Chapter 10

Contemporary Urbanizations in Public Water Reservoirs: Floating Villages of Alqueva Reservoir

Hélder Caeiro Amador
University of Lisbon, Portugal

ABSTRACT

The most important tourism projects since 2005 in Portugal, privately owned and with European funds, were integrated resorts, mostly located in public water reservoirs, as a result of urban policies to encourage the human occupation of the most interior desertified areas. The Alqueva reservoir, although with no visible results, is an emerging paradigm of urban expansion planned for tourism in these areas. This chapter intends to show the importance of the tourism reservoirs, lost with the economic recession, through an analysis of its territorial management tools and a re-focus on innovative urban regeneration and expansion models, using water as a central element of its development.

INTRODUCTION

The research problematic focus on the emergent urban and tourist development, verified in the surrounding of reservoirs, emphasizing the time interval between the year of 2002, until the present time in Portugal. The investigation after a more general approach of the subject focuses on the Alqueva reservoir, as the object of study. Emerging tourism developments in the last ten years in the reservoir area in Portugal were born mainly from the rules established in the various Water Supply Management Plans (POAAP). These establish zones of tourist vocation, in a paradigm of urban expansion, regarding a planning process, that formalized an urban model based on the integrated resort from 2007.

The National Strategic Plan for Tourism (PENT) defined this model as the lever for sustainable development, and that contributed to the environmental valuation of the territories. This public policy instrument defined the reservoirs and their surroundings as privileged spaces for the implantation of tourism infrastructures with a strong golf component, in response to the increase of human desertification and the degradation of the socioeconomic conditions of the interior of Portugal (Martins, 2011).

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The research analyzed eight reservoirs in Portugal (Monte da Rocha, Alvito, Alqueva, Vigia, Montargil, Abrantes, Castelo de Bode, and Aguieira) and one in Spain (Valdecañas), in a total of 22 tourist projects (Figure 1) that showed two different approaches to a more recent urban regeneration approach. This coincides with the revision of the Urbanism Basis Law dated 2014, and with an urban expansion approach that has been in place since 2007 - with the implementation of the PENT. It was addressed for the first time in Portugal the need to implement integrated resorts in the areas surrounding the public water reservoirs, extended until 2012 as a preferential urban and tourist model.

Nowadays, these approaches to urban expansion have difficulty imposing themselves as a model of sustainable development, as would be the initial objective, due to the economic conjuncture, to a new paradigm of urban development, that in this context do not find in the public administration the acceptance previously possessed. Although public authorities also support the justification of these urban expansion approaches, recognizing that the planning processes and the rules established at that time were used, taking advantage of investors and investments that focused on the opportunity created through urban policies. They also acknowledge that most of the detail plans at the project stage will not be implemented, either for funding reasons or because of the real estate crisis. Also, for a change in the developers’ investment strategy, they currently seek a reassessment of these plans, having in view the realization of new strategies, with projects smaller in scale, because they also understand that there is a different paradigm today that calls into question the tourism zoning of the various touristic plans.

The results question not so much the conclusions of the detail plans, which are evident, but their process. In the areas surrounding the reservoirs, the traditional planning process was always dependent on public strategies, involving national and regional policies. These factors are outside the territory (such as markets, global trends, and territorial marketing), which had tourism as its ultimate goal and depended heavily on the private sector for its dynamism, exploitation, and execution.

Figure 1. Localization of case studies - Portugal and Spain