Chapter 9

Tourism in a Salt Pan: Does Creativity Matter?

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ABSTRACT

The production of salt has always been part of human life. Salt natural sources may vary from rock mine to marine water. Some places have developed their economy considerably due to the extraction and trade of this raw material. More recently, traditional sea salt production activities have been attracting attention from a diversified range of the public. Traditional salt producers usually focus on production, but as a result of tourist demand for visiting salt production activities, producers must develop the intention to receive visitors. Such reception not only shows visitors the activity, but serves as an advertisement to international markets likely to add value to such an ancient, fundamental good: salt.

INTRODUCTION

The production of salt has been related to human life from its beginning. Since ancient times, salt has been used for preserving food, seasoning or pharmaceutical products, and applied in the production of many daily commodities (Kurlansky, 2011). Thus, from early times salt has had utilitarian value. Salt is still one of the preferred and the most widespread methods used in the preservation of food (Bjørndal et al., 2016). Notwithstanding the unhealthiness of excessive and regular intake of salt, it has been recognized as having therapeutic utility, particularly in the context of thermal treatment (Merson, 2004). Salt can be extracted or produced out of several sources: mines, lakes, lagoons, ponds, as a result of natural processes or man-made. Extraction processes have been twofold: handmade or industrialized.
Tourism in a Salt Pan

People seek entertainment and novelty during their free and leisure time (Crompton, 1979). When people become tourists (Binkorst & Den Dekker, 2009), whether in winter, summer or midseason, they can go abroad seeking to relax, to find a different culture, to get involved in different experiences (Vittersø et al., 2000). Culture is sought by tourists who like to visit historic sites and heritage (Richards, 1996). However, they also pursue other forms of interests and recreation. Tourism providers thus tend to adjust tourist demand and propose experiences matching these alternative wants and expectations (Richards, 2002). Multiple offerings become available in the market following successful experiential proposals, but tourists will always choose what they perceive as the best recreational option (Walliss and Kok, 2014). Under such competitive conditions, only the selected few will remain operating in the market.

Apart from the traditional thermal use of salt, sites where production of salt take place have recently been attracting the attention of tourists. Either because of the attractiveness of natural landscapes associated to salt production (saltscapes) (Petanidou and Dalaka, 2009), or of the cultural heritage linked to the traditional ways of salt production. It is acknowledged the growing interest in these out-of-the-ordinary landscapes, both for learning and recreational purposes (Wu, Xie & Tsai, 2015). All around the world there are various forms of attracting tourists to visit different types of salt production (mine, volcanic, sea water).

Attractiveness of places is becoming increasingly linked to intangible factors found in atmospheres and activities, and creativity is part of the process of getting visitors involved in salt production (Richards, 2010). New tourism products and experiences can be developed under this logic (Richards & Wilson, 2006). One way to attract and involve people in the salt theme is by providing them different places to visit. Cultural salt routes can be found in different locations around the world. One of them links four European countries through a path crossing Germany, the Czech Republic, Austria and Italy (Jarábková and Hamada, 2012). Destinations scarce in coastal areas but rich in saltern areas are challenged to creatively produce salt under the sustainable tourism framework. One such case is to be found in Sečovlje Salina Nature Park in Slovenia (Faganel and Trnavčevič, 2012). In Portugal, some traditional salt pans are presently available to tourist visitation (Ramos et al., 2019). Traditional sea salt producers eventually expanded their business to other economic areas, and a multilevel approach has been developed (Feng et al., 2014). Salterns are particularly hard environments, however specific natural features are better understood as advantages rather than taken for granted attributes (Duxbury et al., 2018).

This book chapter introduces the reader to iconic salt production places around the world which are also tourist attractions. Then traditional salt pan environments are briefly described. A third section focuses on salt tourism and tourist experiences in these specific areas. Different typologies of tourism are then identified and described in a way they can be developed in a salt production setting. The chapter concludes with managerial implications and recommendations to tourism providers and developers.

SALTSCAPES AND SALT PRODUCTION PROCESS

Some iconic Places Around the World

Since early days, salt has been part of human culture and used as a means to food preservation and as a mode of payment for labor. Salary is a term that originates from the Latin word for “salt” and can be traced back to roman times (Pittia and Antonello, 2016). Around the Mediterranean basin many countries produce salt since antiquity (Lane and Morris, 2001). The Via Salaria is a road purposely built by the