

THE ISLANDS AS TOURIST DESTINATION: BETWEEN THE REALITY AND IMAGINARY

- A BRIEF APPROACH

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Resumo

As ilhas sempre exerceram um fascínio que se tornou uma força de atração importante. Muitas vezes envoltas em mistério, inspiraram mitos, histórias fantásticas e viagens, sempre, ou quase sempre, entre a realidade e a imaginação. Importa assim refletir sobre o seu potencial turístico, o que implica contudo abordagens cuidadosas acerca da complexidade natural e humana que está presente.

São estes aspetos de perfil antropológico que o presente texto procura suscitar

Palavras-chave: ilhas; turismo; utopia; imaginário.

Abstract

The islands have always exerted a fascination which became a huge force of attraction. Often surrounded by a seductive mystery, they inspired myths, fantastic stories and travels, always or almost always, between reality and the imaginary. Hence its huge tourist potential which deserves, however, careful approaches to the human and natural complexity that constitute them...

Keywords: islands; tourism; utopia; imaginary.

The world has 130 000 islands, all different in terms of characteristics and identities. There are large islands, countries that are islands and islands that form countries. There are small islands that coincide with tiny states, islands that remain as distant colonies from countries that still hold the power. There are densely populated islands, others are almost wild.

If history has made many of them paradises, others have become lands of exile and imprisonment...

But what is an island after all? "A piece of land surrounded by water from all sides," no more, as many of us have learned at school? Or will it be a simultaneously geographic, biological and human complex entity? What is the importance of collective and individual representations of its inhabitants about their own insularity? And what are the representations of the mainland inhabitants regarding the insular nature? What exactly is insularity while an anthropological phenomenon?

"Insularity - as Françoise Péron wrote, *Des îles et des hommes*, p. 239 - if we got to live it perfectly, it would be the best adapted way to man, as it fulfills his incessant and contradictory desire of openness and reflection, in a necessary attempt to search his unity. "The sea as horizon means: projection in the distant future and retraction for what is closer to us. And tourism can and should be enjoyment of the human condition ...

It is curious that, at least in the Latin languages, insularity and isolation have a common origin, which conditions the semantics of the term and of the concept. However, isolation is not necessarily a negative experience as it stimulates the encounter with ourselves. Hence, the islands can represent what every person has and is in the

depths of himself, that is the Human condition . In addition to the intimate encounter, they encourage the direction of the travel: the islander is the one who somehow comes and goes constantly to somewhere. Hence the “need for islands” , as some authors refer...

Thus, tourism whose goal are the islands - small or medium - should take advantage of their idiosyncrasy rather than change them, without further ado, into an object at the service of mass tourism, a procedure that, in time, will ultimately destroy those which are the foundations of their added value. That is, identities can coexist with evolution providing that on its behalf and for the benefits of all, their potential will not be crushed but deepened. There is a wide range of tourists seeking authenticity and wishing to share it, including the authenticity that on the islands is defined by the search for bridges with the rest of the world. We refer to lovers of residential and adventure tourism. But surely these are not the ones who , indifferent to local cultures and societies, look in the Dominican Republic, Cuba or the Balearic just for the sun and beaches merely because they are typically more generous on the islands. With time, even this type of tourism will be threatened due to the progressive destruction of coastlines which impose demolitions and late conversions.

The need to have an insular type so that we can understand what insularity is... Françoise Péron proposes a cultural and anthropological criterion as the first one: Consciousness of insularity, “an island is considered small when every individual who lives here is permanently aware of inhabiting a territory enclosed by the sea.” In these islands, boundaries have a big impact. There may be a late exacerbation of insular consciousness due to the growth on external dependency; there may also be an attenuation of the insular status caused by increased links with the outside world and even by the building of bridges. So the “island dimension is an evolutionary, relative and cultural phenomenon”, “and an insular society is unaware of its insularity” (idem). However, in general, insularity unites more (internal solidarity) than that which separates (in relation to the outside world).

“The perception of Tahiti is both real and virtual, and upon a whole reality interpretations linked to ideologies of an era are designed. This is how perception evolves, constantly being reinterpreted, as moved forward in time and Tahiti image in the nineteenth century conveys colonial prejudices keeping certain stereotypes of the previous century, as it is shown by the travelers’ missionaries’ and settlers’ experience. (...) it is the literary transposition of Tahiti that ensures the continuity of the myth that Bougainville was the creator. Creation, interpretation, transposition are the three components of the European imaginary on Tahiti” .

“Since 1768, when Louis Antoine Bougainville occupies the island of Tahiti he baptizes “Island of New - Zither”. The image one has of Tahiti remains the same: the earthly paradise of one’s dream , based on a number with of clichés: blue water, exuberant “vahinés”.

«The climate mildness, fine sandy beaches, etc. However, reality is different.: unbearable climate - very hot and humid round the year - black sand beaches created by volcanic lava, an overcrowded country. Papeete (the capital) has nothing to show and still continues to be the privileged tourist destination for travel agencies.» (Sonia Faessel, *Visions des Îles: Taïty et l’imaginaire européen*)

Among many others Tuvalu represents a reality of an island, a silent victim of environmental disasters: a sad imaginary which turned to be an even more sad reality... much stronger, precisely, because it is an Island.

Bibliography

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