
RESEÑAS DE LIBROS / BOOK REVIEWS

JOSEPH L. SCARPACI: *Plazas and Barrios: Heritage Tourism and Globalization in the Latin American Centro Histórico*. Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 2005.

Anyone who has visited the historical *plazas* of Latin America during the tourism boom of the recent decade will find Joseph Scarpaci's *Plazas and Barrios: Heritage Tourism and Globalization in the Latin American Centro Histórico* a pleasant and informative book that will simultaneously bring back magical memories of those charming public squares and question the future of these cultural jewels in the face of the homogenizing power of market globalization. The book may also provoke a bit of guilt in the reader, as Scarpaci describes the process by which our love of these *plazas* ends up destroying their unique and local qualities, and prices out the local residents.

Scarpaci wants to know precisely how two contemporary forces, heritage tourism and globalization, are reshaping the historical center and the effect of these changes on the people who reside in these neighborhoods before and during these transformations. As the world discovers these *centros históricos*, who ends up determining the new character of the *plaza*? The book examines nine cities: Bogotá, Colombia; Buenos Aires, Argentina; Cartagena, Colombia; Cuenca, Ecuador; Havana, Cuba; Montevideo, Uruguay; Puebla, Mexico; Quito, Ecuador; and Trinidad, Cuba. The study is based on interdisciplinary and eclectic methods, including a clever land-use survey of 30,000 doorways, urban morphology profiles, interviews, and comparative analysis. The research also features three in-depth case studies based on extensive archival work, interviews with local officials and focus groups in Havana, Cartagena, and Cuenca to deepen our understanding of the process of transformation, the role of public officials, and the feelings of locals after the invasion of tourists and investors. The study has a longitudinal element, based on Scarpaci's fieldwork in the nine cities over fourteen years.

The land-use survey featured in Chapter 3 provides rich data about the nine *centros históricos*, divided into seven land-use categories: residential, park, restaurants, institutional, commercial, parking, and abandoned. The variance between the different cities is dramatic. "Percent residential" ranges from 19.69%

in Quito to 93.01% in Trinidad. “Abandoned” ranges from 0.78% in Quito to 5.52% in Montevideo. “Commercial” ranges from 0.47 in Trinidad to 66.69% in Quito. Scarpaci also provides data on the building quality, using a trichotomous scale (Poor, Fair, and Good) for the nine centers. Buenos Aires, Havana, and Montevideo have the highest percentage of poor quality buildings, while Quito has the lowest percentage of buildings in poor shape. Only 12% of Havana’s buildings are in Good shape, compared with 76% in Puebla. Finally, the book also provides original data on the mean number of floors in each center, with Buenos Aires the highest at 2.9 and Trinidad the lowest at 1.04.

These data result from a tremendous amount of work and are useful data. It is unfortunate that Scarpaci employs them merely as descriptive data and does not use them to generate theoretical questions or test hypothesis. Would residents of communities with a high percentage of buildings in good condition be more likely to shun investment and foreign real estate buyers? Would centers with a large percentage of commercial land-use exhibit stronger local organization and participation in planning? These are interesting types of questions and Scarpaci did a lot of work putting the data together to address them. This chapter on land-use is useful and interesting, but could have been much stronger with explicit comparative analysis.

The in-depth case studies follow the same pattern. The research is high quality, original data are produced, interesting findings are presented about the individual cases, but there is not explicit enough comparative analysis of the cases. Indeed, Scarpaci treats the multiple cities as a single case study (p. 33). Had the book leveraged the multiple cases for an explicitly comparative study, the analytical potential would have been much greater.

Chapter 4 discusses a number of important dimensions of the social construction of historic districts, including the impact of heritage tourism, the role of public-private partnerships, the importance of remittances in places like Cuenca, and the dollarization of Latin American economies. As with the rest of the book, a large number of photos is included, adding significantly to the reader’s understanding and enjoyment.

The three case studies are perspicacious and beautifully written. Scarpaci’s chapters on the two Cuban cities, Havana and Trinidad, provide multiple insights into the contradictions of tourism in a communist regime. The role of Havana’s city historian, Eusebio Leal, the emergence and reach of the Cuban company Habaguanex, and the consequences of a weak civil society are all fascinating elements of Habana Vieja’s restoration, and Scarpaci highlights them with great skill. In Trinidad, Scarpaci’s foci are small projects and the dynamic between local and national officials when balancing authenticity and tourism revenues. Side by side, these two chapters reveal interesting differences between Trinidad

and Havana, suggesting that local forces can shape the effects of globalization on urban historical spaces.

This book is appropriate for graduate students in urban planning, tourism studies, and Latin American history courses. The book is a must read for anyone who has enjoyed an afternoon enchanted by one of the *centros históricos* of the hemisphere.

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RICARDO D. SALVATORE: *Imágenes de un Imperio: Estados Unidos y las formas de representación de América latina*. Buenos Aires: Ed. Sudamericana, 2006.

En *Imágenes de un Imperio*, Ricardo Salvatore estudia una dimensión frecuentemente olvidada del proceso histórico: el papel de las representaciones que emanan desde una potencia central en la construcción de su poder sobre regiones periféricas. El caso analizado es el de las imágenes norteamericanas de América Latina durante diversas décadas entre 1820 y 1945. Por momentos, abarca también un necesario correlato: el del concepto que los estadounidenses tenían de sí mismos.

Uno de los mejores capítulos trata sobre las “Exhibiciones”. Nos remite al juego de representaciones emanadas por las ferias mundiales y los museos de historia natural. En un caso paradigmático (la Exhibición del Centenario, que tuvo lugar en Filadelfia en 1876), cada país presentaba muestras de sus exportaciones. La diferencia entre las materias primas exportadas por América Latina y las manufacturas norteamericanas era de alto impacto. El autor sugiere convincentemente que, al proveer al público de contrastes entre las culturas más primitivas y las más avanzadas, se educaba acerca de la evolución. “Como había ocurrido en los debates del s. XVI en España”, reflexiona Salvatore, “había aquí un despliegue espectacular al servicio de la tutela imperial” (p. 43).

La obra es políticamente correcta y eso le garantiza cierto éxito frente a cierta crítica, aunque para mí sea su principal flaqueza. Afín al postmodernismo y el populismo, el autor cede a la tentación de relativizar el conocimiento objetivo. Acertadamente afirma la presencia de un “colonialismo discursivo”, pero argumenta que: “La construcción de una alteridad subalterna en los términos de la cultura dominante, y la constitución de un campo de conocimiento y enunciación sobre esos subalternos, se incluyen entre las numerosas connotaciones de este concepto” (p. 24). A partir de allí infiere que la alteridad subalterna se construyó con: “Un conjunto de tecnologías culturales (que) dio marco a la construcción de