

Pueblos Mágicos in Mexico: The Loss of Intangible Cultural Heritage and Cultural Tourism

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Abstract : Since the creation of the “Pueblos Mágicos” program in 2001, a series of social and cultural events had directly affected the heritage conservation of the 121 registered localities until 2018, when the federal government terminated the program. Many studies have been carried out that seek to analyze from different perspectives and disciplines the consequences that these appointments have generated in the “Pueblos Mágicos.” Multidisciplinary groups such as the one headed by Carmen Valverde and Liliana López Levi, have brought together specialists from all over the Mexican Republic to create a set of diagnoses of most of these settlements, and although each one has unique specificities, there is a constant in most of them that has to do with the loss of cultural heritage and that is related to transculturality. There are several factors identified that have fostered a cultural loss, as a direct reflection of the economic crisis that prevails in Mexico. It is important to remember that the origin of this program had as its main objective to promote the growth and development of local economies since one of the conditions for entering the program is that they have less than 20,000 inhabitants. With this goal in mind, one of the first actions that many “Pueblos Mágicos” carried out was to improve or create an infrastructure to receive both national and foreign tourists since this was practically non-existent. Creating hotels, restaurants, cafes, training certified tour guides, among other actions, have led to one of the great problems they face: globalization. Although by itself it is not bad, its impact in many cases has been negative for heritage conservation. The entry into and contact with new cultures has led to the undervaluation of cultural traditions, their transformation and even their total loss. This work seeks to present specific cases of transformation and loss of cultural heritage, as well as to reflect on the problem and propose scenarios in which the negative effects can be reversed. For this text, 36 “Pueblos Mágicos” have been selected for study, based on those settlements that are cited in volumes I and IV (the first and last of the collection) of the series produced by the multidisciplinary group led by Carmen Valverde and Liliana López Levi (researchers from UNAM and UAM Xochimilco respectively) in the project supported by CONACyT entitled “Pueblos Mágicos. An interdisciplinary vision”, of which we are part. This sample is considered representative since it forms 30% of the total of 121 “Pueblos Mágicos” existing at that moment. With this information, the elements of its intangible heritage loss or transformation have been identified in every chapter based on the texts written by the participants of that project. Finally, this text shows an analysis of the effects that this federal program, as a public policy applied to 132 populations, has had on the conservation or transformation of the intangible cultural heritage of the “Pueblos Mágicos.” Transculturality, globalization, the creation of identities and the desire to increase the flow of tourists have impacted the changes that traditions (main intangible cultural heritage) have had in the 18 years that the federal program lasted.

Keywords : public policies, cultural tourism, heritage preservation, pueblos mágicos program

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