Chapter 2

Revaluing Saltscapes in Portugal: Ecotourism, Ecomuseums, and Environmental Education

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ABSTRACT

Solar salinas in Portugal are progressively changing from places of work to places of tourism. The research question is the extent to which these special landscapes have been understood, marketed, and enhanced to the benefit of mostly tourists and visitors or also local constituencies. This research question arises from a sense of stigmatization, perceived lack of potential, and outmoded technological development associated with traditional cultural heritage and sun and sea tourism paradigms. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze how two Portuguese municipalities (i.e., Aveiro and Figueira da Foz) have engaged in the rehabilitation of their solar salinas. The argument is that given the considerable natural areas of wetlands in the case studies, solar salinas, and their potentialities from ecotourism and environmental education ought to perform a more central role in the municipalities’ territorial development strategies. The key finding is the identification of a set of lessons learned useful to the partial rehabilitation of solar salinas.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-8494-0.ch002

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INTRODUCTION

Portugal is currently experiencing a tourism boom. However, most of the tourism activity takes place in the very central locations of Lisbon, Porto and Algarve. The country is perceived as being very affordable, safe and with a distinct identity. However, tourism-based conflicts between tourists and residents are starting to emerge in the historic districts of Lisbon with the rise of too many *alojamentos locais* establishments (local accommodations in traditionally residential city-center neighborhoods), traffic and rickshaw congestion, and displacement of residents (Urry, 1990; Ribeiro & Fidalgo, 2015).

Simultaneously, many solar salinas in Portugal are progressively changing from places of work to places of ecotourism. Traditionally, salterns were places utilized to produce salt. Nowadays that industrial salt production has replaced traditional artisanal salt making, saltscapes are being utilized for other purposes including, cultural and wellness tourism, environmental education, and nature preserves. Ecomuseums and artisanal salt making demonstration projects are central to the rehabilitation of salterns. The rehabilitation of solar salinas can be understood as an example of environmental daylighting, since many salterns have been completely abandoned and destroyed, while others have been performing below their full potential. A strong awareness of saltscapes’ cultural, ecological and biodiversity potential is helping to rehabilitate many of them for both artisanal, cultural and educational purposes.

Furthermore, since many of the cities with some of the greatest concentrations of solar saltscapes are not necessarily within the two largest metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto (Balsas, 2012), they have remained below their full potential as alternative ecotourism sites. The research question is the extent to which these special landscapes have been understood, marketed, and enhanced to the benefit of mostly tourists and visitors or also local constituencies. This research question arises from a sense of stigmatization, perceived lack of potential and outmoded technological development associated with traditional cultural heritage and sun and sea tourism paradigms.

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze how two Portuguese municipalities (i.e. Aveiro and Figueira da Foz) have engaged in the rehabilitation of their solar salinas. The argument is that given the considerable natural areas of wetlands in the case studies, solar salinas and their potentialities from ecotourism and environmental education ought to perform a more central role in the municipalities’ territorial development strategies. The methodology is threefold: (1) to analyze these municipalities’ recent tourism strategies, (2) to review the specialized literature on ecotourism, ecomuseums and environmental education, and (3) to critically reflect on the field work conducted in both municipalities during recent years. The key finding is the identification of a
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