

CEMETERY TOURISM: A TOUR PROPOSAL BASED ON THE TOURIST POTENTIAL OF THE CIVIL CEMETERY IN SANTA VITÓRIA DO PALMAR (RS), BRAZIL

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180

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a project created during a mandatory internship program which analyzed possibilities of transforming the Civil Cemetery of Santa Vitória do Palmar (Rio Grande do Sul state - Brazil) into a tourist attraction. Such transformation would be performed based on interpretive trails developed through tour planning, aiming at preserving the cemetery's cultural heritage. The SWOT analysis method was used after a tourist inventory was held, and exploratory tours were created through literature reviews. Field research assessed infrastructure, accessibility, safety, and grave features in order to establish the final tour plan.

Keywords: Cemetery tourism. Interpretive trails. Tour planning.

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents a project created during an internship program required for obtaining the Bachelor of Binational Tourism title at the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande - FURG (Brazil) in 2014. The objective was to portray the Civil Cemetery of Santa Vitória do Palmar, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, as a potential tourist attraction, indicating actions that would allow structuring and implementing interpretive trails developed through tour planning and, in the future, creating a Memorial for the Cemetery and its Funeral Rites.

The actions proposed by this project included physical changes in the facility, safeguarding and protecting documents and material assets and developing and promoting the tour plan. All of these actions could be implemented by public-private partnerships and supported by local universities. Moreover, the project considered the possibility of developing regional tour plans based on the Federalist Revolution and the person of Gumercindo Saraiva, whose mortal remains are buried in the Cemetery.

As to the methodology, this work used the tourist inventorying method together with a SWOT analysis in order to generate data to support the diagnosis. The diagnosis, for its part, was established in the years of 2013/2014 after several interviews with civil servants somehow connected to the Cemetery and visitors who took part in the experimental tour plan.

OBJECT OF STUDY

The Civil Cemetery of Santa Vitória do Palmar was founded in January 1889, just a few months before the proclamation of the Brazilian Republic. The land where it was built was purchased in 1884. It was square with side lengths of 118,80 m which had belonged to Captain Bernardo Rodrigues Correa and his wife, Higinia Dorothéa

Souza. The original public deed is now part of the City Hall's Department of Administrative Actions archives. The authors of this paper had access to it, as well as to other public deeds related to further expansions.

Until 1888, burials were made in a cemetery in a central part of town, where nowadays the State School Santa Vitória do Palmar is located (AMARAL, 2010, p. 26). As time went by, the town expanded towards the cemetery, resulting in its transference.

Ferreira (2009, p. 78) describes the town construction as follows:

The town was designed with 14 parallel streets in the North/South direction and 8 perpendicular streets in the East/West direction. The streets were 18 m wide, and the blocks' length was of 960.000 m². The town was built around a square and a church, and all major constructions are located in that area - a heritage from the social class who built and shaped the town. (free translation)

Between 1875 and 1900, the number of urban properties rose from 201 to 501 - a growth surge caused by new production, consumption, and distribution forms. The traders class emerged alongside the rural class, which in turn started to invest in the construction of extravagant buildings in town, thus impressing the power of rural elite on the city's architecture. These social distinction trappings were also left within the Cemetery walls. In 1910, there were 596 urban buildings, and the population in 1920 exceeded 11,000, with 4,000 people living in the urban area (FERREIRA, 2009, pp. 82-82).

Figure 1 - Aerial view of Santa Vitória do Palmar highlighting the two cemeteries and the General Andréa Square.



Source: Google Earth, 2014.

Funerals were true social events, with death and all its rituals being a part of the cities' everyday lives. However, hygiene habits and concepts coming from Europe held dead bodies responsible for transmitting a number of diseases. These new ideas changed people's festive customs towards death rituals: burials inside churches became forbidden, and cemeteries were now built away from urban centers (PAGOTTO, 2004, p. 19).

This process initiated in Brazil back in 1789, under Dona Maria of Portugal's orders. Thanks to Dom Pedro I, became imperative from 1828 onwards, and then compulsory during the First Republic, with Federal Decree n. 789. The transference of the burial site to the town's highest point - Coxilha do Litígio - was probably meant to satisfy those needs. Mortal remains buried in the old cemetery were transferred to the new one, whose main gate and walls, which exist up to this day, were built by João Batista Almeida, who was also the place's first janitor (AMARAL, 2010, pp. 27-28).

The Civil Cemetery is administered by the City Hall of Santa Vitória do Palmar, more specifically by the City Secretariat of Public Works and Urban Services. As stated by the mayor during an interview conducted on August 25, 2014, the government usually turns its attention to the Cemetery according to demands from the community, which only shows interest in this respect on November 2, All Souls' Day, or on celebrations such as Father's or Mother's Day.

Several interviews conducted with civil servants and government representatives provided details related to the Cemetery's administration and superstructure. This information helped understanding on how the facility operates and supported the creation of the internship project.

The Cemetery's southern and eastern sides are surrounded by a white brick wall built in 1888, as was the cast iron gate. Outside the wall, it is possible to see some tombstone sculptures and many crucifixes. The sidewalk has no pavement of any sort, except for the area right in front of the main gate. Within and along the original walls, there are catacombs which were built at that same time. A few were destroyed, but most of them are still used. On the right side of the main gate, there is a small space which serves as an administration office and storage room. In this room, equipment such as shovels, hoes, cement, and work uniforms are kept alongside documents. The furniture is limited to an old table and chairs in poor condition.

There are many mausoleums which have been repaired and had their original features modified throughout the years, with significant presence of tiles and floor bricks. There are also numerous abandoned graves covered with moss, including marble tombstones which are now illegible. The rich details on some of the marble tombstones and their photographs alone are enough to inspire specific studies.

Figure 2 – Main gate and administration office.



Source: The authors' personal archives.

The Cemetery currently covers a 24,640 m² ground. The original area used to cover 14,113,44 m². In the middle of the 20th century, the first expansion took place, embracing a four-hectare neighboring area purchased in 1934, in which Vila Nova is now located (the expanded area comprised 10,526,56 m²).

Today the area may still be considered small, but the Cemetery cannot be expanded any further. When the Cemetery was built and first expanded, there were no environmental laws. Nowadays the CONAMA Resolution n. 335/2003 imposes a series of requirements for building cemeteries. Prior to that, such requirements were ignored, and necessary adjustments are yet to be made. A new area has already been purchased - 1,674,20 m², which will result in a 26,314 m² total area -, but there are no plans for it to be used.

Figure 3 – Satellite view of the Civil Cemetery of Santa Vitória do Palmar.



Source: Google Earth, 2014.

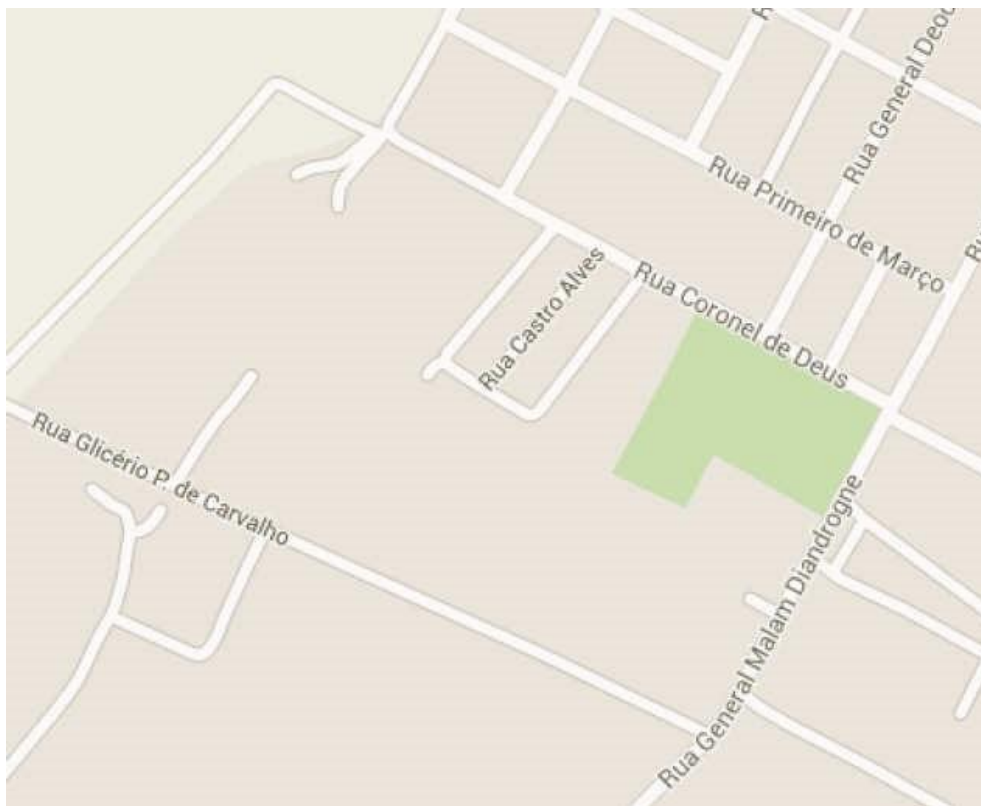
The area studied by the authors measures approximately 102,0 m (front wall) x 55,0 m (side wall), or 5,610 m². Figure 3 shows a broad view of the Civil Cemetery of Santa Vitória do Palmar as seen on Google Earth. The blue square indicates the original area divided into four quadrants, which are then subdivided into four other quadrants. This study focused only on the zone where the oldest graves are located: the ones transferred from the first cemetery plus the ones built up until the early 20th century - that is, the two red quadrants on Figure 3.

As stated previously, at the time when the new Cemetery first opened, a period of urban growth was taking place in association with some important economic development. The rural elite were investing not only in the construction of opulent buildings in the town's central zone, but also in graves that would forever impress their families' wealth and social status in the community's memory. In the 19th century, most graves were masonry built, with finely sculpted marble gravestones. In the first decades of the 20th century, rich marble mausoleums were popular,

mainly with angel statues or crucifixes. Nonetheless, other figures may also be found, such as Christ, the Holy Family, and Our Lady of Sorrows.

The City Hall is currently building new compartments for rent within the area of study in order to mitigate the lack of available graves.

Figure 4 – Streets surrounding the Civil Cemetery of Santa Vitória do Palmar.



Source: Google Maps, 2016

The inventory held especially for this research described 53 graves in details, which are all included in the tour proposal presented here.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Cemeteries and Cemetery Tourism

Cemeteries are monuments in themselves. Regarding monuments, Camargo (2002, p. 24) states that "[...] The root of the Latin word evokes a moment or remembrance. [...] a monument, according to its common conception, is a building or construction meant to perpetuate the reminiscence of a fact, a person or people" (free translation). Cemeteries are places of recollection, where the remains of our beloved rest in peace, and which are full of elements that eternalize their reminiscence.

Halbwachs (apud BURKE, 2000, p. 19) affirms that "memories are built by social groups. Individuals are the ones to remember - in the literal, physical aspect -, but social groups determine what is 'memorable' and how that subject will be remembered" (free translation). Cemeteries, for instance, reveal the way that people are remembered through burial styles, departure rites, the changes from time to time - everything is there, registered in each of the graves.

Patrícia Neuhaus, in her Master's thesis for the Architecture Program in the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil - UFRGS (2012, p. 26), describes the relationships between cemeteries, their visitors, and death. By pointing out that cemeteries are not only spaces destined to burial rites and ceremonies, but also places of recollection, she claims that cemeteries bring death and the dead to a "mnemonic pseudo-existence". This is noticeable both externally, in the mortuary monuments, and internally, in the memories that people keep of their beloved. Thus, the author states that the cemetery experience encompasses two relationship levels: that of the subject with the space and that of the subject with the dead. In other words, in order for the visit - and therefore the space experience - to occur, a previous experience must have happened: the one regarding the dead person's reminiscence -

that is, the subject/beloved one relationship -, adding to the intention of the visit itself.

Since this paper proposes visitation to the Cemetery for tourism purposes, it is worth noting that visitors do not always have this relationship with the dead - after all, they may have no beloved ones buried there. Consequently, in order to allow for a full experience, interpreting the Cemetery's cultural heritage becomes a powerful tool, which will evoke and/or incite memories in the visitors, always bearing in mind that the purpose of the visit is now tourism.

Cemetery Tourism arised as a tendency in the mid 80s in the United States and Europe and established itself as a tourism activity later on. Visits may be preceded by morbid curiosity, a wish to see the graves of famous figures, or an interest in grave art, which in turn is related to the cultural heritage aspect (BORGES, 2002; GASTAL & MOECH, 2007).

In this context, based on the inventory of the sculpture heritage, the historic records, and all the elements connected to the culture and memory of the city/region, it is possible to conceive the Civil Cemetery of Santa Vitória do Palmar as a tourist attraction. As an essential step in that process, the following factors were considered: the relationship between visitors and the Cemetery; what they think about it being used for tourism purposes; their impressions after the visit (PUERTO & BAPTISTA, 2015; GASTAL & MOECH, 2007).

In this research, the city's residents were regarded as visitors, since the Cemetery is not a well-established tourist attraction yet and also because the local community needs to recognize the place's worth before tourism is encouraged. Confrontation with new and unexpected experiences causes a "subjective engagement that leads people to rethink, reevaluate and give new meaning not only to the situation, the

environment and praxis underlying that moment and place, but also to their past experiences" (GASTAL & MOESCH, 2007) (free translation).

The traditional definition for "tourist" takes into consideration that there must be spatial dislocation from the individual's dwelling to another site. Nevertheless, a citizen who visits another neighborhood or space within his/her own city under an unusual situation also goes through new experiences and has his/her subjectivity engaged (GASTAL & MOESCH, 2007).

Representatives from the city government emphasize that tourism is an alternative to bolster the economy in Santa Vitória do Palmar, even though this segment does not influence local economy yet (AZAMBUJA, 1992). A couple of initiatives have been adopted in order to foster city development, such as the building of a FURG campus in the city, which offers the Binational Tourism course.

The discussion about tourism and how to take advantage of city spots is not recent, and neither is the debate on deficiencies related to infrastructure and city appeal. In this respect, tourism planning becomes fundamental, since it is a means through which a given location may grow both economically and socially (AZAMBUJA, 1992; BENI, 2011).

The cemetery as a "tourist product" adds to a few measures already taken by the City Secretariat of Culture, Sport and Tourism, such as tours offered by the Historic Center and Historic Farms, which are available on specific occasions - for instance, during National Museum Week.

The regional tour proposals presented in the project meet the principles of the Tourism Regionalization Plan, developed by the Brazilian Ministry of Tourism, and

respect the Tourism Development Plan of the Rio Grande do Sul state for 2012-2015 (BRASIL, 2013).

Another important aspect is the fact that the southernmost area of Rio Grande do Sul is located precisely in the transit route taken by Mercosul tourists. Therefore, tourism projects ought to consider that it is only necessary to draw tourists into the area, rather than having to actually bring them over.

METHOD

The studies developed prior to this proposal were carried out between the years 2013 and 2014. A field research registered the site's features regarding infrastructure, accessibility and safety, and data was collected for the inventory: pictures of the graves identifying their characteristics, descriptive information, facts and records regarding burials and area mapping. The inventory followed the model proposed by Bestianello (2010, p. 127) and the distinctive features as described by Bellomo (2008).

After the inventory was done, a tour plan was developed, seeking to highlight grave art with all its beauty and symbology in various ways: from the big picture to simple details; elements from popular and religious cultures; the regional story as well as the city's; traces of ethnic and cultural formation of local society; different forms of expressing nostalgia; and the risks that the Cemetery's cultural heritage faces.

The tour plan comprised of a visitation map and a guide text indicating stops and noteworthy features with their description and relation to the exhibit's goals, aiming at arousing visitors' interest and curiosity without being too didactic or repetitive. It consisted of a one-hour space interpretation walk, covering everything from

historic data to elements of grave art symbology, miscellaneous facts, legends, and folktales.

Interpretive trails were used as a tool in order to understand the relationship between the community and the Cemetery along with interviews with visitors through focal groups soon after the visit.

Documental research and semi-structured interviews with employees and members of the government provided information about the Cemetery's superstructure - that is, laws, procedures, janitorial service, and administration.

Literature review, in turn, served as a basis for analyzing data and understanding processes related to this type of tourism activity. The project was then developed based on a SWOT analysis of all data collected.

RESULTS

Diagnosis

The first records of land occupation are from the early 18th century. In March 1778, the first boundary marker was placed on the border of the Arroio Chuí river mouth. On December 19, 1855, the Andréa village - whose patron saint is Saint Victoria - was born, having officially acquired such status on October 30, 1873. Subsequently, on December 24, 1888, Andréa was granted the City status (IBGE, p. 1, s. d.; AMARAL, 2010).

The land meant for founding the Cemetery in 1889 was purchased back in 1884. Until 1888, the Cemetery was located in the town's main area. Mortal remains were transferred to the new Cemetery, whose main gate and wall, which exist up to the

present day, were built by João Batista Almeida, the Cemetery's first janitor. The cast iron gate also dates from 1888 (AMARAL, 2010).

In the middle of the 20th century, the Cemetery was first expanded, embracing a nearby area purchased by the City Hall in 1934. Currently, the Cemetery is 24,640 m². This project covers only the two oldest quadrants - half the original area -, where the mortal remains transferred from the first cemetery plus the graves built until the early 20th century are located.

There are no cobblestone or cement sidewalks whatsoever, except for the area right in front of the main gate. Within and along the original walls, there are catacombs which were built at that same time. On the right side to the main gate, there is a small administration office/storage room, where work equipment and documents are kept.

Mausoleums are oftentimes repaired, losing their original features. There are also many abandoned graves covered with moss in addition to illegible tombstones.

The rich marble tombstones and their photographs stand out from the whole view. In the 19th century, most graves were masonry built, with finely sculpted marble gravestones. In the first decades of the 20th century, marble built mausoleums became popular, with statues of angels, children, the Holy Family, and other civic or religious items.

Gumercindo Saraiva's mortal remains rest in this Cemetery. He was one of the last Brazilian warlords with political importance and the head of the Federalist Revolution in the end of the 19th century – a story that, according to the janitor's statement, sparks the interest of visitors coming from the Southern Cone region.

Chart 1 – Strong features

Strong features
Rich historic, social and cultural references
Public authorities open to dialogue
It is possible to work with awareness and acknowledgement as to the relevance of an almost cost-free space based on the interpretive trail proposal. Universities in the region could provide assistance in partnership with the government
Dedication from civil servants and employees
Good acceptance by visitors, which reveals a new point of view on cemeteries as places where one can contemplate culture, history and society, as well as life and death

Source: Created by the authors.

Chart 2 – Weak features

Weak features
Safety risks, since vandalism and robbery have been registered
Inadequate administrative facilities
There are no maps nor numbering on quadrants/graves, neither is there regulation on how to use the space
Lack of structure for supporting visitors and accessibility deficiencies
Administrative action is taken as far as the community needs it, with no preventive action of any sort
Graves without due care or even abandoned
Original features in poor conditions, such as the wall and the main gate

Source: Created by the authors.

PROGNOSIS

A walking tour around the Civil Cemetery, which would first be offered to local dwellers, may cause the community to look differently at this heritage site. This would result in awareness as to its value and the importance of protecting it, therefore making it easier to implement protective actions such as landmarking the area.

Sightseeing tours for residents are important in that they lead to the implementation of other actions towards tourism development in a given region, for they turn the dweller into a tourist and bring the community together during that process. As a result, thinking about tourism becomes part of the citizen's everyday life, stimulating his/her participation.

The Civil Cemetery keeps the mortal remains of citizens who lived in the city ever since it was first built - that is, the middle of the 19th century. Each grave bears a piece of this society's ethnic, cultural and social memory. As a whole, the Cemetery represents this social group's economic cycles, social stratification, habits, rituals, and beliefs, as well as it presents rich grave art on both its major sculptures and intricate carved details.

Considering that Gumercindo Saraiva's presence was highlighted by visitors and interview participants and that his grave is highly sought-after by people from other cities, it is therefore easy to conceive tour plans based on his story, including neighboring country Uruguay, where the Saraiva family played a key role, just as in other places in the Rio Grande do Sul state where the Brazilian Federalist Revolution took place. Gumercindo Saraiva's first burial site, the Saint Anthony Capuchins Cemetery - Itacurubi, Missionary Region, Rio Grande do Sul state -, holds a monument in his tribute.

Furthermore, Santa Vitória do Palmar still has houses, farms and land that once belonged to the Saraiva family. They could all constitute a local tour plan, which would certainly become a popular tourist attraction.

FINAL THOUGHTS

This study is relevant not only because of the possibilities it offers for appreciating and acknowledging the importance of a cultural and artistic heritage site in Santa Vitória do Palmar and its ensuing preservation. The Civil Cemetery offers free access, regardless of the community's economic, social or religious status. It keeps, within its walls, an important artistic collection which could become an open-air museum for tourists and residents alike.

During the study, it was possible to conclude that there is little work published on the subject. There is only one paper related to this specific topic: a 2010 postgraduate thesis from the FURG University's Social Memory course, which addresses the city's Funeral Rites and presents some relevant data and information about the Cemetery.

"Preserving the reminiscence of the dead is one of the identity and cohesion factors in families, tribes and communities" (BELLOMO, 2008, p. 13) (free translation). In the author's opinion, cemeteries reproduce social spaces of the living. They project values, beliefs, socioeconomic structures, and ideologies of the communities to which they belong. From this point of view, cemetery tourism is a tool for constructing citizenship and preserving a given city's cultural heritage. Creating tour plans and tourist spaces destined to the local community is the first step towards consolidating healthy tourism development.

196

Finally, the authors of this work suggest new studies in order to generate contribution in the management aspect as well as in the academic field, since there are very few papers on the matter at hand.

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