

## Tourism development: sustainable or sustained? Intercultural reflections on the case of Praia do Forte-Bahia, Brazil

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**Abstract:** This article adopts qualitative exploratory research, undertaken by means of a single-case study on *Praia do Forte*, a tourism destination located on the Brazilian coast. Use was made of secondary data and in-depth interviews with local residents, to answer the research question of how this destination could follow a path of tourism development in a way that differentiates it from similar ones; and, as secondary objective if the degree of current development can still be seen as sustainable. Based on a systematic perspective of tourism, we seek to extend the vision of development so as to include sociocultural and environmental dimensions of sustainability based on Sachs' (1986) model. The results indicate that three factors seem to answer the question.

**Keywords:** Tourism; Entrepreneurship; Tourism destination; Sustainability; Communities.

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**Resumen:** El artículo adoptó investigación exploratoria cualitativa, realizada con base al estudio de caso de *Praia do Forte*, un destino turístico localizado en la costa Brasileña. Fueron usados datos secundarios y entrevistas en profundidad con residentes locales, de modo a responder a la pregunta principal de investigación de como este destino podría seguir un camino de desarrollo turístico diferenciado y, como objetivo secundario, si el grado de desarrollo actual puede todavía ser considerado sustentable. Basado en una perspectiva de turismo sistémica, buscamos extender la visión de sustentabilidad para abarcar dimensiones socioculturales y ambientales según el modelo de Sachs (1986). Los resultados indican que tres factores parecen responder la pregunta.

**Palabras clave:** Turismo; Emprendeduría; Destino turístico; Sostenibilidad; Comunidades.

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## Introduction

Historically, the tourism sector has been responsible for the generation of between 85% of jobs worldwide. Being heavily weighted towards labor and one of the economic activities requiring least investment for the generation of jobs (MTUR, 2007), it has been of increasing importance in public policies for development and social inclusion, especially at the bottom of the so-called social pyramid in less developed countries (Alban, 2008; Lin and Guzman, 2007).

However, the expansion of tourism in these countries, oftentimes in remote areas, without economic reinvestment and linked to small communities, can easily result in the latter becoming dependent on tourism as the only economic activity in the region; because of this, the discussion surrounding the long-term sustainability of projects and related activities becomes increasingly important (Lin and Guzman, 2007; Chaves and Rodrigues, 2006; Buhalis, 2000).

As a field of study, tourism is a sector affected by tensions, antimony and mythology (Coriolano and Leitão, 2008), with manicheistic interpretations which see it, now as an essential factor for development, capable of solving an array of socioeconomic problems, now as a voracious industry that threatens the very integrity of surrounding communities. In other words, a sector that generates as many benefit as problems to society.

This article presents a qualitative exploratory study, discussing the sustainability of development of coastal tourism destinations in Brazil, with an emphasis on the cultural dimension. From a multidisciplinary perspective, it seeks to contribute to understanding of the many ways of preventing its undesired effects. In this way, tourism may serve as a complement to improve the residents' life.

Thus, this study seeks to answer the following research question: How was it possible for *Praia do Forte* to construct a path of tourism development in a way that contrasts with other similar destinations? In other words, we intend to learn what motives or factors may have enabled the destination to develop differently from others, exploring, above all, those aspects that

involve the cultural dimension of sustainable development, following the eco-development model of Sachs (1986) and from the point of view of the destination's residents.

Additionally, as a secondary objective, we aim to explore, whether the present degree of tourism development at *Praia do Forte* can still be as long-term sustainable.

The case method is applied to *Praia do Forte*, a tourism destination on the northeastern Brazilian coast, located in the municipality of *Mata de São João*, 60 km from *Salvador*, the capital of *Bahia* – a State which just in the last two years increased the attraction for investments in the local hospitality sector by 145% (from 2.2 to 5.4 billion USD, 2006-2008), earmarked for the construction of 23 high class hotels<sup>1</sup>.

## Review of Literature

In spite of the recognition of the positive impacts (potential or real) of tourism activities on the economy, the negative impacts on the destinations, their inhabitants and tourism hosts have also been discussed (D'arrigo and Bühler, 2008; Buhalis, 2000; Pearce, 1982).

From an anthropological point of view, tourism may be defined as a complex sociocultural phenomenon, one that provides tourists and residents with the experience of alterity, representing a system of encounters between the local community and its visitors, producers and consumers of tourist goods. In this sense tourism can be considered a culture-consumption activity (Santana, 2003 in Pereira, 2006).

Jafari (1990: 36, in Banducci Jr., 2001: 27-29) compares the perspectives of four studies that relate tourism and culture, subdividing them into four groups: a) defense - "advocate the positive character of *touristic enterprise*"; b) warning - against the defense group and "extremely critical" in pointing out "serious social problems caused by [this] enterprise"; c) adaptation - questions the generalization of the previous groups and points to "alternative forms of tourism that can have lower impacts than mass tourism" and; d) knowledge - whose main objective is the "formation of a scientific body of knowledge on tourism".

The present article, while being aligned with the perspective of knowledge, also embraces that of adaptation, as it proposes to seek *alternatives* to tourism development, being based on the needs and surroundings of the hosts, according to the principles of sustainability, while avoiding a manichaeistic perspective, and thus adopting the principles of cultural relativism.

The notion of sustainability was raised during the UN Brundtland Commission in 1983 (Coriolano and Leitão, 2008: 475), meeting the needs of present growth without compromising the future. Aligned with this perspective, the World Tourism Organization defines sustainable tourism development as a continual process that attempts to *avoid* the characteristic problem of losses of its value chain in the local community where it is established and which “*requires the constant monitoring of the impacts that the activity can cause (...) the participation and commitment of all the actors involved (...) [and] where the profit must be distributed in an equitable way between the activity's promoters and the local population*” (MTUR, 2006: 5).

The approach adopted in this article has also been the basis for the majority of studies on the *overall* effects of globalization, a process by which its very nature directly connected to the essence of tourism (D'arrigo and Bühler, 2008).

In studying the multicultural conflicts of globalization, Canclini (1995: 101) observes that national identities – “*the combination of traditions, practices and most of interaction that distinguish populations of a particular city*” – which characterize the inhabitants of a particular territory, have guided the majority of cultural policies. Two main challenges are involved: a) the dissolution of mono-identities, and b) the loss of power and the repositioning of traditional/local cultures, especially with respect to the communication media advances.

However, to a great extent, such reflections when examined from the perspective of public policy, focus mainly on cost-effectiveness, with perhaps some foray into environmental issues (e.g., the establishment of new limits and controls), “*such does not happen, to the same extent, in the cultural domain*”. And in Latin American

countries there is still scant dialogue between the public policies of tourism and culture (Coriolano and Leitão, 2008: 470-471).

Within the academic field studies, there are several studies on the cultural aspects of the development of tourism destinations including both *international* (Moscardo, 2008; Laing and Crouch, 2005; Reisinger *et al.*, 2003; Mataraso, 2001; Patel, 1998) and Brazilian cases (Coriolano and Leitão, 2008, Santos, 2008; Coriolano and Vasconcelos, 2007; Gomes *et al.*, 2006; Banducci Jr., 2001).

In order to conceive sustainability as a construct for academic research, it is first necessary to consider the component variables that comprise it. The present article adopts the eco-development model, proposed by Sachs (1986), which suggests five basic dimensions to *represent* the construct: social, economic, ecological, social and cultural - with priority to the cultural dimension, which “*is one of the most important components of sustainable development. [Since] the extinction or profound mischaracterization of the culture is an irreversible process*” (Coriolano and Vasconcelos, 2007: 103)

In this regard, the formal concept of culture from an anthropological point of view, harks back to the definition of Tylor (1871, in Laraia, 2008: 25) who synthesized the *culture*, from the German term *Kultur* (symbolizing the spiritual aspects of a community) and the French term *civilization* (referring to the material realizations of the people), in order to represent “*that complex whole that includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, laws, customs or any other capacity habits acquired by man as a member of a society*”.

In relation to the cultural impacts resulting from the contacts between the tourists and the host community, which define the corresponding degree of cultural sustainability, it is important to distinguish what type of change is meant, in order to tell whether it can contribute positively or negatively to the host community that comes to have direct contact with the visitors via tourism.

Laraia (2008: 95-96) asserts that since culture is of an inherently dynamic nature, cultural changes can be internal (resulting

from the cultural system itself) or external (resulting from contacts with the other, as in the case of those motivated by tourism), and *"oftentimes, stimulate a change which is more brusque, far-reaching and rapid than internal forces"*.

One of the most-cited negative impacts of tourism on host communities is the process of acculturation (Valachis, 2008; Pereiro, 2006, Banducci Jr., 2001). The concept has been used since the beginning of the last century by the German school of anthropology and from 1928 on by the Anglo-Saxon school but only after the 1950s it was adopted by Brazilian academics (Laraia, 2008: 97).

Another type of cultural impact often associated with social exchanges between tourists and residents is the so-called "demonstration effect" (Valachis, 2008; OMT, 2003, Pereiro, 2006; Banducci Jr., 2001; Mendonça Jr. *et al*, 2000). The demonstration effect refers to a type of loosening of the traditional restrictions of a culture via the "voluntary" attempt to *"adopt certain behaviours (and accumulate material goods) on the basis that possession of them will lead to the achievement of the leisured, hedonistic lifestyle demonstrated by the tourists"* (Burns, 2002 in D'arrigo and Bühler, 2008: 8).

The effect on the host community's "cultural identity" is another negative sociocultural impact of tourism on the residents (Ramalho Filho e Sarmento, 2004; Banducci Jr., 2001). It's a collective attribute, characteristic of a determined social group that shares similar attitudes and which is supported by a past with a projected collective ideal, manifesting itself as an established social construct that enables individuals or part of the group to feel closer and similar to one another (D'arrigo and Bühler, 2008; OMT, 2003; Pereiro, 2006).

The above themes have been addressed in several academic studies on tourism (Throsby, 2008; Sánchez *et al*, 2007; Untong, 2006; Steiner and Reisinger, 2004; Wallace, 2004; Ramalho and Sarmento, 2004), since host communities are considered to be the weakest link, and, therefore, the most susceptible to suffer such impacts during the development of a tourism destination.

## Methodology

The present work is a single-case qualitative research study (Yin, 1984) based on primary data obtained from semi structured in-depth interviews.

The object is *Praia do Forte*, a Brazilian tourism destination located in the municipality of *Mata de São João*, on the coast of the state of *Bahia* near to the capital, *Salvador*. It has been cited in several studies as a successful case of tourism development in Brazil, especially with regard to paths of sustainability (Alban, 2008; Barreto and Alvarenga, 2007).

*Bahia* has stood out in the Brazilian scenario as one of the sites preferred by tourism investors (especially foreigners and from hospitality) and represents one of the top Brazilian destinations in terms of exposure, international promotion and tourism strategies. The *Prodetur-Bahia* project launched in 1992 (Mendonça Jr. *et al*, 2000) is one of the few long-term (20 year timeframe) Brazilian planning programs and is funded by resources from state and federal governments, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) among other relevant institutions, as well as supported by private capital and local universities. Geographically speaking, this program divides *Bahia* into seven regions, one of them represented by the municipalities that comprise *Costa dos Coqueiros* (literally "Coconut Coast") region - where *Praia do Forte* is located.

In 2007 and 2008 seven projects were expanded and inaugurated along *Bahia's* coastline, corresponding to a private investment around 150 million R\$ - 70% of which earmarked to finish the second stage of the Spanish Iberostar's project in *Praia do Forte* (Bahia Online, 04/03/2009).

In order to answer the two research questions, we examined the secondary data obtained from bibliographic research allied to a systematic study of public access sources. Primary data, derived from in-depth interviews held with residents and ex-residents of *Praia do Forte*, was also analyzed.

Six interviews were held based semi-structural interview framework in 2008, recorded and lasted about an hour. Two of them were carried *in loco* on April and the

others through web conferencing, between September and November. The entire interviews' content was transcribed and codified using ATLAS.ti 5.5 for discourse analysis.

All the interviewees were residents of *Praia do Forte* (or had been for a least a year) and continued living there (or visit the place regularly), as well as maintain friendships and family relationships with current residents. An attempt not to limit the profile of the group was made. So, it was formed from a random selection of professionals over 40 years age, with diverse jobs and levels of education – including: an oceanographer, a professor/historian, a hotel professional, an architect, and two executive secretaries. It also included respondents whose experience as *Praia do Forte* residents had initiated after the beginning of the region tourism development in the 1980s (two of them lived there between 2001-2002 while the others witnessed its development since the beginning) but none of them was native of *Praia do Forte*.

#### Contextualization of case under study

For a long time, the *Praia do Forte* region remained unknown due to its difficult access - the connection to the capital was so precarious that the trip between the two cities took more than four hours - and because the northern coast of Bahia was considered too far to be discovered by the Bahian "elite".

In the 1970s, Klaus Peters, an entrepreneur of German origin, visited *Bahia* to build a factory and decided to invest half a million dollars to buy the entire area known as *Fazenda Praia do Forte*: a total of 30,000 ha (Vitória, 2001).

No specific studies about Peters' business history were found. As he moved to the region at the beginning of the 1980s, the data presented here reflect information provided by interviewees as well as research and journalistic material.

The information suggests that from the beginning of his undertakings at the site, Peters sought to regale *Praia do Forte* with an "ecological destination" stamp and the driving philosophy to his businesses was to ally a structure of impeccable service, offer-

ing high-end gastronomy and leisure, however preserving ecological and cultural heritage of the region.

In order to build the region's first resort – a concept unheard till then in the Brazilian market – Peters was concerned with environmental preservation. So that his Master urban plan (Curvello, 2000: 14) took into account rigorous criteria to maintain the original features of the little village - located on his land and which comprised, then some 1,800 inhabitants – as well as contractually preventing the resale of real estate by the natives (who could only pass the land on to their children).

Another example of this project's results is local legislation that protects the region's extensive groves of coconut palms – prohibiting palms cutting and establishing that for each one palm sacrificed, four others must be replanted – and establishes 10m (the average height of an adult palm tree) as the maximum height for any local construction (Alban, 2008).

Additionally, Peters' decision to contract only local labor for his undertakings reduced local unemployment to practically zero. At the time, that was something of a rarity in tourism development, which, in general, customarily disdains such labor, giving priority to the staff of large urban and foreign centers - especially for those projects financed with international capital (Coriolano and Leitão, 2008; Gomes *et al.*, 2006).

Regarding the publicity efforts to promote the destination, Peters' strategy was to focus on the foreign tourist as his target public, in a joint endeavor with the *Bahia* state government. This approach while reinforcing the importance of public-private partnerships to a more-sustainable tourism development represents additional complexity for intercultural contacts between tourists and residents, since different national cultures are involved.

Other uncommon facts are Peters' sought of himself as a real "*Baiano*" (e.g, "born on *Bahia*") and invitation to his relatives for living in *Praia do Forte*, where he lived for more than 20 years (Alban, 2008).

However, in 2006, Peters sold his hotel, then named *Praia do Forte Eco Resort & Thalasso Spa*, to the Portuguese *Espirito Santo* Group and left the region. In the

same year, another large international tourism group, the Spanish Iberostar Hotels and Resorts, inaugurated its first hotel complex in Brazil in *Praia do Forte* and, in October 2008, opened a second luxury resort at the location. Both undertakings are part of a US\$250 million megaproject that aims to build the largest resort complex in Brazil.

### The *Tamar* Project

At the end of the 1970s, there was still no marine conservation program in Brazil and the sea turtles were already listed as a species threatened by extinction. Having identified the main turtle nesting grounds in the country, the *Tamar* Project was begun at *Praia do Forte*, a place confirmed to have the highest concentration of sea turtles on the Brazilian coast.

Peters donated a house on his land, a Jeep and a horse for the transportation of *Tamar's* team, helping to found the Project's headquarters whose activities, since that time, have followed three lines of action: conservation and applied research, environmental education and sustainable local development. In addition to being a pioneering regional initiative, and along with the local forests and mangroves of the *Mata Atlântica*, the *Tamar* Project area was subsequently categorized as an Environmental Protection Area.

### The Foundation and the Castle *Garcia D'Ávila*

The *Garcia D'Ávila* Foundation (FGD) was created in 1981 as the first investment by Peters to act in the educational, environmental, cultural, historical and social activities of his businesses, with three main objectives: to administer and to restore the ruins of the Castle *Garcia D'Ávila* (the *Castelo*), to preserve the environment surrounding the two tourist attractions of the region (the *Castelo* and the *Sapiranga* natural reserve), and to serve as a pivot between Peters' businesses and the local community.

In 1997, after 16 years of being dedicated exclusively to the surrounding environmental preservation, the FGD presented the first "sustainable development plan" for the region including a series of initiatives

for integration of the village community into the tourism development process, whose main objectives was to enhance the qualification of local entrepreneur and labor force (A Tarde, 1997: 18).

In 1937, the *Castelo* was declared a Brazilian cultural heritage and after going through a restoration process – started in 1999 and only finished in 2003 (Cordeiro, 2003) – was open to the public. Today it is surrounded by a rich archaeological site and counts on lot of facilities as exhibition center, shops and restaurants.

### Results

Results indicate that at least three factors acted decisively and simultaneously to differentiate the tourism development strategy at *Praia do Forte*, conferring upon its path a sustainability degree quite different from that witnessed at the majority of Brazilian beach tourist destinations – especially those located in small communities where tourism becomes the main economic activity. These factors are: Klaus Peters' entrepreneurship style, the *Tamar* Project, and the *Garcia D'Ávila* Foundation.

The joint action of these factors seems to have preserved – at least in the period between the beginnings of tourism activity in the region in the 1980s and the current decade – important aspects of sociocultural and environmental dimensions of sustainability (from Sachs' 1986 eco-development model).

The differentiating characteristics of *Praia do Forte* "touristification" process – seen as "a convergence of business, political and economic factors" – was mentioned in all interviews as being related to these three "guardians of the region" factors which, in combination, fostered the community belief in the process – "They really believed in this undertaking. I believed in it too. We all believed in it", summed it up one of the interviewees.

The majority of large private Brazilian tourist investors – especially those from hotels and infrastructure projects and in general represented by international groups – started to invest in the Brazilian northeastern coastline since 2000, often-times with volatile and speculative capital

and without any long-term community commitment. In contrast, choosing to take up residence with his family in the region, Peters was able to involve himself directly with the local governance structure.

Interviewees relate how Peters himself would oversee the process zoning of the region, walking the beaches and being vigilant, even when there was no tourism nor electricity in the area, which then was only accessible by raft.

Also according to the interviewees, Peters always defended the idea that the future for tourism activity in the region lays in eco-tourism and in the democratization of access to it, with distinct accommodations, both for the most demanding tourist who prefers resorts, as well as for those more inclined to stay at campsites (an option also available at *Praia do Forte*). He was also concerned with “*respecting the village folk, really emphasizing the capacity to make homemade food and fishes*”.

The *Tamar* Project is considered one of the most important attractions of the region, as well as a catalyst agent for important cultural and behavioral residents' changes in their relationship with the environment. Interviewees point that the *Tamar* Visitor Center even attracts visitors from the neighboring *Costa de Saúpe* tourist complex, offering “*educational [environmental] entertainment*”.

The oceanographer interviewed believes that each local family has a least one employee involved in the *Tamar* Project and identifies the current relationship between them as “*labor initiative*” in which “*the turtles provide work and the people live off that work*”, without, however, needing to kill them anymore as seen in the past. He points out that it is usually a main objective in the majority of the environmental projects and is known as “*nonlethal use*”, arguing that “*the Tamar has achieved this (...): Before, turtles were food. (...) Today, turtles are business; turtles are subsistence*”.

The *Tamar* Project also seems to contribute to the management of negative impacts associated with tourism development, through: the use of tourism products and concepts appropriated to the destination's available environmental resources and the education of the staff of local tourist-

oriented businesses.

FGD, in turn, is another example of the positive impacts of *Praia do Forte* “touristification” process, directly contributing to the conservation and restoration of the region's cultural heritage. It is also attributed to FGD the role of workforce qualification to tourism, thereby improving the quality of the services provided by restaurants that have opened in the region after 2002.

The difficulty of managing the impacts of tourism development at *Praia do Forte* and some trade-offs associated with this process, seem clear to the interviewees who confirmed that when “*the tourists arrive, they bring employment and wealth. They may even bring higher cultural demands to the natives (...) but they also bring with them drugs and child abuse (...) one thing tends to go with the other, unfortunately*”.

Other positive sociocultural impacts on the local *Praia do Forte* community related to tourism development identified in the literature and emphasized by the interviewees include:

- 1) Strengthening and rescue of local traditions (Gomes *et al*, 2006; OMT, 2003; Mendonça Jr. *et al*, 2000): As “*the Carretas (festival of masks) - a movement (...) attributed to a historical awareness, when the slaves would avenge the slaveowners by dressing up in masks like the warriors of the Castelo used to do*”. Portraying the historical path of the coastal communities of northern Bahia, hailing from “*fishing villages [in which] extraction activities are the center of economic and social life*”.

The historian interviewed recognizes as very important the restoration of the *Castelo* in combating local community trauma arising from the historical process and the subsequent task of cultural education of the local population by the FGD - which “*caused an increase in awareness the reflected an ease of getting along with tourists, by fostering an interest on the part of community folk in taking tourists to those places that they had previously rejected*”.

- 2) Jobs and income creation for the community (Gomes *et al*, 2006; OMT, 2003; Mendonça Jr. *et al*, 2000): It was un-animously recognized that tourism has

provided improvements in the financial condition of residents of *Praia do Forte*, which “*have grown and keep on growing, (...) from the boy who performs ‘capoeira’ to the waiter, (...) everyone has a job*”.

The importance of the cultural dimension and its impacts on the long-term sustainability of the destination was a perception shared by all of the interviewees, as someone declaration: “*the development processes can only be sustained if the cultural processes can handle the challenges that arise*”.

Moreover, the Master Plan implemented by Peters was decisive in controlling the speed of local development, something that reduced subsequent future negative impacts on the community. This fact reinforces one of the points recurrent in the literature: the importance of an orderly and slow growth, as well as an adequate public governance structure that makes viable the participation of the community and public-private partnerships in the process. As one of the interviewees pointed out, “*involvement by a local government that is highly committed to the community and with its orderly growth (...) because what kills a tourism destination is disorderly growth*”.

Other strategies suggested in the literature to manage the sociocultural impacts of tourism development on the host community also mentioned by the interviewees were:

- a) Local community involvement in the tourism planning of the destination: which prompted one of the interviewees to declare that is only dangerous “*for the culture of the community when the community doesn't manage to get involved in the development*”.
- b) Myriad opportunities for cultural tourists-community contacts: which might enable residents to “*learn and live together with the many other cultures here in a way which is harmonious, rich, and beneficial to all*”. At the same time, contact between the residents and tourists occurred naturally, as exemplified by the *Cocapilo* dancing club, mentioned as “*a fantastic place where the local people could dance – young men with women, village women with married men – without any conflict, without any*

*problem whatsoever*”.

- c) Explanations of tourism-related questions to the community and education improvements: According to the interviewees, the role assumed by FGD benefited not only the village community, but also the neighboring ones. They were sorry, however, that in 2008 this initiative was practically extinct and were concerned with the possibility of the project not continuing since this could compromise the future of generations to come.

Interviewees who had direct contact with Peters and who were more familiar with him say that by the beginning of the 1990s, he had already indicated three points that the State ought to pay attention to in expanding local tourism: looking after the environment, improving the infrastructure and qualification the workforce.

Nevertheless, among negative cultural aspects on the residents of *Praia do Forte* associated to tourism growth, research results point to both acculturation and demonstration effect.

Additionally, expansion of the “rich neighbors” – as Peters would refer to the new tourism developments, according to some of the interviewees – have already been paralleled by radical local changes, such as the paving of the main road in the fishery village which abandoned its original name “*Alameda do Sol*” (literally “street of sun”) to become “ACM’s<sup>2</sup> Avenue”.

In fact, some of the interviewees’ statements are quite concerning from the point of view of sustainability. They suggest that the region suffers a lot from the absence of Peters and that his legacy has not been sufficient for a new leadership to arise or for the implementation of an efficient public policy.

According to them the alert signs have become more acute in the last five years and can be ascertained from the “*uptick in construction*” that “*coincided with the time when Peters was no longer around*” in the region, which began to receive colossal investments from international groups.

Other unsustainable aspects described in the literature also mentioned by interviewees as being noticeable alert signs at *Praia do Forte* since then include: the appearance of real estate speculation, traffic



congestion and violence (Mathieson and Wall, 1992 in Mendonça Jr. *et al.*, 2000), prostitution and sex tourism (Gomes *et al.*, 2006).

In 2008 there was also evidence of negative economic impacts attributed to tourism development as the rising of land prices (Mathieson and Wall, 1992 in Mendonça Jr. *et al.*, 2000: 41), accompanied by increased inflation. As one interviewee observed: "A small, fifty-square-meter house that someone built here: there was the land (...) which cost almost nothing – today it's worth a fortune. The [monthly] rent from a house like this is equivalent to ten [Brazilian] minimum salaries<sup>3</sup>". And if, on the one side, the fact can be seen as one more source of income for the residents (a positive effect), on the other, it might be the beginning of a process of casting off the natural enjoyment of the site as residents (usually, a negative effect, with ramifications on cultural identity).

Other Klaus's initiative that does not seem to be respected anymore is the maximum height of constructions as a means of environmental control: "These knock down whatever they want and no one pays any attention to that anymore".

One of the interviewees compared the current situation to the environmental concept of "carrying capacity" also cited in the literature (Buhalis, 2000) and which refers to the "the maximum use of any site, without causing negative effects on the resources, reducing visitor satisfaction, or exerting adverse impact upon the society, economy and culture of the area" (McIntyre, 1993: 23 in OMT, 2003: 176).

This concept is related to three main component restrictions that would define the maximum number of visitors for an area (OMT, 2003): ecological or biophysical (degree of water and air pollution, erosion or disturbance to life); psychological or what can be perceived (sensation of crowding or concern with its impacts); and sociocultural.

In the present study it can be perceived that at least the psychological restrictions symptoms are already observed in the present interviewees' discourse, as well as the effects of a recent trend to regard the place as a fashionable spot for second residence by the wealthier residents of Salva-

dor city (Gomes *et al.*, 2006).

It seems that the group already perceives in *Praia do Forte* some alerts of Coriolano (2007: 25) to the common practices of "touristification" process along the Brazilian coastline: something which eventually fragments and privatizes the coast "for use as a second residences, hotel chains and resorts – especially the latter. [And] the community that had, in nature, a common good (...) becomes banished from using it, since just like any other merchandise, it becomes a scarce good, accessible only via purchase".

When discussing the current situation discourses, at times displays a tone of concern and hope, at times a tone of deception and resignation as if (un)sustainability were a characteristic inherent to tourism itself or an economic activity condemned to using up natural and cultural resources.

This perception is portrayed in the speech of an interviewee who works directly with tourism in the region, one which brings to the forefront the problematic behavior of the tourism entrepreneurs who battle against assuming a more socially responsible stance, preferring to engage in a cycle of successive investments (and divestments) in new "unexplored" destinations (that later on, also become saturated).

## Conclusions

Tourism has an important role in the economy of several countries and appears as a potential strategy for the growth of developing countries, especially those endowed with places of renowned natural beauty and cultural diversity, as is the case of Brazil.

Primary and secondary data were used with the intent of answering the research question of how it was possible for *Praia do Forte* to embark on a path of tourism development in a way that differentiates itself from other similar coastal destinations not only in Brazil but throughout the world.

Being a qualitative case study, the results correspond only to the perceptions of the group of residents who were interviewed and cannot be generalized. Therefore, it is suggested its replication on other coastal tourism destinations and contexts,

as well as the development of a more in-depth study to Praia do Forte region, applying quantitative methodology to get statistical inferences regarding the population, or qualitative techniques closer to the ethnography, such as participant observation.

One of the limitations of the present study is the absence of native residents in the group studied. So the inclusion of natives would be another element that would provide valuable information in future studies. Another limitation is related to the fact that many of the interviewees' perceptions are from the past time, thus drawing on their memories, something that could lead to a distortion of what really happened. To minimize this effect in future studies, the collection of more detailed secondary historical data is suggested.

Regarding the main research question results indicate that three factors seem to have enabled *Praia do Forte* to develop a different path from other similar destinations, especially from a cultural perspective (as Sachs, 1986, eco-development model): i) singular entrepreneur performance of Klaus Peter, who spearheaded touristic exploration of the region in the period between the 1980s and the beginning of the 2000's; ii) *Tamar* environmental preservation and educational Project (also since the 1980s) and, iii) FGD cultural foundation (also an Peters' initiative).

The research strongly suggests that, at least from the local residents' point of view, the combined action of these three agents enabled the adoption of strategic differentiating factors that led to a more controlled rhythm of tourism development at the site which helped to improve the management of negative sociocultural and environmental side effects.

Between the differentials is outstanding the importance of active participation of the local community in the tourism planning, the maintenance of ample cultural tourists-residents contact opportunities, and, lastly, the fostering of education and professional qualification of the local population.

Results exemplify one of the greatest challenges to a more-sustainable tourism destinations development: the impacts caused by the intercultural contact between tourists and residents (especially in small communities isolated from larger urban

centers). This is truer, still, in cases that prioritize the foreign tourist as the target public where different national cultures are involved.

Regarding the positive impacts of tourism development on the local community, that also steer the destination towards a more-sustainable development are: strength and revive local traditions and values; higher income and better jobs; greater environmental awareness and non-lethal use of nature; getting back to historical and cultural roots (something which, in turn, facilitates restoration, conservation and protection of the physical spaces and access to incentives for the recovery of constructions and historical sites); and, the creation and maintenance of protected areas.

Finally, the results obtained as a response to identification of the current sustainability degree of tourism development (secondary research question) were notable. Surprisingly, the testimonies show evidence of a lot of negative impacts on resident community, mostly starting at the beginning of the current decade which includes cultural changes, such as acculturation and demonstration effects.

Although the existence of a causal relationship between the tourism activity and the abovementioned perception cannot be concluded from the present study, results suggest that there is some correlation between the change in the path of tourism development, Peter's leaving *Praia do Forte* and the subsequent change in the model of local public governance, combined with the beginning of operations of large international hotel groups at the location.

Although it was not the objective of this study to pinpoint *Praia do Forte*' present stage, according to the Butler model (1980 in Buhalis, 2000: 105) for tourism destination life cycle, everything seems to indicate that it is between the phases of consolidation and stagnation.

So, at least two questions remain unanswered: if it would still be possible to avoid a future decline to *Praia do Forte* as tourism destination and what could be done to prevent this. Or yet, what can be done and how, so that this destination and its local community can rewrite their history in years to come, inspired in the singularity

of their own path since the 1980s, for its rejuvenation.

Of course, from a practical point of view, this reflection can also be extended to a global context as it is not an isolated experience but a fact already observed in many international mass tourism destinations (Buhalis, 2000). So, we can highlight two points similar to them: Firstly, be inspired by the *Praia do Forte* path from the 1980s to the early 2000s, other tourism destinations might equally benefit from search for cultural and environmental public policy similar supported strategies. Secondly, as soon as there are signs of getting close to the carrying capacity limits of these destinations, it is vital to watch out for the review of its own strategic public and governance policies.

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## Notas

<sup>1</sup><http://www.jornalbahiaonline.com.br/index.asp?noticia=62>

<sup>2</sup> The initials of a Brazilian politician, Antônio Carlos Magalhães who served three terms as governor of *Bahia* State.

<sup>3</sup> The Brazilian national minimum wage is adjusted annually (465 R\$/month, 2009).

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