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### **Tourism, the End of an Illusion: a Social Practice that still has its Spatial Importance but does not deceive People anymore**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This text discusses the end of the illusion of tourism as a socio-spatial practice shown by local elites as a real possibility to build the so-called citizen space. Based on specific cases of urban touristification processes which have occurred in some of the territories situated in Pernambuco State (Brazil), this paper advocates that although tourism has not promoted, *per se*, the citizen space, it is an important socio-spatial practice for the places where it occurs. This central argument has been based on a review of the literature on the subject, as well as the results of field surveys conducted at different times and in different places of tourism mainly in Recife, the capital of the State.

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## Introduction

Since the 1990's the research carried out in the State of Pernambuco (Brazil) has examined how tourism offers real possibilities, not only to insert, but also to integrate liveable landscapes (urban and rural spaces) into a process of citizen space's construction. The results of this research have mainly shown that tourism has been used more as an illusion than as a real possibility, for the effective mitigation of socio-spatial problems which would move us along the path of the citizen space.

Tourism as some kind of a panacea, something firmly criticized by Cazes (1989), Knafo (2012), Rodrigues (2002) and Castilho (2001; 2002), among others, does not seem to make sense these days anymore. Particularly, and chiefly, in territories where that socio-spatial practice which is based upon a clear process of touristification of rural and urban spaces has clearly eroded.

In the range of questions related to tourism as a socio-spatial practice with its possibility of promoting the citizen space (CASTILHO, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2004), we have sought to understand how this possibility could become a reality: not only by inserting people into the job market (frequently used as an informal process of 'hiring for the sake of hiring'), but also principally for the real integration of these people into a 'socio- environmental' way of life, thus promoting significant changes to the extent that people feel some level of social fulfillment in their rights.

The construction of the so-called citizen space, as it is in any dimension of social life or liveable territory, proves to be a complex process which can only be fully understood and explained through an interdisciplinary analysis.

Related to the latter, we advocate the role of tourism in constructing a different society in Brazil in which the players are those who question and participate effectively in the process of democratization which concerns them, thus creating a real citizen space, real freedom and real autonomy. This perspective of constructing the citizen space can establish some of the fundamental conditions for tourism as an instrument of development.

However, in many of Pernambuco's cities there is a kind of touristification based mainly on cronyism, especially by local elites who are connected to powerful political and economic groupings. This direction simply maintains the status quo rather than making way for effective social change. Therefore, value is given to 'capitalist space' to the detriment of giving value to citizen space. For low-income populations, which still constitute the majority of the Brazilian people, this creates informal jobs, only, and promotes some access to basic goods and services. That is why we affirm that this kind of touristification cannot construct citizen spaces.

On the other hand, can informal occupations possess create the conditions to promote a desirable proposal of development? Here we defend the position that current policies merely legitimize the maintenance of power within groups of elites who, in turn, adopt and promote their ideology within a globalized framework. Unfortunately, our analysis continues to show that current programmes of 'touristification of urban

space' (as analyzed here) do not benefit the majority of the population in ways that would create a more ideal form of social development.

A little different from what happened during the 90's, current tourism is no longer poised by urban administrations as the most dynamic instrument of management in the State of Pernambuco's urban centers, promising to solve historical problems inherent to Brazil such as: poverty, territorial inequality and social injustice. At the same time, we note that the public does not accept this argument as they did before, because people are no longer easily deceived. Above all, people have become conscious of the fact that nothing is changed by simplistic and linear social programs, that is, without the adoption of an interdisciplinary posture for an analysis and socio-spatial practice.

In our search for a citizen space, we continue to wonder what we can do to understand the real idea of, and the practice of a 'sustainable tourism' (YAZIGI, 1999) as a concrete instrument for the social and spatial integration of underprivileged men and women in our cities. We need to assume that there is not one absolute truth and that tourism alone should not be seen anymore as the panacea for development; we need to identify the many contradictions and conflicts (and limitations), without neglecting the role of social representations within this process, also finding answers for the socio-historical production of space led by the tourism activity.

### **1. The Philosophical Nature of Tourism in Cities at Troubled Regions: the Creation of Illusions that only deceive**

First of all, we assume that tourism cannot be neglected anymore either by science or by society as a social and spatial practice that has a great relevance with regard to the economy and social dynamics in regions with potential for touristification, because it constitutes a crucially strategic phenomenon in the various areas where it takes place. Therefore, we cannot fail to admit it is important in social theory and for contemporary societies.

On the one side, evidence shows that tourism constitutes a socio-spatial practice, which plays a part in the life of many people, in many regions of the world (RODRIGUES, 2002). That is to say, it is a phenomenon in the life of people who are tourists, people who earn an income from tourism, inside both the formal and informal workforce. In Pernambuco, we have to take into consideration both levels of involvement. On the other hand, establishing evidence of tourism as a socio-spatial practice is of great significance for contemporary society. This legacy has been 'taken over' by the local ruling elites, who have presented proposals for tourist development relating more to economic than to social agendas.

There is a control of touristification, formulating the idea of what tourism contains as a factor of economics either at urban and local levels or else a condition to materialize the existence of the citizen space. In current practice, these various adjectives associated with the idea of development do not translate into reality, because they do not go beyond the economic level. However, they continue to be used to justify the

permanence of the logic of economic growth without promoting deep changes in society. So we come to believe that this is the way we should be making investments, in activities that give support to the attraction of foreign tourists and capital, in order to consolidate the process of inserting these areas into a globalized world.

In elaborating and publicizing their rhetoric, the representatives who administer the municipalities and states (under the false premise of strict business), try to show that their proposals and programmes replicate the success of other countries, such as France, Italy, Spain and Portugal, amongst others. This measurement of tourism as a fundamental instrument of development may be successful in those countries, but not in Brazil. But why this distinguishing between Brazil and other countries?

According to this point of view, we need to clarify that not just tourism, but any activity can promote effective development of people, if it is based first of all on the construction of citizen spaces. That is one of the most important conditions of citizenship. That is to say, without citizenship there cannot be spatial integration in the social life of people. Therefore, without citizenship, the development of people cannot happen. And it is worth remembering that:

[...] the development of tourism is not a short or medium term objective. Strong (political) will and determination are necessary to balance the distribution of income and jobs... and the need for projects of high credibility in order to attract international resources (finance); this is necessary to generate the construction and re-organization of space, of urban or natural landscapes. Territorial re-organization takes decades and tourism with its territorial aspects requires long term investment. But where do we start? Naturally, a development plan should involve measures to combat severe injustice in society. But when we speak of a national plan of development, and of its planning as a process, we have another unresolved difficulty. The problem is not tourism but the social structure of the country. This is why this sector cannot develop. [...] In other words, we do not have a culture of planning in our country (it is not just about government activities) to solve the social question. This idea is a crucial question in the equation of tourism. These crucial factors must be associated because history reveals that the social question is not solved by chance, but by a project of conquest which is installed in the planning of citizenship. (YAZIGI, 1999, p.36-37)

We reiterate that it may even happen that some economic growth encourages the creation of jobs and related gains in placing people in the job market, albeit part-time, temporary work, or in the service sector, under the conditions of precarity and exploitation. But the creation of socio-spatial development, causing society to change, remains an illusion – understood by Santos (2000) as a ‘fable’.

This was confirmed by Santos (2000) when he said that: we live in a confused world, which will also be confusedly perceived. Does this mean there is a paradox waiting for an explanation? ‘On the one hand, endlessly mentioned is the extraordinary progress of science and its techniques, from where came new artificial materials, which make precision and intentionality the authority’. (Ibidem, pp. 17-18) The principles are information and the sustenance of an empire, where there is the base of the production of images and idealization which are subservient to the empire of money,

this having been founded in the economization and monetary systemization of both social and private life. In fact, if we wish to escape the belief that the world presented thus is true-to-life, and when we do not want to admit the permanence of this deceiving perception, we need to consider the existence of at least three worlds rolled into one. The first one would be a world as it is made to be seen: in the fable of globalization; the second one would be a world as such: globalization as perversity; and the third one, a world as it should be: another globalization. This globalized world, seen as a fable, upholds as true a certain number of fantasies whose repetition, nevertheless, turns itself into an apparently solid base for interpretation (Ibidem). Moreover, another part of the problem refers to the social effectiveness in using tourism as a way of reinforcing the aims and intentions of the market, and hiding which groups really benefit. How does one benefit from tourism? What happens is that those who were winning continue to win and those who had always been losing continue to lose or, at least, obtain few positive benefits in a way that postpones a concrete change in their lives (CASTILHO, 2008, 2012) The great illusion of tourism is needed for masking this division.

Having touched upon the perplexing philosophical nature and historical legacies of tourism in problematic regions such as the State of Pernambuco in Northeastern Brazil, in this next section we will try to demonstrate the nature of this by showing some results by empirical research carried out in areas which are directly and indirectly related to actions of touristification. The evidence shows that tourism is not used as an effective instrument of citizen space.

## **2. The Evidence for the Use of Tourism as an Illusion to Mask the Perverse Dimensions of Spatial Reality in Recife: Obstructing the Construction of Citizen Space**

The central question here is: what are the most evident factors which support our affirmation that the use of tourism as a way of touristifying areas is rather more of an illusion than an effective instrument of the process of citizen space construction? We will answer this question based on research findings, particularly in Recife, the capital of the Federal State of Pernambuco/Brazil (Figure 01).



**FIGURE 01 – Federal State of Pernambuco/Brazil – Locations of the most important cities.**

Source: Google Maps, July 10, 2014. Note: Recife, the capital of the State, is located in the central coastal area. From this coastal zone to the interior of the State, from East to West, tourism has been used as an instrument to promote sustainable development through a series of programs.

Besides what was said in the previous section of this article, intending to confront the socio-spatial dilemma in the cities of Northeastern Brasil – in which poverty, territorial inequality and social injustice constitute major factors of urban formation – we believe that the process of production of space by tourism should, above all else, be supportive to the necessities of the people of that place, and not just of tourists. The comment that is often heard is that tourism, as a factor of development, confronts serious socio-spatial problems when its process of space production expands to the detriment of territories occupied by dwellings.

It is not just mere access to goods and services, which promotes the citizen space for people: there is also the feeling of belonging to society. One can effectively participate in decisions, which pertain to an autonomous and democratic society, exercising creativity for a better world. In this we agree with Souza (1999, p.18-19) when he says that socio-spatial processes (?) should be understood as:

[...] a process of overcoming problems and offering the possibility of conquering conditions (cultural, political, technological, temporary space), thus creating the greatest individual and collective happiness [and demanding] simultaneous consideration of various dimensions, establishing social relations (cultural, political, economic), and also natural and social space. It is evident that with this type of approach, alongside its economic growth and technical progress, is totally insufficient within currently defined parameters (even being part of the

problem rather than the solution: think, for example, of growth at the expense of increases in environmental degradation, or think of unemployment and social exclusion, due to technical progress). (Personal translation)

Thus, the citizen space, as a condition to this process, also means the construction of healthy environments. This pervades all human dimensions such as housing, leisure and work, among others. Faced with this perspective it is left to us to show some empirical data, pointing towards the new 'inverse' movement, which we desire. We interviewed 100 people within urban space used for tourism in Recife - those working in hotels, travel agencies, restaurants, tourist information centers and events organisation.

This empirical survey mainly aimed at hearing people at their various workplaces which have been tapped by tourism in order to know how they perceived the relevance of tourism in their lives. According to some data (CASTILHO, 2004):

- 65.1% received (officially) up to two minimum salaries per month (in August 2004 the minimum salary in Brazil was approximately US\$100);
- 70.3% were not satisfied with their work environment, above all because of the high degree of exploitation. As stated by Harvey (1989), the worker is expected to be "eclectic", that is to say, flexible, especially in the acceptance of low salaries. In the present historical context, Fordism and flexible accumulation coexist to become inherent in the capitalist system;
- 71.5% (due to the problems mentioned earlier) were waiting for an opportunity to obtain another job. 'Tourist work' was seen simply as a means to 'move up the ladder' towards better socio-economic positions;
- This situation was marked by a high job turnover. 60.6% of those interviewed had been working in this sector for less than two years and 10% stated that on completion of their university course they would look for more stable opportunities within the local job market. Even those who could not manage to complete their studies were looking for other forms of employment.

Therefore, with regard to the types of jobs, a mechanism to promote access to goods and services necessary to the construction of the citizen space, we would say that the jobs created were motivated by urbanism, existing as tertiary activities. In the context of flexible accumulation, Harvey (1996, p.58) alerts us to the fact that: "The types of jobs created, in many cases, go against progressive change in the distribution of income with an emphasis on small enterprises; and subcontracting could have secondary effects, directly encouraging an 'informal sector' to create low-paid work". (Personal translation) We may add that Harvey also goes on to say that jobs at the top level, with high pay, are restricted to a minority. This reinforces an unequal growth in wealth distribution and income, as poverty in cities rises upward. A new legacy of truly global development is yet to be seen.

Harvey (Ibidem, p.60) continues in his argument to state that even when faced with a blight of low income earnings, these types of investment projects continue to have both political and social appeal. In reality, the sale of a city as a space for activities

depends a lot on imaginary urban attraction. The forefront of the city considers spectacular development as a 'leader in spending' in order to attract other forms of development. What we have seen in the last two decades has been an attempt to construct an imaginary physical and social situation, showing that cities are adequate enough to accept competitive proposals. The production of an urban image also has internally felt political and social consequences, creating a feeling of alienation. Simmel identified this problematic aspect of modern urban life. This is especially so when urban land opens itself out in an ostentatious fashion, in an environment that is theatrical and spectacular. A production orchestrating an urban image can, if successful, create a feeling of social solidarity, civic pride and loyalty, creating a mental refuge in a world where capital creates more and more a sense of belonging. It is true to say that for many people – in our research we have given priority to analysing conditions of people mainly from poor environments – it was important to be successful in obtaining work within tourism-related activities. So we know how difficult and arduous this path was for people of low social status in their search for upward social mobility. We call this socio-spatial mobility due to the fact that the use of territory has an important part in this process. In this way, space is not an epiphenomenon. (Castilho, 2002)

Following the hearing of people involved with the dynamics of tourism in Recife, during interviews with workers, shoppers and local residents, held around tourist haunts in Recife, the majority of respondents gave us answers such as the following:

"...I do not believe in tourism as a development factor, because things are still the same in our town..." (December 2013);

"...Since the 'fever of tourism' started to happen in Recife (from the end of the nineties), nothing has changed..." (January 2014);

"... I know people who have already completed courses for the tourism sector, but they have only succeeded in obtaining short-term paid work" (January 2014).

Such answers have been given recently, right after the realization that tourism, per se, does not represent an access to an effective citizen space. The content shown in the answers differs from the ones given during interviews in the late 1990's when Brazil witnessed the tourism practice as a panacea capable of solving ultimately nationwide problems (Castilho, 2002), including the historic lack of citizenship.

That is why on these days the content of the answers shows the true nature of tourism in the city, which is that such socio-spatial practice "does not change anything"; "everything remains the same"; "at most people get low-paid occupations"; etc. It all ends up alleviating the existing social tensions but it fails completely as an effective instrument to construct a citizen space.

Therefore, maybe because of the way it happened in Brasil (somewhat diffuse across the territory), tourism was an illusion to keep the present logic of a perverse urban



capitalist economy of neoliberal characteristics, that is, highly concentrated in the space and bringing benefits only to the social classes already included in the dynamics of the urban economy.

The idea of tourism as a development factor has also expanded into Pernambuco's countryside. The information used in the latter cases have been extracted from thesis of Master's and Doctoral studies under our supervision and orientation in programs of Post-Graduation of the Departments of Geography and Development and the Environment at the Federal University of Pernambuco. With regard to municipalities in the interior of Pernambuco, "employment" is often presented in a positive light, even when the situation of those employed is less than satisfactory. However, this 'satisfaction' is based principally on two facts: a greater conformity of local populations and less urban density.

Bezerros (see fig. 01), for example, is a municipality situated along the BR-232 – the most important highway, recently modernized in Pernambuco. It is situated in the micro-regional Valley of Ipojuca. At first glance, it may seem that tourism has been an important factor of development in the area. This was because it was analyzed from the point of view of education for tourists, aiming to improve local development. Melo e Silva (2002) concluded her work by saying that a considerable number of people had been inserted into the local job market within the municipality, and that this had proportionately improved the quality of life of the local population, with access to goods and services, all important factors for the citizen space.

In another study, Melo e Silva (2013) not only confirmed her previous conclusions, but also affirmed that tourism, in Bezerros, reinforced local social values. However, she recognised that this improvement in the quality of life did not promote social mobility and through this, effective social change. This was because social participation was limited and concentrated in the hands of a few local leaders: a mere insertion in the job market does not necessarily indicate effective social change. With this last case, it is important to remember the well-trodden path of tourism:

[marking] the passage of political development in the name of social integration for political behavior, for the purpose of mere insertion. What is understood by the politics of integration is motivated by the search for a greater balance in homogeneous society, beginning at the centre. Safe and sound development occurs through general guidelines follow a national norm. There is an attempt to promote the access of public services for all, a reduction in social inequality, a better division of opportunities, the development of a 'safety net', and the consolidation of salary conditions. We will interpret this as the policy of insertion based on two differences, and based on its opposition when compared to the policy of integration. The policies of insertion obey a logic of positive discrimination, defining with accuracy the clientele and the particular zones of social space and development strategies specific to them. However, if certain groups or certain regions are the target of attention and care, it means that those groups and regions suffer from (social, political, material) deficiencies. (Castel, 1999, p.537-538) (Personal translation)

The joining of actions and programmes of touristifying territories has, as a central

objective, the control of the extreme consequences of neoliberalism, securing minimal incomes for the needy, and promoting the maximum performance of the market while reducing the socio-territorial inequalities that have existed for centuries in cities, yet not worried about the production of citizen space. Castel (Ibidem, 537) states that:

They invent many social projects in order to create links between groups and territories in search for the control of society, finding sources of well-used time based on social activities. Their task aims at creating different sociabilities so that people accept their hard, everyday life. (free translation)

Therefore, what is fundamental in the mechanisms of mere insertion of goods and services to promote the citizen space? If we consider just the levels of insertion, what occurs is a reduction, not only in the idea of development, but also in the real conditions of involving people in an economic dimension.

With the objective of analyzing the potential for ecotourism under the perspective of the promotion of Birdwatching in the municipality of Itamaracá (situated in the Metropolitan Area of Recife) as a proposal for sustainable development, Farias (2004) arrived at the following conclusion: a lack of articulated planning amongst other things did not obey the principles of what we call sustainable tourism; the local community did not participate in the organization of their territory; and the business people involved were in fact local elites, guided mostly by economic principals. Therefore, their ideas were based on market parameters.

Studying the situation of 'Agriecotourism' in the municipality of Moreno (also situated within the Metropolitan Area of Recife), Mota (2004) also lost some of his enthusiasm about tourism as an effective factor of development. In the beginning, when he was directly involved in the elaboration of the 'agriecotourism' programme in Moreno, he thought that the proposal could in fact be done. However, when he became more distant from the process, analyzing it, he perceived that the reality, unfortunately, was far distant from his initial thoughts.

According to this author, despite the undeniable potential for tourism that existed in the municipality, 'agriecotourism' did not constitute a factor of sustainable development in that there were no regulations for the use of existing resources, and no public control of these resources. Furthermore, the proponents did not foster a consultative and participatory process involving those citizens whose lives would be impacted on which, for Moreno, would have been fundamental in ensuring its socio-economic sustainability.

Other masters theses were defended in the Post-Graduation Program at the Department of Geography of UFPE: one was about the question of Ecotourism – also in Bezerros – and the other one about Rural Tourism in the Zona da Mata (the forested region of the State of Pernambuco). Their conclusions are similar to those previously mentioned and may be effectively summarised as such: non-participatory tourism is not sustainable nor does it offer any concrete form of citizen space

and, consequently, real development does not occur.

Finally, although tourism has not promoted, per se, citizen space and sustainable development, it is indeed an important socio-spatial practice for the places where it occurs, and this is because it can boost economic activities and strengthen local cultural values. This is important for the formation of citizen spaces.

### **Final Considerations**

After reflecting on the arrival of an universal measure of organization with commitment to social projects, Harvey (2000) reminds us that the most fundamental rules for the conquest of socially integrated and, consequently, for the creation of a citizen space of men and women are:

The right to the production of space [...] It also means the right to reconstruct spatial relations (territorial forms, communicative capacities, and rules) in ways that turn space from an absolute framework of actions into a more malleable aspect related to social life. There is also the right to differ, including that of uneven geographical development. [...] This implies the right to be different, to explore differences and, as a consequence, the right to pursue development on some territorial and collective basis that departs from established norms. Uneven geographical development should also be thought of as a right rather than as a capitalistically imposed necessity that diminishes flexibility in one place in order to enhance it elsewhere. (Ibidem, p.251)

There are rules which are fundamental, or which should be thought of as ideas in the permanent process of freedom, elucidating the illusion, which is created to give value to our creative and innovative capacity. According to Harvey (Ibidem), the main lesson lies in the fact that we are the architects of our own destiny with the courage of our minds and with capacity to take an equally speculative plunge into some unknown, we too will continue to be the objects of historical geography – like worker bees – rather than active subjects who consciously push human possibilities to their limits. Still, according to the same author, what Marx called ‘the real movement’ that will abolish ‘the existing state of things’ is always there for the making and for the taking. That is what gaining the courage of our minds is all about. In order to consolidate the proposal of social change in one area, it is necessary to bring together conditions of citizenship. This construction of citizen space requires the existence of and access to goods and social services (of quality), indispensable in the acquisition of real citizenship with effective participation and satisfaction for the people within this process of territorial development.

Here we mention some of the fundamental factors for the materialization of the citizen space through tourism. Associated with the rest of the socio-spatial practices in the territory, in our vision they are the following: the social organization of local populations, the discussion of certain urban problems, a search for more dynamic action and the undertaking of public administration of territory, all the while taking

heed of the interests of the region's individuals.

Moreover, what is happening in reality is that the interests of the region are undermined to benefit extra-regional interests linked to the imperatives of the "homogenization" of capital. Accordingly we can observe the most pragmatic and immediate effects which refer to the zealous maintenance of an existing reality.

Even though, due to the set of facts set out above, a process of citizen space construction which follows the parameters we pursue has been difficult to consolidate (reduction of poverty, participation in governance, the fight against inequality and the promotion of social justice), it cannot be denied that some battles have indeed been won. However, these conquests have occurred more in the direction of handouts (access to funds) and access to services (labor training programs) rather than these conquests' having a quality directed towards, above all, overcoming the socio-spatial dilemma inherent to the history of Brazilian cities.

In any case, people begin to have access to social programs which, historically, were denied to them; and furthermore, they are reacting against the illusion of social program promises, pleading for a more consistent deal: access to employment, participation in public decisions, etc. For this reason we cannot forget that there exists a possibility of 'social change', something that exists in all of us and constitutes what Santos (1997, p.258) called a 'strength of place' (*força do lugar*), that is to say when in this place there is a daily distribution between various people, firms and institutions as cooperation and conflict form the basis of a normal life. Because each exercises their own actions, their social life is individualized; and next to the creator of communion, the policies of territorialization represent a confrontation between organization and spontaneity. Space is a picture of pragmatic reference for the world – along with it come requests and orders needed for conditioned actions, but also the theatre of human passions, responsible through communicative action, seen as various manifestations of spontaneity and creativity.

With these conditions – objective and subjective at the same time – analyzed in this paper, tourism cannot just constitute a factor of citizen space. It is also an activity present in areas creating or reinforcing small spaces of globalization, 'touristic spaces'; and leaving behind many other spaces of the city. Tourism thus becomes an *enclave* as we have already highlighted in other studies. With regard to this, it is worth finishing this text by citing Cazes (1992, p.159) who defines a 'tourism *enclave*' (different from a 'tourism of integration') as:

[...] the synonym of tourism that is concentrated, disorganized, colonial, speculative, segregative, without respect for whom it should support. It is indifferent and negligent with local structures; whilst integrated tourism is sweet, soft, diffuse, appropriate, suitable, responsible, autocentered, organized, progressive, preoccupied with the customs and the local balance, with equity guaranteeing symbiosis and harmony. (Personal translation)

Moreover, this issue becomes even more serious when it happens in territories constructed according to the specificities inherent to the process of territorial

formation in Brazil, that is, with the economical activities highly concentrated in previously chosen territories by hegemonic interests in order to predominantly benefit the dominant elites and their aggregates.

Across fleeting and delicate mechanisms of local governments and the market interests is the fact that local elites are controlling the only voice in society. It is difficult to evaluate the socio-spatial reality of people; thus continues the silence and the complacency within a hard reality, presented on the surface with tendencies for change.

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