ice | proceedings

Urban identity and tourism: different looks, one single place

Fátima Bernardo PhD
Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, School of Social Sciences,
University of Évora, Évora, Portugal; Research Fellow, CESUR-CERIS,
University of Lisbon, Lisbon, Portugal
(corresponding author: fatimab@uevora.pt)

Joana Almeida PhD
Assistant Professor, Department of Civil Engineering, Architecture and
Georesources, Instituto Superior Técnico, Lisbon University, Lisbon,
Portugal; Research Fellow, CESUR-CERIS, University of Lisbon, Lisbon,
Portugal

Catarina Martins MSc
Masters Student, Urban Planning and Territorial Management, Instituto
Superior Técnico, University of Lisbon, Lisbon, Portugal

'Urban identity' is high on the policy agenda and pervades the discourse of the planning community on the value of historical city centres. Unfortunately, there seems to be, until today, no proposal in scholarly literature of any unified conceptual framework or any tools to make identity operational. 'Tourism' takes advantage of this process, by seeking the qualities of the place, its authenticity and its perceived uniqueness that is grounded on the physical features as well as on the presence of local communities – their way of living and investing in the place. The interdependence between identity as perceived by tourists (external observer) and the identity of the residents rooted in the relationship with the place (in-group) are key to addressing the identity of historic urban areas. These issues are addressed in the context of the growing attractiveness of Lisbon, Portugal, using a historic neighbourhood as a case study. The findings, which are on a set of interviews with different groups of users, showed the points of convergence and divergence between the different groups' views of the neighbourhood's identity. This actor-oriented approach is pivotal to understanding the process and to produce knowledge for informed action.

1.   Introduction

1.1   Urban identity: different approaches, one place

The concept of urban identity is present in the discourse of politicians, practitioners and researchers from different disciplines, with a wide variety of conceptualisations and definitions. However, despite the increasing use of this concept, and the recognition of its importance for urban planning (Palmer *et al.*, 2013), current scholarship has not proposed any conceptual framework or tools to make the identity operational (Loupa-Ramos *et al.*, n.d.). The different meanings presented in the literature may cause confusion and weaken its importance.

The identities of places are depicted in the literature in different ways depending on the objective and the field involved. On one hand, the urban identity is mainly centred on the physical features of the place, including the physical elements and the way they are organised. This conceptualisation, also called spatial identity, refers to the environmental features that allow one place to be distinguished from another (Lynch, 1960).

This is an expert-based approach that is centred on the observer's point of view.

On the other hand, urban identity is conceptualised as not only the spatial character of the place but also including the memories and the symbolic meanings associated with the setting (both personal and socio-cultural). Identity in this sense refers to the characteristics of the place as perceived by people. This approach focuses on the point of view of different users.

Two points of view can thus be distinguished: one by which a place is seen as a source of identity and as contributing to the collective identity of its residents (Bernardo and Palma, 2012) and a second, the external observer's viewpoint that focuses on what makes a place unique. Some attempts to integrate these two perspectives from a theoretical perspective rather than from the practical one can be found in the literature (e.g. Loupa-Ramos *et al.*, n.d.).

The main objective of this paper is to present a conceptualisation of urban identity that emphasises the importance of