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RETRACTED: The Commodification Dilemma: Tourism Pressure and Heritage Conservation in Barcelona

Marina Mazzamuto and Marco Picone *

Department of Architecture, University of Palermo, 90128 Palermo, Italy; marina.mazzamuto@unipa.it
*   Correspondence: marco.picone@unipa.it; Tel.: +39-091-238-65441

Abstract: In recent years, the proliferation of tourists in the urban environment has generated several issues in the functioning of cities. As urban tourism has historically been linked to cultural and architectural attractions, this increased tourism pressure has involved and often compromised the common heritage uses. Therefore, many cases saw the implementation of measures that, if on the one hand reduced tourist flows, on the other also drastically restricted the access for residents and totally altered the sense of place in the community. This article explores this topic by applying a Critical Discourse Analysis methodology to the dispute that took place in Barcelona regarding the restricted access to Park Güell. The main results of this work concern the instrumentalisation of both the UNESCO label and participatory processes in the case of Barcelona, along with the failure of regulative measures to solve the problems related to tourism pressure. The article advocates the usage of more qualitative-oriented analyses to address the relationships between urban planning, heritage management and tourism management.

Keywords: heritage; overtourism; commodification; Barcelona

1. Introduction

Except for the recent recession in tourism and mobility due to the COVID-19 sanitary emergency (whose uncertain recovery scenario is beyond the scope of this article), tourist presence in cities has dramatically grown over the last two decades [1].

The observation of this phenomenon has generated the proliferation of scientific literature on the malfunctions of the current urban tourism paradigm, marking a real 'critical turn' with the consequent formulation of new terminologies to describe specific side effects related to it, such as the saturation of infrastructure and public spaces (overtourism and overcrowding) [2], the amplification of gentrification processes due to tourism (tourism gentrification) [3], the onset of social movements linked to the intolerance of resident communities towards tourists (tourismphobia) [4] and the profound alteration in the residential market due to the spread of short-term rentals for tourist destinations linked to the circuits of sharing platforms (airification [5], platform urbanism [6]).

In summary, in various forms, the pressure of 'too much tourism', affecting the ordinary functioning of the city, is no longer just the sectoral responsibility of tourism managers but must also concern urban planners, geographers and city makers in general.

The focus of this article concerns the relationships between this extreme condition of urban tourism 'excess' and heritage policies. What role does heritage play in the contemporary tourist city?

It is undeniable that city tourism has been strongly linked to heritage since its inception. At the beginning of its entrepreneurial organisation (an innovation historically attributed to the genius of Thomas Cook), urban tourism introjected the two main cultural matrices of the 19th century: on the one hand, the 'hygienist' matrix led to the development of extra-urban tourism destinations (bathing, thermal, SPA settlements), and on the other, the

'historicist' matrix and the renewed interest in monumental heritage guided the trajectories of urban tourism [7].

In the urban context, therefore, both the new enhancement of monumental emergencies linked to Haussmann-style road demolitions [8] and a new cultural sensitivity related to heritage—highlighted by the formulation of the latest theories on heritage restoration [9]—strongly influenced the connotation of the new social practice of tourism. However, since Cook's time, this cultural relationship with the heritage of the communities of 'temporary users' has been strongly mediated by a heteronymous interpretation linked to the original pedagogical function of travel. Even in Cook's own experience, it was tied to that model of 'rational recreation' with which the new bourgeoisie sought to organise and control the free time of the working masses to make them milder and more productive [10].

From a certain point of view, this mediation becomes more solid in the transition between the Fordist city and the post-Fordist city [11].

Between the second half of the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s, after the oil crisis, the delocalisation of productive functions and the consequent deindustrialisation of cities raised the issue of re-functionalising urban centres. Therefore, culture, leisure and tourism emerged as natural candidates for outsourcing city centres, especially if they were endowed with monumental heritage. The historic-tourist city [12] becomes a mono-functional enclave, where a sanitised version of the heritage becomes an ideal scenography for the consuming landscape. Therefore, the mediation mentioned above between tourists and destinations becomes so pervasive that it profoundly shapes the city's landscape [13]. In the same decades, the general awareness of the transformative power of tourism was enhanced, and the first theories on tourism impact control and the destination life cycle were formulated in the tourism management field [14–16].

In this transformative process, heritage plays a fundamental role. In the 1980s, we also witnessed the incredible growth of interest in heritage and musealisation processes [17–19]. This growth was related to the Thatcherian and Reaganian spirit of the time that, in the context of the touristic reconversion of the industrialised West, stressed the connection between heritage preservationism and the recognition of heritage's economic value. It is no coincidence that museums began to proliferate in the United Kingdom in the 1980s. Robert Hewison noted in 1987 [20] that half of the museums existing at that time were opened after 1970 (the same number of museums had been established in just sixteen years as in all previous centuries).

The strong connection between the (re)construction of a historical identity around heritage and its economic capitalisation (contained in the very term 'heritage', which stems from an economic semantic area) was sealed by Margaret Thatcher's famous National Heritage Act (1983).

In this process of the monetarisation of heritage, the adoption of the World Heritage Convention by UNESCO in 1972 played an indirect but essential role, marking the conceptual frame of the universal value of heritage. This economic universality was also somehow aligned with the progressive deregulation of capital movements that concretised the idea of a transnational economy [21].

The text of the convention of 1972 clearly explains in the first lines the two main objectives of the organisation: on the one hand, the cultural diffusion of heritage and, on the other, its conservation[1]. These two objectives might appear somehow contradictory because the diffusive mission implies increased media exposure and the consequent increase in tourist pressure that might endanger the site's integrity.

Some studies try to investigate the relation between these processes, even if it is difficult to trace a direct quantitative cause–effect relationship, between nominations, increased notoriety and consequent tourist saturation [22].

In general, the positions on the impact of the UNESCO label on cities are very heterogeneous. If some mainly emphasise its positive aspects and the development opportunities [23], others problematise its effects [24], up to extreme positions such as the one by Marco D'Eramo [25]. He considers even the label as a 'death sentence' for

cities due to the processes of touristification and museification, which, in his opinion, are irretrievably triggered.

Over the decades following the ratification of the World Heritage Convention, UNESCO-labelled cities have increased and, at the same time, as previously mentioned, tourist presences in the urban environment have grown considerably. Despite the difficulty of establishing a quantitative cause–effect function, what is evident, as underlined by Schramm [26] (p. 446), is that the label poses a paradox:

> UNESCO's policies appear paradoxical—while they attempt to preserve the multiplicity of local cultural traditions perceived to be under threat by the forces of globalisation, the resulting heritage regime itself seems to act as a homogenising machine, objectifying and classifying distinct cultural forms as heritage and others not.

The paradox also broke through UNESCO itself: awareness of the ambiguity of the effects of the labels on the territories has grown, producing internal studies on the necessity of improving tourism management on labelled destinations [27]. The inclusion of various destinations (such as Machu Picchu or Bali in the 'UNESCO in Danger' list due to the threats of too much tourism) is also very relevant.

From 1972 to the present day, in the subsequent evolutions of the convention, selection and control tools have been refined, such as management plans (which have been mandatory in the applications since 2003) and upgrades in the operational guidelines, such as those of the '4 Cs' theory (2002) (which introduces the term 'capacity', highly valued by control theories on tourist impact) or the subsequent '5 Cs' which also includes the value of the resident community (2007) in the UNESCO heritage conservation strategies[2].

However, as the theory of 'heritage dissonance' [28] reminds us, someone's inheritance is always someone else's dis-inheritance. At a time when tourist presence increases dramatically in cities, the question is: whose urban heritage is it? Is it for permanent citizens or temporary visitors? Since heritage is an asset to be protected, its delicate use, therefore, enters, like many other aspects, into the game of urban competition between these two opposing communities (the settled and the mobile).

This article focuses precisely on this competition regarding heritage. Additionally, the questions it raises not only affect a scale level (a local or global city) or a temporal level (a permanent or transient city?) but, above all, a political level: a public or private city, free or commodified [29]?

Therefore, the purpose of this article is to inquire about the actual 'battleground' of this competition: the spatial planning of heritage. We will focus on analysing how discourses on heritage protection from tourist pressure concretely land into spatial policies and problematise their coherence with the adopted measures. Moreover, given that the monetisation of tourism attractiveness on heritage is a strong economic driver, we have been trying to discern whether the concern on heritage fragility is consistent or just instrumentalised for economic reasons or to build consent.

2. Materials and Methods

As already mentioned in the previous section, this work[3] focuses on the short circuits created by the tourist pressure on the management of the protected heritage and on the consequent spatial policies and disputes with the local communities.

The article begins with a brief comparative analysis of the public space restrictions implemented in Barcelona and in Venice to control tourist flows, discussing the cases and methods of intervention; it then continues with a more in-depth qualitative analysis on the case of Barcelona, carried out according to the methodologies of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) [30–35].

The case study of Barcelona was chosen for an in-depth analysis as it presents an extended and more complex parable; moreover, since public space restriction measures have been in place for the longest time, it is more suited for a retrospective analysis. The texts in question, partly selected from the pool of sources provided by the precious work of

Albert Arias Sans's doctoral thesis [36] on the case of Park Güell and partly traced by the authors of this article, were subjected to a linguistic examination which aims to analyse the following issues: (1) the construction of an official discourse on heritage by administrations and heritage experts and (2) the use of this discourse in the negotiation of the dispute with citizenship and its repercussions on space policies. The texts are both official documents and newspaper articles. These texts have been selected for their relevance, according to the authors' opinion, to describe the controversy in the time comprised between the UNESCO nomination (1984) and today. In the first part of the article, most texts are newspaper articles because we have tried to reconstruct the debate in the public opinion (both local and international); later on, the texts mainly stem from official urban plans and programmes, because in that phase of the controversy it was relevant to inquire how the discourse on heritage had affected concrete planning strategies.

On a methodological level, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA, as defined by Norman Fairclough in his inspirational work) [31] (p. 6), "combines critique of discourse and explanation of how it figures within and contributes to the existing social reality, as a basis for action to change that existing reality in particular respects". CDA has been consistently used in heritage studies, starting from Laurajane Smith's work [37] on the authorised heritage discourse, which constitutes the methodological foundation of our work.

Smith [37] highlights that "CDA is, in sum, concerned with developing accounts of the inter-relation of discourse with power and domination, social hierarchies, gender relations, the work of ideologies, negotiations between different social identities and the acts of production and resistance within political spheres" (p. 16). Her approach, which applies CDA methodologies in the analysis of the discourses constructed by the 'authorised voices', has been a fundamental guide for navigating through a quantitative analysis of the often-hidden links between heritage recognition labels and tourism reconversion processes; these links, as we mentioned in the previous paragraph, are often difficult to demonstrate through a cause–effect function in quantitative analysis.

There are, however, some caveats regarding the usage of CDA that one should be aware of. Dittmer [33] warns his readers about the risks of light-heartedly using CDA: "A methodology that is rooted in a belief in the open-endedness of social processes, like this one, does not provide a satisfying 'Truth' at the end of the research, but rather a situated reading of life's phenomena. However, the same philosophical elements that make this research difficult also make conducting research like this important" (pp. 284–285).

3. Results

The cases of Venice and Barcelona are particularly fertile for comparative analysis, as similarities and differences characterise them.

Their UNESCO nomination is very close in time—1984 for Barcelona and 1987 for Venice—and they are part of that first generation of labels that occurred during the heritage cultural wave of the 1980s when the nomination processes were not bound to the presentation of a management plan.

Regarding the differences, the morphology of the UNESCO-protected heritage zone within the two cities is almost the opposite, as is apparent also by the official names of the sites: if the site 'Venice and its lagoon' recognises a compact heritage area which also includes the environmental system of the lagoon, 'the works of Gaudí' of Barcelona, even if collected under a single name, constitutes a highly discontinuous constellation of sites.

If this fragmentation even of the proprietary regime (only two of Gaudí's protected works—Park Güell and Palau Güell—are owned by the municipality while the others are private) has complicated the management coordination between the sites—the various areas have had totally disconnected planning processes and some, paradoxically including the most visited Sagrada Familia, still do not have a management plan—also the compactness of the Venetian system has generated some issues.

In fact, in the case of Venice, the process of public space enclosure to cope with the tourist pressure (in other words, the insertion of pay turnstiles to manage access to

a previously public space) was more radical as it extended to the entire city–museum system protected by UNESCO. Meanwhile, the controversy in Barcelona regarded 'only' a public park.

Obviously, contextualisation is required, as Barcelona and Venice are morphologically very different (Venice—being an island—is already a closed system) and as the phenomenon of urban tourism in Venice is an older process, while that of Barcelona is relatively recent.

Another difference is that while the case of Park Güell concerns a park located in a relatively decentralised area of the city (Figure 1), the turnstiles in Venice were applied in the very centre. In the first phase, in 2018 [38], this enclosure regarded only a series of bridges, streets and squares and the turnstiles were activated only in case of high concentrations of tourists. After an interruption during the pandemic years, a very recent resolution by the administration (dated 12 May 2022) has announced that the 'turnstiles measure' will be adopted again but this time will be extended to the entire area of the historic city, whose entry, from February 2023 and onwards, will only be possible, except for registered residents, with a fee and under reservation [39]. As was to be expected, this radical measure is currently generating an intense controversy within public opinion and citizenship [40].

Figure 1. Localisation of Park Güell in Barcelona. Source: map created by the authors.

As the Venetian controversy is still very recent and ongoing, in this article we will focus on the Barcelona case, and we will study in detail its long-time story to adopt those approaches and lessons which will enable us to analyse the Venetian case in future works.

We have chosen Barcelona as the main case study for several reasons highlighted in the existing literature on the topic. According to López Palomeque [41], the adoption of policies that have put the singularity of Barcelona's architectural heritage, especially the portion whose paternity is of Gaudí, has strongly shaped its tourist attractiveness in the transition from a mainly industrial city to a primarily tourist city.

This process, which involved a radical shift for the Olympic Games of 1992 in terms of international media imagery and a real physical transformation, turned Barcelona into an archetypal example of tourist-centred tertiarisation of a post-Fordist city in a Southern-European context.

Other studies, such as the one by Duro and Rodríguez [42], analyse the quantitative data on the growth of tourism in Barcelona to demonstrate how, in the context of the tourist growth function, the attractions linked to the heritage of Gaudí have suffered a

strong surge compared to other types of attractions and have therefore strongly shaped the characteristics of Barcelona as a tourist destination.

Another element of interest is the nature of the social reaction towards tourism pressure in Barcelona. The very term 'tourismphobia' that we have previously mentioned was formulated by the Spanish anthropologist Manuel Delgado [43] to describe the social discontent toward tourism in the context of Barcelona, and in general the tourism pressure has fuelled a massive debate in the local press, as highlighted by Milano [44]. The strength of associations' activism in Barcelona, which has been the protagonist of the phenomenology of these social reactions, displays the above-mentioned competition on heritage and translates it into the level of public controversy as described by Arias Sans [36] in general throughout the city and in particular in the emblematic case of Park Güell that we will analyse in the next section.

The Case of Park Güell

Park Güell (Figure 2) has fluctuated between public and private use since its inception. It was created as a private urbanisation initiative by the wealthy Catalan entrepreneur Eusebi Güell who, inspired by the 'Howardian' model of the garden city, commissioned Antoni Gaudí in 1889 to design a subdivision with housing and green areas of relevance accompanied by a series of spaces and shared services. The project proved to be an economical failure, and very few houses were built, including that of Gaudí himself. When Güell died, the park was put up for sale, purchased by the municipality of Barcelona and inaugurated as a public park in 1926. Very few academic texts describe the daily life of Park Güell once it became a public park. Still, it was known as a fundamental recreational space for the northern parts of the Gràcia district, where cultural events, religious ceremonies, folkloric events and assemblies were regularly held [36].
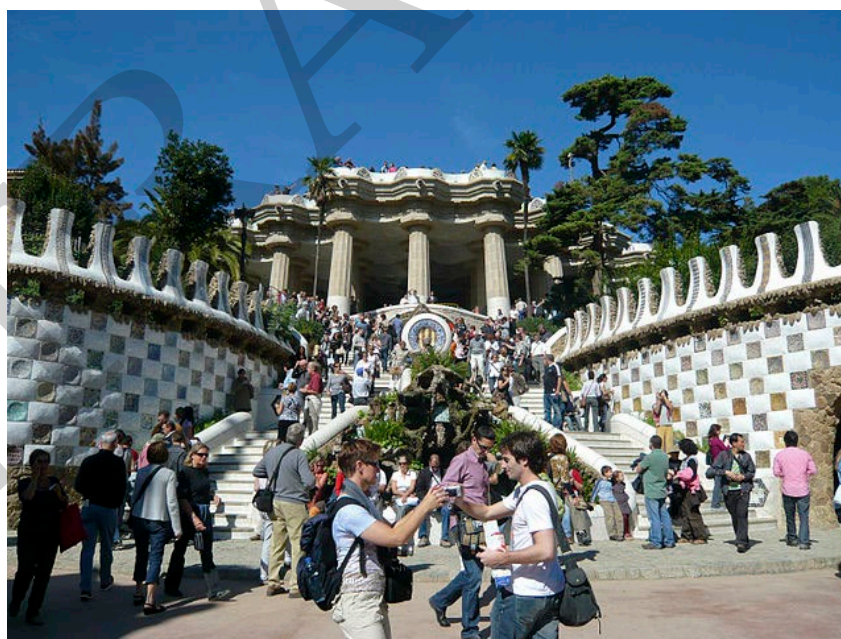

Figure 2. The entrance of Park Güell in Barcelona [45].

Park Güell's official documentation jumps from 1926, the year it opened to the public, to its inclusion in 1984 as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The first analysed text is the 'advisory body evaluation' by ICOMOS for UNESCO.

On the one hand, the text underlines the uniqueness of the park (and Gaudian production) as an expression of a brilliant eclecticism that contains a skillfully mixed potpourri of other treasures of the world heritage (both recalling some antecedents and pre-empting

following ones). On the other hand, after consolidating the arguments on uniqueness, the discussion on the fragility of the work begins to be established [46] (pp. 2–3):

> ICOMOS would, however, call attention to the necessity of assuring the preservation of the whole of this exceptional work by Gaudí, which is now threatened because of the fragility of some of its materials (in particular the ceramic facings).

The use of powerful words such as 'necessity' and 'assuring' and the use of the somewhat terrorist image of the site 'threatened' by its own materiality are to be noted; these provide an increasingly dramatised representation, once again underlining the 'exceptionality' of the work in danger.

UNESCO's declaration of a World Heritage Site was accompanied by a commitment to provide the park with public investment, embodied in an action plan between 1985 and 1995 with an estimated budget of over six million euros. Here, the 'authorised discourse' on the work's fragility begins to undermine its public functions: at the beginning of the restoration projects, a preliminary report emerged, proposing the transfer of the *Baldiri i Reixac* school, which occupied the former residence of Eusebi Güell in Can Muntaner de Dalt. The second analysed text is a 1985 article in the *El Periodico* newspaper [47] (p. 10):

> En el plan especial de protección del parque Güell deberá resolver no únicamente el deterioro concreto de la obra de Gaudí, sino también problemas en sus accesos y el destino de la escuela Baldiri Reixac. Este centro escolar se encuentra en pésimas condiciones y con déficit de espacio para un centro de EGB. Una de las posibles soluciones es la construcción de un nuevo colegio fuera del recinto del parque Güell.

Even this text uses assertive modal verbs such as 'must' (*deberá*), but it does not explain how or why the presence of the educational centre constitutes a threat to the park. The only argument concerns a spatial deficit for the school itself. As proof of this, within the community mobilisations that followed the dissemination of the proposal in 1986, a technical report was published by a group of architects stating that the presence of the school did not involve any risk for the park [36]. Eventually, due to massive community mobilisation, the municipality gave up the initiative.

However, the authoritative (or authorised?) voices of the 'discourse on heritage' remained in disagreement with this intended use. In this regard, the third analysed text is an article from the *La Vanguardia* newspaper, written a few years later by Juan Bassegoda i Nonell (1990). Back then, Bassegoda was considered one of the most prestigious Gaudí scholars, was president of the *Reial Càtedra Gaudí* and of the *Amics de Gaudí* Association, was one of the founding members of ICOMOS itself (which he presided over in the 1980s) and was also an advisor for the restoration project of Park Güell between 1987 and 1995.

He begins by complaining about the laxity of the institutions and uses the unquestionable argument of visitors' pressure to legitimise a specific type of decorum the park needed, in his opinion [48] (p. 23):

> Por parte de la Generalitat nada se ha hecho en ningún sentido, siendo normal que también contribuyera a la restauración de un monumento archivisitado y conocido en todo el mundo. Mientras tanto, la escuela municipal Baldiri Reixac continúa en la antigua casa que fuera de don Eusebio Güell cuando lo lógico es que fuera desplazada a otro lugar para proceder al arreglo del edificio y a liberar al parque de la inevitable degradación que supone la existencia de un edificio público tan concurrido. Si la escuela es trasladada, ha de ser con la condición de que se inicie inmediatamente el arreglo y acondicionamiento del edificio para museo o centro cultural.

Even in this text, the necessity of moving the school function (in which he even defined 'logic', despite the aforementioned technical opinion published by his fellow architects) is not argued solidly. The only argument Bassegoda brings is the supposed overcrowding generated by the school that would have led to the 'inevitable degradation' (once again a strongly deterministic expression), thus proposing the museum as a natural and far more

adequate alternative. However, a few sentences later, Bassegoda predicts that, as a cultural attraction (and certainly not as a school centre), in 1992 the park would be preparing to receive more visitors than the same Olympic stadium [49] (p. 23):

> Seguramente ninguno de los cuatrocientos monumentos restantes del Patrimonio Mundial de la UNESCO merece este olímpico desprecio institucional. El oro corre a raudales en Barcelona en la feliz ocasión de los Juegos Olímpicos del 1992, pero el parque Güell sigue abandonado y escarnecido. (. . .) el Parque Güell recibirá en 1992 mucho más visitantes que el estadio olímpico (. . .). Pensar que el parque Güell es un simple jardín público urbano, un lugar para juegos incontrolados de la chiquillería depredadora, refugio de drogadictos, casi una zona suburbial, es un error tan grave que casi no cabe en cabeza humana (. . .). Se impone un rápido cambio de actitud de las instituciones hacia el parque Güell, si no quieren que Barcelona sea, además que la sede olímpica del 1992, la ciudad insensible u poco civilizada, que sume en el abandono una de sus más altas y singulares joyas artísticas.

To conclude the discourse analysis of this article, one should notice that the adjective 'public' is subtly given a negative value; the part in which 'public' is associated with the adjective 'simple', in particular, reveals a certain disdain from the author towards this service to the city (*simple jardín público urbano*, 'simple urban public garden'); he also describes, with polarised and extremely derogatory terms, the users of the park as delegitimising the current function: children's games become 'uncontrolled games of predatory infantilism' and the rehabilitation centre (planned by the municipality in 1985) a 'refuge for drug addicts'.

A few years later, another article in *La Vanguardia* reports a new appeal, again by Bassegoda, who, in response to a small fire (probably arson but unrelated to any public event), requires the suspension of public acts in the park [49] (p. 17).

As Bassegoda himself prophesied, the radical urban transformations and media exposure due to the 1992 Olympic Games consecrated Barcelona as the Olympus of the most popular European tourist destinations, and tourist flows grew massively after that year. Furthermore, in 2002, the international spotlights of this increased tourist–media notoriety were redirected to Gaudí's heritage. That year, in commemoration of the 150th anniversary of his birth, saw the celebrations of the *Año Internacional Gaudí*. The whole city was filled with exhibitions and cultural events dedicated to Gaudí. The use of the word 'international' in the title is decisive for understanding this initiative, which was declaredly aimed at internationalising the fame of the Catalan architect: programs and publications were translated into many languages and had a strong media echo in the foreign press all around the world. In this regard, we will analyse an article from the digital version of *Domus*, a renowned Italian architecture magazine (we deliberately chose a non-Spanish article to examine the construction of the discourse on heritage outside the Spanish borders). This article [50], entitled *Gaudí record: in 6 milioni a Barcelona nel 2002*, said:

> Volete rilanciare il turismo, attirando visitatori (e soldi) in una città? Puntate sull'archi-tettura. È il messaggio, esplicito, che si coglie leggendo sulle pagine del *País* i resoconti dell'anno gaudiano da poco concluso e promosso per il 150 mo anniversario della nascita dell'architetto catalano Antoni Gaudí. "Per Barcellona è stato uno degli avvenimenti di maggior successo, dopo i giochi olimpici del 1992", ha dichiarato con non poca soddisfazione il ministro della cultura Ferran Mascarell. E, dati alla mano, non si può dargli torto: in un anno sono stati 6 milioni i turisti che hanno affollato gli oltre 300 eventi del fitto cartellone o visitato gli edifici del maestro catalano. Un conteggio che contempla i soli appuntamenti a pagamento. Senza considerare che le celebrazioni hanno portato con sé una serie di importanti interventi di restauro e recupero dei monumenti e l'apertura al pubblico di alcuni edifici, come la Casa Batlló, che rimarrà visitabile anche per tutto il 2003. (. . .) Monetizzando, si parla di introiti per oltre 47 milioni di euro, 14 dei quali generati grazie al solo "anno di Gaudí". Obiettivo raggiunto.

"Dimostrato il buon risultato degli anni tematici, continueremo anche in futuro", ha commentato Mascarell, "Barcellona ha fatto un salto di qualità e si è imposta all'attenzione internazionale come città di architettura e cultura".

A series of issues emerge from the use of language in this article: the internationalisation of Barcelona also relies on the exportability to other countries in its model of the tourism promotion of heritage. There is a robust positive emphasis on the significant number of visitors achieved (which is not problematised in any way) and the continuity with the growth trend due to the Olympic Games. Another fundamental focus is on heritage monetisation, and reference is made to the fact that many of the events were free of charge, without clarifying whether this money had flowed into heritage conservation funds. Indeed, within the initiatives of the international year, Gaudí's works were also literally monetised thanks to the *Fábrica Nacional de Moneda y Timbre—Real casa de la Moneda*, which issued a series of coins depicting Gaudí's works, including Park Güell itself.

In the following years, however, tourism began to be problematised in the public debate due to the first symptoms of fatigue in a tourism policy based solely on promotion and growth. In fact, 2008 saw the beginning of the drafting of the first strategic tourism plan for Barcelona (PET15), which would include strong linguistic metaphors on the effect of tourism on the city, such as that of Barcelona's risk of "dying of fame" [51].

A year earlier, on 6 February 2007, when public interest was probably already high on this issue, an unpleasant incident took place: the famous Gaudí salamander (Figure 3), flagship of Parc Güell—but also a symbol of the Gaudí's Year posters and programmes, as well as a future cinematic icon consecrated by the film *Vichy, Christina, Barcelona* that Woody Allen was shooting in those same months in 2007—was attacked with an iron bar.

Figure 3. One of the famous salamanders by Gaudí [52].

Here, therefore, follows the analysis of an article from *La Vanguardia Vivir Barcelona* entitled *You could see it coming: Park Güell was in danger*. In the article, the journalist, after a lengthy introduction citing some cases of parks whose museums and access restrictions had been progressively accepted by citizens (such as the *Laberinto* park and *Tibidabo*), comments on the accident [53] (p. 7):

Todo este preámbulo es para razonar mejor la salvajada cometida en el Park Güell. Esta obra de Gaudí debería haber sido, desde hace mucho tiempo, considerada como un museo y obrar en consecuencia. Las alertas dadas por vecinos y usuarios sobre la violencia que los gamberros han ejercido allí no han sido atendidas, pese a que por desgracia se habían detectado algunas agresiones. (. . .) Y lo irremediable fatalmente ha sobrevenido. Espero que este desmán obligue a actuar pronto y en serio. El Park Güell es único y no puede estar al albur de los sinvergüenzas.

> Se impone una protección inmediata, máxime ahora que sufre la multiplicación de visitantes.

In this text, it is interesting to underline the use of the term 'museum', which will return to the language of subsequent management plans for the park. Another critical element is that the future overexposure due to the increase in tourists is highlighted when there is no evidence that the vandals were tourists.

In August 2007, six months later, Imma Mayol, Councillor for the Environment and the highest political figure in charge of Park Güell at that time, made public the will to regulate the access of visitors to the park through a plan of use to overcome the deterioration of the park [54].

In the meantime, in 2008, the community and neighbourhood initiatives traditionally held in the park were moved to other places in the city. The organising associations of the *Sardana* gathering (a typical Catalan dance), which took place in the park since 1956 during the *Fiesta Major de Gràcia*, as well as those of other events which took place over there (the dance performances of the *Grec Festival* or the *Major della Salut* festival) saw their permits formally denied by the municipality, apparently due to structural overload problems in some areas of the park [36].

Finally, on 25 September 2009, the *Salut de Gràcia* district was convened to present the first version of the action plan for Park Güell. To do this, the municipality created a new specific space for participation, called *Comissió del Park Güell*. Below we analyse the document presented for that occasion and entitled *The Park Güell. A space of quality and coexistence. An ongoing project. Preliminary presentation of the Global Action Plan for Park Güell. June 2009*[4].

Even the title of the plan and the first introductory pages construct several lexical dualisms: between the park as a world heritage and the park as a space for the future city, between the two communities of users (the visitors and inhabitants of the neighbourhood) and between the two goals at stake: guaranteeing the quality of assets on the one hand and the coexistence of functions and users on the other. In the plan's structure, however, there is a discrepancy between the declarations of intent and the proposals.

On the one hand, the proposed actions to facilitate the tourists appear clear and solid: the regulation of access to the entire monumental area (the 17 hectares listed by UNESCO) through the payment of an entrance ticket; the pedestrianisation of the street overlooked by the main entrance (which involved the suppression of numerous parking spaces for residents in an area where the geomorphology makes underground parking difficult) and the construction of two new service structures—a park interpretation centre and another visitor reception centre—which would have involved the demolition of protected houses adjacent to the perimeter of the park; the cataloguing and maintenance of heritage and natural assets; and the improvement of lighting, paths and signage.

On the other hand, the proposals aimed at the neighbourhood and 'coexistence' appear very evanescent. Out of forty-five pages, only two refer to the neighbourhood. They only plan to set up programmes with schools and associations and collect experiential material from residents to include in the visitor centre exhibits. No solution is provided for guaranteeing the use of the park for the residents of the neighbourhood (leaving unresolved the crucial question of the impact on the residents of the paid entrance). The other lack in the plan was transparency in processing the data on tourist pressure (simply referenced with photographs of the crowded park).

The role of heritage memory and conservation institutions appear to be very instrumental in justifying choices that are actually unrelated to it: like the fragment of Eusebi Güell's text of the request for a building permit, which discussed the need for fencing inhabited parks (but concerning the original function of a semi-private garden city), or of the photo of the original entrance of the park at the beginning of the 20th century to justify the pedestrianisation of Carrer Olot, or the reference to the UNESCO directives to explain the paid ticket while no such problems on tourism pressure were raised in the periodical UNESCO reports [55].

It is not surprising that the plan has been heavily criticised by the neighbourhood residents, as can be observed from the strong words of a local newspaper, *L'Independent de Gràcia*, in 2009 [56] (p. 6):

> Abans de fer propostes en la taula d'un despatx, com sempre, l'Ajuntament hauria de pensar una mica més en els nadius d'aquesta Barcelona cada cop més abocada a ser un Descamisats Thematic Park.

Neighbourhood voices complained about the fact that the closure of the perimeter had just increased the pressure outside the park, leaving many problems unsolved; merchants claimed they were unable to cope with the losses of declining visitors and trade union voices warned that this regulation represented a further step towards the privatisation of public services. In this context, in December 2009, the Coordinadora de Entidades del Park Güell was established, an assembly of the leading associations and NGOs of the neighbourhoods bordering the park that acted as the major pressure group and collected more than 20,000 signatures between 2009 and 2011. In December 2009, the entire opposition rejected the plan in two plenary sessions: that of the District of Gràcia and that of Urban Planning. Finally, in April 2010, Imma Mayol made public her renunciation of setting limits on the park [36].

The controversy was temporarily pacified in the district, but portions of public opinion remained in strong disagreement. In particular, 'authorised' voices arose in defence of the rejected proposal, such as the case of the renowned association Foments de les Arts i el Disseny (FAD), which expressed a strong opinion on the subject [57] in a publication called *Gaudí on red alert!*:

> El Parc Güell rep una pressió de públic molt important atès el seu valor arquitectònic. Es tracta d'una de les obres emblemàtiques de Gaudí per la idea de ciutat que conté. La seva gestió ha de contemplar alhora la doble vessant de parc i zona verda d'ús veïnal i la consideració d'espai patrimonial protegit. Demanem que es consideri la possibilitat de posar mesures que ordenin les aglomeracions estacionals actuals, ponderant i preservant l'ús restrictiu. Proposem que una de les mesures estableixi el cobrament d'una entrada al recinte definit pel perímetre restringit acordat per la UNESCO.

After the elections of 24 May 2011, a new party came to the municipal government and soon proposed the implementation of a new action plan and a participatory process to discuss it. During the second participatory meeting of this process, a new plan entitled *Park Güell, un museo abierto* (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2013) [58] was presented, explaining the changes to the previous plan. An ambiguous discourse transpires from the title: on the one hand, the intention of museification is openly admitted; on the other, the adjective 'open' is used, insinuating doubts as to whether or not the intention of the park's closure is abandoned. In the declaration of the objectives, the previously mentioned themes return: the preservation of heritage as a supreme good and then the usual dualism between the quality of life of residents and the quality of the visit of visitors.

However, there is a substantial change: if in the previous documents the UNESCO name was heavily used (together with its perimeter of the monumental area of 17 ha), in this document the UNESCO name is not mentioned even once and the regulated site is totally redesigned: it is reduced to 7.9% of the park's surface, without legitimacy regarding the patrimonial reason, but designates an authorised voice as the guarantor of historical and patrimonial matters, the new partner *Museo de Historia de Barcelona* (MUHBA). Though no longer in the name of UNESCO, the introduction of the paid ticket is still confirmed with a price between seven and eight euros and a maximum number of 800 visitors per hour.

On the one hand, a unipersonal card was provided free of charge with unlimited access to members of the five neighbouring districts and the educational community of the seven schools close to the park. On the other hand, it was proposed to establish the *Gaudir + BCN* registration with which the people of Barcelona—and everybody else—could

reserve one of the one hundred seats assigned every day a week after having formalised the registration [36].

In this way, it was also possible to save the legal obstacle of the European ruling—which did not allow one to discriminate the gratuitousness of public monuments for reasons of residence or nationality that had discouraged the closure measures in the previous phase—by being able to consolidate the discrimination between tourists who should pay for access and to the Barcelonans who could enter for free.

Such compromise solutions, which softened the side effects of the previous proposal together with privatisation tactics [36] by compensating for individual private issues, led to the dismemberment of the resistance voice of the *Coordinadora de Entidades of Park Güell*. In the summer of 2012, anyway, a new dissident voice stood up against the privatisation of the park, formed by a constellation of actors who came from the basic movements of the neighbourhoods, from the 15 M assembly and from those members who remained loyal to the cause of the *Coordinadora de Entidades: the Plataforma Defensem el Park Güell*. Although the latter managed to obtain the support of over 70,000 signatures by involving key players such as other neighbourhood associations or parties and making its case known internationally, it was not enough. On 25 October 2013, the central area of Park Güell in Barcelona, one of the most important tourist attractions in the city, became an 'open-air museum', but behind closed doors [36].

However, the debate remains latent. After the 2015 change of administration, a further participatory planning process opened in 2017, generating the most current plan concerning the park entitled *Strategic Proposal for Park Güell 2017–2022* [59], the last text analysed in this article. Again, as in the previous plans, the language of the title already says a lot about the content of this plan. For the first time, the header contains the term 'strategic' and an extended timeframe (2017–2022). The proposal's focus concerns the shift of the planning axis from the regulatory approach, which had constituted the object of the dispute up to then, to the strategic one. First of all, unlike the previous ones, this plan is, in general, much more extensive and clarifies both the conceptual and the analytical basis very well. It claims an idea of uniqueness not only at a universal level (as in the UNESCO candidacy criteria) but also concerning the urban context: Park Güell, being the second largest park and the first in terms of environmental performance value, represents a unicum within a strongly built city like Barcelona. A fundamental element of the plan is, therefore, a systemic vision. The preliminary analysis investigates the park's role not only in terms of concise data on tourist presence but as a portion of the large metropolitan environmental systems, the urban commercial patterns (more or less touristified) and the transport network. The analysis tries to recompose the connections with the historical memory of the park by reconstructing, in a timeline, all the initiatives and significant urban events which it hosted. Finally, a hyper-fragmented park is recomposed by successive perimeters that reflect its bumpy controversy: the external perimeter, the UNESCO monumental perimeter and the regulated perimeter. The most exciting feedback data provided by the plan analysis concern precisely the diversified destination of these perimeters in the years following the park regulation in 2013. It appears that congestion has only moved from the monumental area for payment to the non-public one still belonging to the UNESCO protected zone.

Starting from these data, the fundamental concept of the proposal is formulated: the turnover produced by the new paid entry income spent only in the restricted access area must instead be reinvested into the rest of the park, trying to rebalance the attractiveness of the park and the pressures of tourism to make it function again as a single organism. In this rebalance, the residential gentrification issue related to the park area's touristification is also addressed.

The strategy also includes proposals for more sophisticated real-time monitoring related to transport that replaces the need to expand the regulated fence and tactile recognition technology to avoid physical ticket constraints and long lines for residents and *Gaudir + BCN* holders. Another interesting point of the proposal is the de-marketing of the

park linked to tourist transport companies and, on the contrary, a revision of the virtual image that is less directed to tourist commercialisation and more directed to residents.

From a linguistic point of view, the plan also openly rethinks the much-debated definition of the term 'museum' during the controversy: it claims the park, being one of the few non-private Gaudí works, not as a commodified museum but as a 'public agora museum'.

In summary, the general idea proposes reversed functions: introducing more local social initiatives (directed to the neighbourhood) in the paid 'touristy' area and new diversified cultural activities (from open-air cinema to biodiversity paths to an open playroom) in the free non-UNESCO area that finds a new kind of attractiveness both for visitors and locals.

Between the slowdown due to the paralysis of COVID-19 and the imminent change of municipal administration, unfortunately, there remains a long way to implement this final strategic plan which remains an interesting, albeit provisional, epilogue of a profoundly complex political debate.

4. Discussion

From the previous analysis, we can underline a series of aspects. As highlighted by the analysis of the *Strategic Proposal for Park Güell 2017–2022* [59] on the output of the use of the park after the entrance restriction, the overcrowding of visitors is still pressuring the park within the UNESCO perimeter, concentrating in the area with no fee access.

We can therefore observe that while the UNESCO argument [49,58] was central in the construction of the discourse on the necessity of the park preservation, in the actually adopted measures, the adherence to its recommendations, such as the central one of the protected perimeter, somehow faded.

Secondly, from this case we can highlight that, in the face of their high price for the local community, regulative measures on their own are not guaranteed to solve problems related to tourism pressure. Suppose their application is vital (which, in our opinion, should be the last option): in that case, it is essential to frame them into a systemic approach that very carefully balances compensation measures for the community and a holistic urban strategy.

Regarding the compensations and strategies to soften regulations for local communities, it is fundamental to work on a substantial rather than a formal level. For example, in this case, while in theory the 100 reserved seat list was an excellent solution to get around the European law and maintain the locals' privileges, in practice it was too complex to implement in the daily use of the park by residents (as shown, again, by the analysis of the *Strategic Proposal for Park Güell 2017–2022* [59]). Therefore, this strategy was efficient only in building consent and smoothing opposition.

Another important aspect of this controversy is the role of participatory processes. Even if all the three analysed plans employ a participatory approach, in our opinion participation plays a key role only in the third plan (the *Strategic Proposal for Park Güell 2017–2022*), whereas in the two previous plans it appears more as a tool to instrumentally legitimate pre-established decisions. In our opinion, this is a very delicate topic as, when it comes to the participatory processes of spatial planning on the urban space that is shared between tourists and locals, a very insidious problem of representation surges: tourists are temporary, ever-changing users that have no political voice in city making; therefore, their interests and uses of the space can be easily instrumentalised to achieve other goals in the negotiation on spatial planning and to possibly counter other claims prospected in the participatory process.

One of the limitations of this work is that we have only analysed the 'loud voices' in the discourses of the controversy: the experts on heritage and the municipality on the one side and, on the other side, the associations' positions reported in the newspapers. A possible interesting extension of this work would be interviewing other actors not actively

involved in the political debate and unheard parts of the community, like informal sellers or even tourists.

5. Conclusions

The need for urgent coordination between urban planning, heritage management and tourism management sectors appears evident from our analysis of this controversy. Another aspect that emerges is the complexity of heritage value and meaning that once again, recalling Smith's approach [37], belongs very relevantly to the intangible sphere. Even though the concept of intangible heritage has long been implemented into the UNESCO narrative, it lacks those operational tools that are still very focused on the conservation of materiality, despite the immaterial and collective value. This value can be highlighted by qualitative approaches, such as Critical Discourse Analysis, that need to be included more in the future research agenda and urban planning processes. The latter are currently dominated by an aseptic quantitative approach, especially when it comes to (as shown in the word itself) the matter of 'overtourism'.

Notes

1. The text literally says that "the Constitution of the Organization provides that it will maintain, increase, and diffuse knowledge by assuring the conservation and protection of the world's heritage, and recommending to the nations concerned the necessary international conventions".
2. We are referring here to the text of two versions of "The Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention", in 2002 and in 2007.
3. This article stems from a doctoral research thesis in progress that investigates the phenomenology of tourism pressure in Southern Europe. The thesis is supervised by Maurizio Carta (tutor) and Marco Picone (co-tutor), both from the University of Palermo.
4. This document is included in Albert Arias Sans's thesis [36] as Annex 2.2.

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