consumers (tourists and local middle classes). Recent literature about “competitive” cities sheds light on the study of this particular case. The concept of competitive city, sometimes assumed as a guarantee to access to international networks and capital mobility, is associated to the attempts to create or re-create some local distinctive features (e.g. heritage and cosmopolitanism) through place marketing. Competitive cities were also described as places organized to facilitate and stimulate consumption.

In order to analyze recent processes in Salta the paper examines how the tourist image of the city was shaped and what were the material and social transformations that accompanied and complemented this image. The paper focuses on the actors that took part in this process: provincial and local government, tourist entrepreneurs and heritage experts. It also examines how Salta historic district became a center oriented to tourism, leisure and consumption. The intention of this paper is to understand the role of tourism in recent processes of urban transformation and territorial competition through a case study.

To conduct the research several official documents were analyzed including tourism development and heritage reports. Marketing campaigns and press reports concerning

urban transformation in Salta were also collected and examined. Some in depth interviews with provincial and local public officials, the local tourism bureau and owners of local shops related to tourism were conducted in several occasions from 2010 to 2017. They inquired into heritage and tourism policies, business investment decisions and criteria involved in the urban renewal process.

The paper explores in detail how tourism became a central issue in the renewal program created at the beginning of the 2000's. This program includes the restauration, painting and illumination of historical buildings (especially those established during Spanish domination period), the pedestrianization of some streets and the installation of some historic urban furniture. The main goal of the program was to emphasize Salta's heritage as a colonial city (the hegemonic version of local heritage). Inspiration for this renewal process was sought in international well-known cases such as Barcelona model of urban regeneration.

This special emphasis on local heritage was strengthened by marketing strategies. Posters, films, brochures and guidebooks were elaborated and distributed in order to reinforce the idea of Salta as a colonial and noble city that is proud of its past, its traditions and also its religiosity.

Renewal process in Salta was designed to transform the city in one of the most visible and desirable cities in Argentina. It was exhibited as a successful case of heritage and tourism planning. This idea was conveyed by local politicians as an attempt to construct and deliver a positive image about the city.

Salta was shown as a heritage and cultural city but the paper examines how Salta was also advertised as a "cosmopolitan city" according to the contemporary ideas about urban planning. The idea of Salta as a cosmopolitan city was based on some cultural attractions and exclusive services promoted as part of the provincial tourism policy. This includes: 1) the tourist promotion of exclusive accommodation (both five stars and boutique hotels); 2) the development of appropriate infrastructure to host events (convention centers); 3) the organization of events that centers around the idea of Salta as a creative city; 4) the promotion of local and gourmet food based on Andean crops and local wines; and 5) the opening of the worldwide famous Museo de Arqueología de Alta Montaña (MAAM). The presence of tourist and especially international tourists around the city were also exhibit and promoted as a sign of cosmopolitanism.

As a central idea, the article suggests that local initiatives in Salta seek to attract what the literature has called the "post-tourist", that is a tourist with sophisticate taste and cultural capital who search for exclusive (but at the same time familiar) experiences. The article also states that this new image and the transformation Salta went through are attractive for local middle classes as well. In fact, these inhabitants along with the tourists enjoy the embellished historical center as a space of leisure and consumption. And Salta, like many other cities, has specially prepared some spaces for this kind of consumption (e.g. bars, trendy shops, gourmet restaurants and areas marked as public spaces defined by conviviality).

As it happens in many other cities, consumption spaces shared by tourist and local middle classes are limited to Salta's historical center. Tourists, in general, do not venture beyond this area. Embellishment and renewal processes, neither. Away from the historical

center classical urban problems persist in Salta: unemployment, lack of access to basic services and housing, and mobility difficulties define everyday life for most of the local inhabitants.

Nostalgic gaze upon Salta's colonial past is combined with a gaze to a promising future: cliché postcard goes together with post-tourist demands. This offers a possibility to present Salta as a different destination among other Northwestern cities: not as a mere heritage destination but as a heritage destination with cosmopolitan pretensions.

As a conclusion, the paper notes in which ways the main actors took part this urban renewal process. It points out the intentions of provincial and local governments to re-imagine the city and to create the conditions for economic investments. It also revises the strategies used by local entrepreneurs who invested in hotels and restaurants at the historic center. And finally, the article indicates how experts in urban renewal oriented and legitimated these transformations.

The case study offers some evidence to consider the role of tourism as a consumption practice in current cities and specially to understand how contemporary city centers are shaped as consumption spaces.

