

Rural world, wild spaces: Legends and narratives of fantastic worlds in the appropriation and interpretation of the rural space. How to integrate these narratives in the enjoyment of the rural space?

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Abstract: *The legendary and the fantastic world is one of the characteristics that define and specify the rural space and its communities. The main propose of this paper is, first, to analyze how these narratives are an integrant part of the communities that live in the rural space and how fundamental they are to understand their memories and senses. Secondly, it intendeds to suggest a proposal on how to use these narratives in tourism and cultural experiences.*

Keywords: *Rural world legends; memories of the space; cultural tourism.*

Inside an ecological and cultural sustainable paradigm¹, one of the strategies which might allow tourists and rural areas' semi dwellers to experience the less humanized spaces can be the rebirth of the intangible heritage of the wild areas. Starting from the narratives and control processes with which local communities related to these spaces.

While wild, for outsiders of a community, some spaces, rich in biodiversity and with low intensity of productive practices (though they might be important as resources suppliers for the agrarian community) are a good context for encountering the mysterious – meaning also that they allow a creative and meaningful leisure and touristic experience – to roam in this areas is to built new cognitive worlds (Ingold 2000). Concerning its relation with Nature, the urban dweller not only is apart from the natural heritage (which only by itself would be interesting) but have also lost the ethnographic heritage where the Human - Space relationship has an history which reflects lived and negotiated experiences throughout time with all its creatures - human, animal, vegetable but also supernatural. Forests and mountains are specially complex and rich in this relationship between humans and the unknown.

It is our belief that by including the intangible elements of the natural space on the ludic and touristic experience, the perceptions and values that will emerge will greatly contribute for the protection and increased value of their particular characteristics. Local communities and tourists will understand nature in a different way if it presents itself both with ecological and cultural value - and again, a deeper experience of the ecological space will increase its protection. From the analysis of these processes and its results, strategies of action will rise which can be implemented by the institutions connected with all kinds of heritage. In this way anthropology can have a leading role suggesting alternatives to the present paradigms. And if must be, it should place at an uncomfortable position, the ones in political and economical command (Wright, 1995; Campelo 2002a) so that Humanity can be allowed to live sustainably closer to the natural world.

Huge compilations of these narratives were written by many classic authors such as Leite de Vasconcelos (1882; 1994), Abade ou Martins Sarmiento (1998), but there are also contemporary

¹ It should be stated we understand sustainability in an ecological and anthropological perspective. Ecological sustainability integrates the environment, as a interaction space as well as its dwellers. The social practices which transform landscape should be among the lines of interpretation as well as their ecological protection on the variety of their cultural dimensions: material and intangible.

compendiums². Apart from this bibliographical ground, field research in the Serra do Vento at Beira Alta allowed to contextualize our own Minho's area collection. These tales were the working base to start creating new ways of experiencing the space.

This investigation and work proposal allocates itself on the Northern Portugal forests and especially on the Área Protegida das Lagoas de Bertandos e S. Pedro d'Arcos (Protected Landscape of the Bertandos' and S. Pedro d'Arcos' Lakes). The Northern Portugal Minho's area is characterized by scattered human settlements, especially closer to the Atlantic and on the fertile valleys. This type of organization is different from the rest of the portuguese territory which traditionally has small nuclear settlements among pastures and woodlands (Ribeiro 1989). Thus, in this area, the places without a strong Human presence are small. This presence is symbolized by the parochial church symbolizes, designing the sacred spaces inside an area which the community tries to protect from the other spaces, dangerous by nature but possible of dominion through cercos, clamores and territorial processions (Santo 1990; Almeida 1986). Anyway, although dangerous, these other spaces were essential for the survival of the communities which so many times administrad the areas autonomously, with strong references to its pre-roman past.

Defining the places as wilderness or even non-domesticated isn't easy in this work, for the studied area cannot meet the concept according to Shultis and Kearsley nor Leslie and Taylor³. Even if in the portuguese culture these spaces can be considered like that, it is not hard to spot their economic use in the past through agriculture, pasture or wood exploration. The end of these activities, the changes on working processes and the replacement of organic resources for chemical ones, originated the abandoning of the space. The result was a profound change on the wild life (animal and vegetable), acquiring the great ecological and touristic value of the present. Swampy areas like the ones of the Lagoas saw Human impact diminished, in a solitude nowadays only disturbed by tourists and conservation projects.

This void happened between the ancient practices and some of the new rural objectives, where enjoyment is the key. This research believes that this enjoyment cannot only be based on the context of the present "era", but it has also to discover the meanings which it carries from ancient times. Plants and animals now seen as wild, designed part of the everyday life of a community as wilderness but also interfered with domestic practices. Then narratives had a huge role, building part of the relationship between the community (the ones which communicate them) and their space and its components. In this way, the interpretations allowed the integration of this elements on their beliefs and social practices.

Perceiving the out of bounds symbology of this areas (places of the outsiders, places of magic and of practices outside the social defined rules), they can be presented as cultural paradoxes: fear and danger, together with awe, spirituality, mystery but also as a living storage of survival goods. The perception of a space is characterized by the symbology of its composing elements, as well as its own orographic and topographic structure. On this symbolism, the opportunity for belief or disbelief that will set apart the practices (Eliade 2002) between the autochthonous and the visitor happen (Rota 1992). The locals recognize the places where they can fulfil their own basic needs and where they can be protected against the surrounding menaces (George 1984; Melotti 1981) for they need this surroundings to survive and have a historical memory on their cognitive world (Certeau 1995). Through this they erect not only a geometrical order but a magic and sacred one where they live as social actors (Rapoport 1994; Brun 1986; Ingold 1994; Condominas 1999). Amos Rapoport (1994, p.479) notices how the imaginary space is only imaginary from the point of view of an outsider, not of the local dweller who lives according to it. Just in the same way that the rites do not exist to be

² As examples it can be mentioned: Monteiro, 1991; Ramos de Oliveira, 1997; Bernardino, 1997; Caramelo, 2003; Céu, 2004; Lage, 2004; Teixeira, 1996; Costa, 2000; Cerejeira, 2003; Mesquita, 2005; Pinho, 2004.

³ Shultis and Kearsley defined four properties for *wilderness*: absence of human impact, aspects of forests and vegetation, isolation or remotness and solitude. Leslie and Taylor have also defined four characteristics: remotness from settlement, rmotness from acess, aesthetic primitiveness and biophysical primitiveness (Bosangit, 2004).

watched but to be a part of (Hatzfeld, 1997, p.115) and to be a part of it the practices must be spread throughout the community⁴.

Against the safe areas of the village, then there is this other space, this "além" (overthere) which can be both the space of the other villages, the wilderness or the Gods dwelling place (Silvano 1997, p. 13). As these spaces acquire a strong historical and symbolical heritage, they become cosmological locations (Reboredo 2006). Since the natural world connects Humans with its occult meanings (Bourg 1997) the official religion tried to take out Nature from its sacredness, perceiving human relationship with it as a dangerous detour. The church together with positivist science, the industrial-urban revolution and the technological capitalism set Humanity further and further apart from Nature, ending the last one to be a mere storage of resources, notoriously inferior to its' exploiters (Descola 1994).

The intention of this proposal is, starting from the ethnographic work on the intangible heritage of rural areas and its anthropological interpretation, to allow rural visitors with an human and intellectual experience that will contextualize them on the experiences that originated it while placing responsibility for its protection at the same time they are confronted with the paradigms under which we live nowadays.

As a clash between different worlds, it might originate a new understanding of the visited space but also a new perspective on their own Human life. On the other hand, this process of approaching and discovering the intangible heritage of natural spaces will provide an increased value inside the rural communities concerning their own heritage. These communities, faced with the industrial and technological progress and the paradigms of modern knowledge tend to forget their inherited knowledge, hidden it from preconceptions and marginalizing classifications. It is not hard to connected the economic and cultural marginalization of the rural communities with their own cultural legacy from which they wish to get rid off as soon as possible to "evolve".

Despite their increased disappearance, traditional narratives are localized in places which we can experience as ethnographic / cultural landscapes. According to John Muir its the experience of a place that helps to protect it (2001), so a space or a narrative will be protected by the ones which will experience them emotionally! This leaves us with the great challenge of finding the right tools to create this emotional experiences to the natural / cultural visitor aligned on a sustainable ecological / cultural tourism. Nowadays, most knowledge transmitting strategies only lay on the biology/ecology field. We believe there are other fields possible that can bring a deeper knowledge and experience for the visitor.

This type of experience will add the individual inner perspective, which allows the visitor to feel personally engaged with a space and narrative through emotion and personal history. He/she is not reading only about a plant they can see and touch, they will feel its symbology and uses rooted deep in the holistic puzzle of a culture. An universe he/she might feel amazed to discover in the same way we are amazed by the contexts and imaginary of early and indigenous cultures. Natural, ecological and traditional products and services are a established interested nowadays. Workshops, tours, medical systems, music among others are searched everyday for people in search of new meanings and new ways. This project would fit perfectly also in this phase of the modern world, feeding it with premises for a sustainable and organic (as opposed to mechanical) driven society and planet.

Of course, a great care should be placed on the production of activities for youngsters, including school field trips. Looking to the Protect Area of the Bertianos' Lakes some new strategies arose:

- a) Using informative / interpretative panels next to places or vegetable species associated with the narratives collected on the area.
- b) Placing artefacts or art works close to pedestrian paths which might bring new meanings to the legendary contents of the space. Also proposing visitors with artistic expression activities on the theme.

⁴ Through field work it was clear that although not everyone believes in everything not only one person does not believe in anything.

- c) Including the narratives in audio-guides and proposing the visitors for creating and discovering sound languages connected with the stories and their characters.
- d) Make field recordings and experiences with Biomusic which can be used indoors and outdoors with proper guidance and study.
- e) After studying the symbolic and daily attributes and use of local plants, experiences can be built on how visitors sense their looks, texture and smell.
- f) Propose the visitors for creating illustration, videos, photography, theatre or new narratives based on their experiences of the tales and their spaces.
- g) Games inspired by this universe.

Conclusion

In a society where most Nature visitors are urban and where the ecological sustainability clash with processes of mass cultural tourism, which destroy the host locations, promoters and researchers will have to start proposing experiences that, in one hand, inform about the complexity of present meanings and not only biological ones, on the other hand, allow them to be preserved physically and intangibly. The proposal for the Protected Area has its ground on an investigation on intangible heritage, which must be added to the enjoyment of the ecological heritage in a harmonious relationship between Humans and space, thus creating a new and unique experience. This experience can be an opportunity for the visitor to experience the knowledge and meanings which organize space, an opportunity which allow him to protect it consciously.

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