

## **HERITAGE, TOURISM AND PLACE: SELECTIONS, ACTORS AND INTERPRETATIONS ON QUEBRADA DE HUMAHUACA WORLD HERITAGE SITE (JUJUY, ARGENTINA)**

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Several scholars have insisted on considering heritage as the product of a selection process. As a result of this process many attributes of societies or places become the referents of certain identities (Prats, 1998; Graham, *et al*, 2000; Santana, 2002). The same authors have pointed that these heritage selections are marked by the present time because they respond exclusively to nowadays demands.

Beyond this temporal dimension in the heritage definition process, there is a geographical dimension since very often heritage has a specific geographical reference. Geological processes, vegetal formation, buildings, cultural manifestation of every kind, intangible heritage, all of them are located or related to a place at the earth surface. The same is truth for World Heritage Sites, which are defined by specific location. Hence, certain characteristics related to a place are deeply involved in these heritage selection processes.

In relation to these ideas, certain scholars interested in the relationship between tourism, heritage and territory have tried to understand how tourism is implicated in these heritage definition processes. They pointed that tourist interest in certain characteristics of places has made them «eligible» for these heritage definition processes. In other words, it is suggested that the way in which societies and places are characterized in terms of heritage can be explained taking tourist demands into account (Almirón, *et al*, 2006). Thus, identity is not the only dimension that is implied in the definition of heritage referents: development of tourist business is involved as well.

Considering these ideas the place (both as heritage site and tourist destination) can be understood taking several aspects into account: its natural and cultural characteristics, the different actors involved in the heritage definition process, the current concerns about natural processes and cultural manifestations, and the tourist demands that pay special attention to heritage. Hence, transformations and dynamics of places can be explain by processes generated locally but also by others that take place in different social contexts, beyond what has traditionally been defined as place (a delimited, bounded geographical area, self-contained and coherent) (Massey, 1996; Agnew, 1987). In other

words, understanding places implies to consider them as open, as a network of relations connecting different actors that can transform places according to their interests (Massey, 1996).

These theoretical perspectives lead the interpretation of the processes that have taken place at Quebrada de Humahuaca (Jujuy, Argentina). Along history this place has been populated by different prehispanic groups, briefly by Incan empire, by Spaniards (as part of Virreinato del Peru and Virreinato del Rio de la Plata) and it was the setting of several battles to get Argentinean independence. During XXth century Quebrada de Humahuaca has become an agrarian area where traditional aboriginal products like maize, beans, potatoes and other vegetables were grown to be sold in local markets. At the beginning of XXth century, and due to the development of railways system, the area became a summer holiday destination for regional elites and progressively it was transformed into a national tourist destination. During 2000s this tourist orientation was highlighted due to the World Heritage distinction by UNESCO (as Cultural Landscape) that the area received in 2003. This distinction was the result of a heritage project led by provincial government. Its intention was to transform Quebrada de Humahuaca into a major national and international destination to attract both tourists and economic resources (Troncoso, 2008).

As in every heritage process, in the case of Quebrada de Humahuaca there has been some selections defining a group of attributes of this place that finally became a heritage version certified by UNESCO. The aim of this article is to analyze the selections involved in the patrimonialization process that leads to the recognition of Quebrada de Humahuaca as a World Heritage Site. Namely, the article focuses on those special characteristics of the place that were selected (and the ones that were not), and on who has participated in this process and what kind of heritage interpretations have arisen. The role that tourism has had in these selections is also under examination. In order to do that, the article analyzes both, different documents that have justified the heritage distinction and statements made by government staff regarding patrimonialization. Several interviews were also conducted in order to recognize the opinions that public employees, neighbours and entrepreneurs have about the analyzed process.

Concerning research results, the analysis made in this article shows that:

— The creation of a heritage tourist destination at Quebrada de Humahuaca involves a selection process through which some characteristics of the place are chosen to be presented as heritage. This selection generates an improved version of the past oriented by current interests that dictate what is interesting and what not concerning heritage. As an example industrial history of the area is not included in the heritage version while its heritage image is made of its rural, aboriginal, colonial characteristics (in other words: the heritage version is very similar to the tourist image of the place).

— The decisions and actions made by provincial government (assisted by experts) to obtain the international recognition as World Heritage Site has generated one (of many possible) version of Quebrada's heritage. We assist to a process of heritage activation in which provincial government has a major role in suggesting this heritage version. The experts, holding an important cultural capital and an undisputed prestige, assist political power dictating what is heritage and what is not and suggesting the way heritage administration should take way.

— The participation of local people at this process of heritage definition was limited. Different actors were invited to workshops to discuss the way this site would be administrated but some of the interviews have showed that suggestions and demands exposed during these meetings were not taken into account by politicians. Besides, some of the interviewees has pointed out that decision concerning heritage administration had been already taken by the moment the workshops were organized.

— Heritage of Quebrada de Humahuaca could imply different interpretation depending on the different actors taken into account. This means that there is not a unique version of its heritage. On the contrary, there are several. Provincial government, experts, entrepreneurs, local governments, local people, each of them has their own way to interpret Quebrada's heritage recognizing o rejecting others' interpretations.

As main conclusion, the article shows that heritage definition process could be understood at the intersection of specific interests, certain values and a socio-historical context. Thus, Quebrada's patrimonialization process could be interpreted not as the result of an identity definition process but as the result of some economic and political interests orientated by the intention of transforming the place into a tourist destination. The creation of a heritage version for touristic consumption reflects external demands instead of local ones concerning identity issues. Actors from «outside» the place define how Quebrada should look like to be consumed (turistically) as a heritage site. Government employees, entrepreneurs, experts, tourists, all of them actors from «outside» construct and approve a heritage version legitimized by UNESCO.

All these aspects of the patrimonialization process redefine Quebrada de Humahuaca as a place. And this redefinition is marked by demands, interests, gazes (most of them touristic) produced in other social contexts outside this place. Quebrada's heritage is defined therefore depending on the relationship that the place establishes with the world. The ideas about what should be protected; the current heritage and touristic relevance of certain characteristics of places; the touristic promotion strategies; the revalorization of objects and cultural manifestations already forgotten; etc., all of them mark the adoption of certain ways to gaze at and to transform Quebrada de Humahuaca. And these ways of considering the place are defined by actors from outside the place and not by local people. The role of the latter in this process was limited to re-signifying or claiming the «official» heritage version.

