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De la crisis del cacao al turismo experimental del chocolate: el comienzo del movimiento de reposicionamiento de marca del destino turístico Ilhéus-BA.

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Keywords:

Experiential Tourism;
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Destination Brand;
Bahia.

Abstract

The article aims to understand the movement of the (re)positioning of Ilhéus as a brand, from a traditional destination of Sun & Sea tourism to a destination of cacao/chocolate experiential tourism. The theoretical framework used to support data analysis is that of Destination Branding and Experiential Tourism. Qualitative research with data collection was carried out through interviews with four local personalities: the Deputy Mayor of the city, a businessman and President of the Costa do Cacau Convention and Visitors Bureau, the owner of the tourism agency responsible for commercializing the Costa do Cacau area, and the owner of a cacao farm that receives tourists. The data were interpreted based on Thematic Analysis, which made it possible to observe a movement of repositioning Ilhéus as a brand – from a destination already based on Sun & Sea tourism to a destination more focused on its cacao and chocolate culture. Based on the interviews, a historical survey of the tourism activities in the region was also discussed. Finally, it was observed that: a) the interviewees agree that chocolate and cacao are relevant to the identity of the destination; b) there is a unanimous perception that Ilhéus is a major mass tourism destination, in which visitors have weak knowledge about the region's culture and history; c) there is a consumer movement that looks for experiences involving cacao and chocolate in the region; d) there is also a movement to create cacao/chocolate tourism products and experiential tourism in the region.

Palavras-chave:

Turismo de Experiência;
Turismo de Cacao e Chocolate;
Marca de Destinos Turísticos;
Bahia.

Resumo

O artigo tem por objetivo compreender o movimento de (re)posicionamento da marca de Ilhéus, de destino tradicional de sol e mar para um destino de turismo experiencial chocolateiro. Como base teórica para dar suporte a interpretação dos dados adotou-se os construtos marca de destinos turísticos e turismo experiencial. Para tanto, foi desenvolvida uma pesquisa qualitativa com coleta de dados realizada por meio de entrevistas com quatro gestores locais: o vice-prefeito da cidade, um empresário e presidente do Costa do Cacao Convention and Visitors Bureau, a proprietária da agência de turismo responsável pela comercialização da Costa do Cacao e, por fim, o proprietário de uma fazenda de cacao que recebe turistas. Os dados foram interpretados a partir de uma Análise Temática, que possibilitou observar que o movimento de reposicionamento da marca Ilhéus tal como descrito no problema de pesquisa existe, mas ainda em fase inicial e tímida de mudança. Fez-se, ainda, a partir das entrevistas, um levantamento histórico do turismo na região. Observou-se, por fim, que: a) há concordância entre os entrevistados sobre a relevância do chocolate e do cacao para a identidade do destino; b) há percepção unânime de que Ilhéus possui muita atividade de turismo de massa, em que os visitantes tem pouco conhecimento sobre a cultura e história da região; c) há um movimento de consumidores que visam experiências mais diferenciadas, de busca pelo cacao e pelo chocolate da região; d) há, também, um movimento de criação de oferta de produtos turísticos voltados ao cacao e ao chocolate e ao turismo experiencial na região.

Palabras clave:

Experiencia de turismo;
Turismo de Cacao y Chocolate;
Marca de destinos turísticos;
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Resumen

El artículo tiene como objetivo comprender el movimiento de (re)posicionamiento de la marca Ilhéus, desde un destino tradicional de sol y mar a un destino para el turismo de experiencia de chocolate. Como base teórica para apoyar la interpretación de los datos, se adoptaron las construcciones de destinos turísticos y turismo experiencial. Con este fin, se llevó a cabo una investigación cualitativa con recolección de datos a través de entrevistas con cuatro gerentes locales: el vicealcalde de la ciudad, un empresario y presidente de Convention and Visitors Bureau de Costa do Cacao, la propietaria de la agencia de turismo responsable de comercialización de Costa do Cacao y, finalmente, el dueño de una granja de cacao que recibe turistas. Los datos fueron interpretados en base a un Análisis Temático, que permitió observar un movimiento de reposicionamiento de la marca Ilhéus desde un destino ya consolidado como sol y mar, a un destino más centrado en su cultivo de cacao y chocolate, pero aún en su fase inicial y tímido. En base a las entrevistas, también se realizó una encuesta histórica del turismo en la región. Finalmente, se observó que: a) existe un acuerdo entre los entrevistados sobre la relevancia del chocolate y el cacao para la identidad del destino; b) existe la percepción unánime de que Ilhéus tiene mucha actividad de turismo de masas, en la cual los visitantes tienen poco conocimiento sobre la cultura y la historia de la región; c) existe un movimiento de consumidores que busca experiencias más diferenciadas, buscando cacao y chocolate en la región; d) también existe un movimiento para crear productos turísticos destinados al cacao y el chocolate y al turismo experiencial en la región.



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1 INTRODUCTION

The history of southern Bahia is intertwined with its tradition of cacao farming. However, for many years, the cacao farms, their stories, and their products were not seen as potential tourist attractions. After the crisis caused by the witches' broom fungus (*moniliophthora perniciosa*), diagnosed in 1989, some occasional tourism initiatives in cacao farms emerged as survival alternatives for farmers, as the commercialization of commodity cacao started to face serious difficulties. Cacao is native to South America, specifically the Amazon basin, and inherent to the story of Brazil. Therefore, it is relevant to study the relationship between tourism and cacao. Bahia is the second-largest cacao producer in Brazil (IBGE, 2019) and its cultivation is still, despite the crisis, the main economic activity in the southern part of the state, the locus of this study.

The "broom", as the famous plague is known among locals, has changed the economic and social situation of the region considering that, consequently, unemployment rates have grown. As a result, the exodus from rural environments to urban centers arose, which led to the appearance of the first favelas and several social conflicts in Ilhéus, such as issues related to street cleaning, basic sanitation, and public health. For Brazil, there were also consequences, since it ceased to be the main exporter of cacao in the world, and its produc-

tion fell significantly due to the cacao plague. The arrival of the witches' broom brought harmful consequences – both economic and social – to the entire region. This has broadly affected society, from large landowners to rural workers (Andrade-Matos, 2018).

As a consequence, the region has been suffering over the past years trying to eliminate the plague in order to return to the success of cacao farming. However, its productivity cannot return to the levels achieved before the plague because the fungus remains present in the region. Even with developed grafting techniques, the witches' broom does not stop, which demands a series of different cultivation practices from producers. Thus, it was necessary to learn to live with the adversities caused by the fungus. Some richer farmers invest in science and technology, while the poorer ones deal with the plague in their farms palliatively.

The artisanal chocolate movement started in the mid-2000s in the United States (Giller, 2017). However, it started to stimulate two phenomena in the region: (a) the production of fine cacao (for higher quality chocolate) and the consequent production of chocolate by some farmers; and (b) the offer of cacao-related tourist experiences – after the perception of the existence of a tourist demand with a greater interest in knowing about cacao farms and the production of the famous sweet. Thus, the region started to attract visitors who seek experiential tourism, i.e., for tourism experiences that overcome the ordinary, in which the tourist searches for moments and places that enrich their history (Netto & Gaeta, 2010). This new challenge has forced the government and private firms to rethink and restructure tourism in Ilhéus, which is historically known as a Sun & Sea destination, to position it also as a destination of cacao, chocolate, and all the history surrounding these products.

One example of the initiatives is the implementation of the Chocolate Road in 2017. This route was designed to attract more tourists to the region, which is located on the highway that connects the city of Ilhéus to Uruçuca, where several cacao farms are located. This context led to the development of this study, which aims to better understand the life cycle of this destination as a brand, especially from the arrival of the witches' broom and the inclusion of cacao and chocolate as new elements in the composition of the region of Ilhéus as a tourist product.

According to Moilanen and Rainisto (2009), it is understood that a tourist destination brand can be established when the identity of the place is clear. Identity is how the brand would like to be perceived and the image is how it is seen by consumers (Crompton, 1979; Aaker, 1995; Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). For Pike (2008, p. 179), between brand identity and brand image exists the concept of brand positioning, which would be the “interface between brand identity and brand image, over which the destination has some control”. Thus, **the central objective of this study is to understand the movement of (re)positioning of the Ilhéus brand, from a traditional destination of Sun & Sea to a destination of experiential chocolate tourism**, considering the period between the diagnosis of the witches' broom (1989) and the beginning of the local chocolate movement (present).

The study can contribute to the supply of data that can inform better planning and management of tourism in the region of Ilhéus, in South Bahia. Furthermore, from an academic and social point of view, the study makes it possible to reflect on the events and consequences of the witches' broom and the subsequent implementation of tourism focused on the experiences involving the cacao production chain – all of which evolved from a greater appreciation of the local culture as an alternative path to survival for the destination.

2 TOURIST DESTINATION BRAND

Given the large number of destinations that exist in the world, and due to the competitiveness and the incessant search for survival in the tourism market due to globalization and ease of access to means of transportation, tourist locations are increasingly becoming brands in order to differentiate themselves from others and gain visibility amongst tourists around the world (Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009).

The brand is possibly the most powerful marketing tool available for use by tourist destinations (Hanlan & Kelly, 2005). However, what often happens is that places do not have a well-established and coordinated brand. It is common for each sector of a location (tourism, technology, business, among others) to exploit a differentiated brand and, consequently, the place has its image fragmented. Replacing such a fragmented image with a coordinated image can mean growth in competitive advantage (Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009).

Aaker (1991) states that “brand” is a name or a symbol used to identify the products or services of a seller, or a group of sellers, and to differentiate the services of those from their competitors. For this author, the brand is composed of image and identity: the image is how the brand is perceived by consumers, and the identity is how it intends itself to be perceived. To manage these elements, Aaker (1995) states that the brand must plan what part of the identity will be communicated. It is then understood that the brand is composed of the image and the identity, represented by a name or symbol.

Therefore, according to the objective of this study, it is important to discuss the two elements of brands. As said, identity refers to the strategy of the organization, i.e., how it wants to be seen (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). Identity has an internal focus, it is the 'self-image' of the tourist destination, i.e., how it is seen and wants to be seen (Pike, 2008). Ekinci (2003) states that having a well-defined identity is a way of emphasizing the uniqueness of the destination in contrast to its competitors.

Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) consider that identity planning is fundamental if the destination wants to establish differences and particularities since it is through these that a personality for the destination will be defined. Hosany, Ekinci, and Uysal (2007) state that this defined personality may impact the image that will be built by tourists. Since it is crucial for the brand, the identity should be established and planned, and must always correspond to reality and demonstrate the strengths and the real personality of the destination (Crockett & Wood, 1999).

On the other hand, the image of the tourist destination is defined by Crompton (1979), who states that this is the sum of one's beliefs, ideas, and impressions of a destination. Thus, the image is formed by the consumers (Gronroos, 2009; Gândara, 2008), since they receive, interpret, and form the image, which is something particular and exclusive to the consumer him or herself, consisting of his/her opinion about a certain place. For Moilanen and Rainisto (2009), image is how the brand is actually being experienced. Thus, one realizes that the image is the perception of the tourist about the place, so only they can control it and form it. Thus, identity and image come together to form the brand of the destination, which will be communicated through promotional efforts.

3 EXPERIENTIAL TOURISM

Repositioning the brand of an already consolidated tourism destination is not simple, but crucial in the face of an increasingly competitive global market. To do so, the destination needs to create an identity to attract tourists based on a strategy of differentiation from its competitors.

Most destinations have spectacular scenery, attractions, warm hospitality toward visitors, culture, and unique heritage. However, one must consider that these factors are no longer differentiators. The success of a destination lies in its potential to reduce the possibility of its replacement by another (Hudson & Ritchie, 2009). An alternative to achieve this differentiation may be centered on the tourist experience, from the creation of a brand identity based on the experiences that have a strong appeal in the emotions of potential travelers. Given these reflections, the tourist destination of the cacao region of southern Bahia seems to have glimpsed the experiences of cacao farms as an alternative to differentiate itself from others.

The experience approach from the perspective of consumer behavior is preliminarily analyzed by Hirschman and Holbrook (1982), who bring this new approach into the field of research, considering that until then consumption was treated as rational and utilitarian. The authors show the existence of the emotional aspect, characterized by a flow of fantasies, feelings, and amusements, directly associated with the process of consumption. This association is translated as hedonic consumption, which designates the facets of consumer behavior that are related to the multiple sensory aspects that can evoke a variety of meanings related to tastes, sounds, smells, tactile impressions, and visual images.

Within this context, it should be considered that for Bruwer and Rueger-Muck (2018) there is a consensus among scholars, in the specific case of tourism, that the consumption of tourism products has a predominantly hedonic component (Calver & Page, 2013; Gursoy et al., 2006; Hosany & Gilbert, 2010; Kim, 2014; Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2012), with a very broad research focus covering the subject in this perspective.

Pine II and Gilmore (1999) considered that for the success of a business in the new economic era, the offer of companies should not only be based on goods or services, but also on experiences. The idea is to create

experiences that consumers find memorable so that the brand can always be remembered. This perspective contributes to the studies of tourism insofar as it is a service that focuses on the experience of the consumer, which is part of the process (Mondo, Talini, & Fiates, 2016).

Considering that the experience-centered perspective is socially constructed and linked to multiple interpretations that permeate the environment, the social, and other components of the activity (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009), one can consider that the emphasis is on the subjective responses of tourists, considering their emotions and feelings in interacting with services (Addis & Holbrook, 2001), as well as their narratives about these experiences (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). Therefore, if the tourist activity aims to create experiences, the destination must offer it considering functional and emotional aspects that are positive. Thus, consumers can feel satisfied, share their positive thoughts about the destination, and subsequently return to the same place (Song, Lee, Park, Hwang, & Reisinger, 2014; Knobloch et al., 2014).

Since there are no reports of research on cacao farms, the authors took wine tourism as a basis for reflection since it is centered on a product (the grape), and on the living in the vineyards (plantations) and wineries (physical structure and wine tasting), an experience format that is close to living in cacao farms. It has been found that both in wine tourism and cacao/chocolate tourism, tourists can easily get involved in the cultural and/or physical environment of the production of these elements. In the farms of Ilhéus, for instance, they can taste chocolates, acquire knowledge about cacao, and experience authentic views of the landscape during their visits, akin to those experiences in wine tourism (Sparks, 2007). According to Huang and Gao (2018), it is then possible for tourists to extend the duration of their stay, thus increasing their expenditure to dive even more into this type of experience (Huang & Gao, 2018). For Gu, Qiu, King and Huang (2019) in the wine tourism experience, and by similarity, applying the thoughts of these authors to the case of the cacao/chocolate tourism experience, these are highly engaging experiences and have considerable potential in generating economic benefits for a tourist destination.

The intention of tourist destinations should be to offer extraordinary or memorable experiences related to the experiences of the consumer during the visits – in this specific case, to cacao farms – and should be an essentially hedonic service. The aim is to provide a moment that the tourist interprets as unique, in which he/she will feel amazed and deeply marked by the experience (Nascimento, Maia, & Dias, 2012).

However, according to Coelho, Meira and Gosling (2017), not every tourist experience is capable of generating strong memories in consumers. A memorable experience is a feeling of being present in a place, experiencing and absorbing that unique moment. An experience becomes unforgettable, especially when one can share it with people or create bonds during the experience, which reinforces the role of emotions as the central point of memorable experiences (Knobloch, Robertson, & Aitken, 2014).

The engagement of people in wine tourism or cacao/chocolate tourism experiences seems, therefore, a logical search for a better knowledge of the tourism product (Bruwer & Alant, 2009). The nature of this type of tourist experience involves mainly the delivery of the senses to the product and its immediate aesthetic environment, and therefore seems justified an experiential vision (hedonically oriented) (Charters et al., 2009). This experiential approach to wine tourism research studies is at an early stage (Dodd & Gustafson, 1997; Pikkemaat et al., 2009; Charters et al., 2009; Chen et al., 2015), and the expansion of these terms to the cacao farm experience is even more recent.

Consequently, the interest of the consumer is not restricted to purely functional benefits, but extends to the consumption of a total experience (Leighton, 2007). This experience will have a positive effect on emotion and, consequently, on behavioral intention, i.e., by the satisfaction mechanism (Tsaur et al., 2006). However, this does not mean that just having a tourism experience would be enough. The experience should also be deliberately marketed in an experiential manner (Petkus, 2006), hence there will be efforts to compose and sell the image of the destination with this characteristic.

4 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

Taking the interpretative view as a basis, the nature of this investigation is considered as qualitative because, according to Merriam (1998, p. 5), it aims to understand and explain the meanings of the social phenomenon studied – the changes in the tourist destination of Ilhéus – with the least possible distance from the real

situation. In agreement with the aforementioned author, Richardson (1999) states that qualitative research can be characterized as an attempt to understand in detail the meanings and situational characteristics presented by the research subjects, thus corroborating Patton (2002), who states that this method is related to the details and particularities that make a unique and relevant case. Therefore, based on the research problem, the qualitative perspective is considered the most appropriate. Thus, it is possible to accumulate a greater depth of information about the studied reality.

The cacao region was the selected unit of analysis due to its relevant historical context, which stimulates the researchers to understand the transformations and challenges that the tourist destination of Ilhéus has faced over the years.

The data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews with four managers of the Ilhéus tourist destination. This technique was selected since it allows the researchers to find more in-depth information. To do so, the researchers planned topics that allowed other important questions to arise throughout the interview (Gil, 2009). This method was chosen based on Flick (2009, p. 149), who argues that “the interviewees have a complex stock of knowledge about the topic under study” and it is interesting to be able to make explicit what is implied.

To maintain discretion concerning the information collected, it was decided to code the names of respondents. The respondents and their codes are the following: the Deputy Mayor of Ilhéus (A); the President of the Cacao Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau (B); the owner of the tourism agency responsible for marketing the Cacao and Chocolate Coast (C); and a cacao farm owner who is inserted in the tourism scenario (D).

The interview with the Deputy Mayor of the city took place on February 20, 2017, at the city hall, at a time scheduled by the interviewee. The interview with the President of the Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) of Costa do Cacao took place on February 16, 2017, at the interviewee's advertising agency, and also at a time scheduled by him. Likewise, the interview with the owner of the Tourism Agency responsible for the Cacao and Chocolate Route (according to Bahiatursa's website) took place at the company he owns on February 16, 2017. Finally, the interview with the farmer took place on February 18, 2017, at his farm. The interviews lasted from 60 to 90min (one hour to one hour and a half), according to the availability and interest of the interviewees.

These interviewees were selected due to their relevance as managers within the destination, as in the case of the Deputy Mayor and the President of Costa do Cacao CVB. The owner of the tourism agency was selected because, according to the Bahiatursa's (Empresa Baiana de Turismo) website, it is the one responsible for organizing tours on the Cacao Coast. Finally, the farmer was selected because it is his farm that receives the majority of tourists, according to Sebrae and the interviewed tourism agency.

After the interviews, the data were transcribed and analyzed through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis proposes that codes are created for each type of information found in the text, and that each code has a color. Thus, using markers of different colors, the text was divided according to the codes. The color division was useful to identify each type of information, ensuring a clear understanding of the interviews, greater perception in the minutiae of the interviewees' statements, and, consequently, greater robustness in the data analysis.

For example, extracts from the interviews marked in yellow were related to the historical context made by the interviewees regarding tourism in the region; when the statements were related to the economy of the region they were marked in green; and when related to the economy of the farms, they were marked in blue. After identifying the types of information, each color was read separately so that categories could be established. Thus, themes were generated from the categories and, finally, generalizations were made.

5 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

In this section, the results of the data analysis and their discussion will be presented. The section is divided into three items, according to what emerged from the data analysis: “The past and present of tourism in Ilhéus”, “The profile of tourists that visit Ilhéus”, and “The brand (re)positioning movement of the tourist destination Ilhéus, BA”.

5.1 The past and present of tourism in Ilhéus: realities according to the interviewees

The Deputy Mayor of the city (interviewee A), sees tourism in Ilhéus as an area that needs improvement. He says that tourism in the city started – informally – 35 years ago with a person from the region who had a huge car (12 seats) with which he offered tours. He stated that Ilhéus, despite having had an ambassador like the famous Bahian novelist Jorge Amado, and the luck of having been the stage for several soap operas, never knew how to take advantage of such opportunities.

Interviewee B believes that Ilhéus is privileged by the factors pointed out by interviewee A, but also by its geographical characteristics. B stated that Jorge Amado presented the place to other regions of Brazil and several countries in his literary work. The interviewees' arguments that Ilhéus could make better use of these resources are relevant, including the fact that it has been the stage for films and soap operas, as these factors can influence tourist activities (Bolan, 2011), a phenomenon known as film-induced tourism.

The businessman (B) reinforces that in addition to the aforementioned privileges there is also the possibility of planting cacao in the region, which is, in his words: “raw material for a spectacular product that is chocolate” (Interviewee B on February 16, 2017).

According to this interviewee, in the 1980s there was no cacao and chocolate tourism. Along with the diagnosis of the witches' broom in 1989 began what he calls the 'lost decade'. He describes this period as a very slow process of recovery and explained that there was no initiative for change at that time. He explained that people were waiting for a solution to the fungus, when, however, according to his vision, they should seek different alternatives. In his words:

“Considering that it is a 250-year-old culture, you didn't have leaders with a polished enough culture to understand that it was necessary to look for an alternative. It was a little obvious to outsiders like me, and to others too. Because surely: since cacao wasn't so powerful and didn't represent so much to the state economically, Bahia also had to pay attention to other things”. (Interviewee B on February 16, 2017)

It is noticeable that the entrepreneur (B) states that for a long time Ilhéus did not have an investment in tourism as an alternative for local economic growth among its priorities. That happened because cacao cultivation was enough for most of the economic needs of the region, he says. Therefore, in the economic matrix of southern Bahia in the 1980s, tourism was not relevant because it was not necessary and the region did not see its possibilities.

Not realizing that cacao was growing again, the properties began to seek alternatives to generate income, according to interviewee A.

“Due to the very impoverishment of cacao production and the loss of work-people, the farmers were looking for alternatives to generate extra income” (Interviewee A on February 20, 2017)

Along with the reduction of 50% to 90% in cacao production and the emergence of new opportunities, interviewee B says that his fight for local tourism began some 25 years ago. He affirms that in the region some things are difficult to achieve, and it is complicated to convince people. He states that the south of Bahia has one hundred kilometers of beach, many film productions, Brazilian popular culture texts (literature), music, and other assets. With these assets, the interview says Ilhéus is a “shown-off region”, but that it still is not enough to attract tourists.

According to interviewee A, the use of houses to lodge people became something common in this time of crisis. Therefore, tourism emerged as an alternative for the survival of many families and properties. According to Riva and Bertolini (2017), rural tourism can be one of the alternatives for generating employment and income for families in these contexts. At a time when the main economic activity in the region is no longer successful, families in Ilhéus began to reconsider their activities.

Interviewee D – the owner of the cacao farm – describes the initial moment of local interest in tourism. After the great crisis and the indebtedness of many farmers in the 1990s, the interviewee reports that he was invited to take office at Ilheustur, a former local tourism institution. He states that at the time he called a specialist and consultant in rural tourism to present a lecture at the former Cacao Auditorium of Bahia (of UESC, located in the center of Ilhéus) – which, in search of a way out of the crisis, several cacao growers attended. The owner of the farm said that the lecture culminated in a major conflict since the consultant gave

the example of the cotton crisis that occurred in the United States, and said that one day the cacao farmers would thank the witches' broom for having been the driving force of a movement that made them reconsider their business. The interviewee D reported that because of this statement there was great resistance to the ideas related to the tourism proposed at the time, and that few farmers considered this possibility.

It is important to observe how sensitive the population of this region is about this subject, not only in the 1990s – when the lecture took place – but even today. He says:

“This feeling became open wounds; it became a very serious feeling (...). We cannot talk about this everywhere (...) Because people are still connected to the past. Grandpa committed suicide, I was born rich and today I have to ask for a job here at City Hall. I mean, it all hurts people a lot, and... that's a serious problem. So, we need to be careful about what we say.” (Interviewee D on February 18, 2017)

Following the same flow, interviewee D states that the region is currently going through a period of economic restructuring, which has lasted since the beginning of the crisis and that currently many see chocolate as a means to pursue this. According to interviewee B, the people of Ilhéus started to think about chocolate after the first chocolate festival, of which one of his companies is the organizer and promoter. According to him, when he realized that the region could not recover, he noticed during a trip to Gramado that cacao as an agricultural product is not appealing to people. He also stated that people cannot associate cacao with chocolate. Thus, in 2009, he had the idea to hold the first chocolate festival in Ilhéus. The interviewee reported that this was an eccentric idea since it was a “chocolate festival without chocolate”. However, according to him, it was necessary to start talking about chocolate in the region before promoting cacao and tourism.

However, there is an ongoing discussion in the region about the real possibility of chocolate bringing new opportunities, which the interviewee D says is a relevant issue. The farmer states that there are 43 thousand registered cacao farmers, and that among these few will be able to make the famous sweet – due to the lack of technical and/or financial conditions for the necessary investment. Although not everyone will be able to produce, the owner of the farm (interviewee D) affirms that the role of chocolate in revitalizing cacao is enormous, because it will be the propaganda for quality cacao, corroborating with interviewee B (argument presented previously). This statement is an interesting element that can be analyzed according to the scale of value progression of Pine II and Gilmore (2013). From the moment a commodity is transformed into a good (chocolate), and a good into a service (the visit to a cacao farm), it is possible to add value to the product and, then, it is possible to say that clients will be able to enjoy experiences that can be extraordinary (Anderson & Narus, 1990; Nascimento, Maia, & Dias, 2012; Jesus, Gonçalves & Silva-Neto, 2018). When in a rural agricultural environment capable of generating more involvement, these experiences can also increase the time tourists spend in the locality (Huang & Gao, 2018) and develop economic benefits (Gu et al., 2019). The farmer firmly reiterates: “this is the new stage of cacao in Bahia” (Interviewee D on February 18, 2017).

Presenting the aspects of the historical context of tourism in southern Bahia according to the interviewees, the next section will discuss the profiles of tourists identified in the interviews.

5.2 The profile of tourists who visit Ilhéus according to the interviewees

Besides the historical questions, a few aspects of the profile of the tourists (and changes in those profiles) were mentioned and are relevant for the brand repositioning discussion since they will be responsible for the image of the place (Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009).

For instance, the Deputy Mayor (interviewee A), said that tourists are “silly, they believe in everything”. On this occasion, the interviewee said that it bothers him to see some tourist guides of the city providing wrong information. Besides issues concerning the consumer profile, this sentence shows a conflict between tourist guides at the destination. This fact is an inconsistency in the identity that can cause brand fragmentation, which makes it difficult to place it (Ekinci, 2003; Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009).

From the comment of interviewee A, about the profile of the consumer, it is evident that he believes that Ilhéus receives uncritical tourists, and that they know little or nothing about the place before arriving. Interviewee B – the entrepreneur and President of the CVB – uses the term 'mass tourism', which according to Montejano (2001) is a form of tourism in which a group of people travels collectively or massively, usually

with travels organized by an agency or travel operator. These tourists usually seek lower and competitive prices.

In another section, interviewee B states that visitors look for Sun-&Sea-related activities, as the transcript presents:

“Sun & Sea. Sun & Sea. The first airport after Porto Seguro is here (...) Jorge Amado is like... ‘Land of Jorge Amado!’, ‘Oh, so let’s see it!’ But Sun & Sea is what people want. Sun & Sea is a determining factor”. (Interviewee B on February 16, 2017)

In contrast, interviewee C – the owner of the travel agency, a foreigner (Swiss) – says that many of her clients are foreigners who come mainly from Europe. Since her agency is focused on adventure tourism, she says that her audience uses Ilhéus airport only as a gateway to other regions:

“so most tourists, they don’t come to Ilhéus. They arrive at the airport in Ilhéus and go to Itacaré, Barra Grande (...) Only a few stay in Ilhéus. There exists tourism of... (thinking) there are all types of hotels including [resort name], there are several as soon as the clients spend ten days there with their families” (Interviewee C on February 16, 2017)

When asked about the main interest of her clients, she answered that it is the beach, although she highlights:

“but it is adventure tourism too, you know? It is more... it is less... how am I gonna tell you the right word? It is a more typical Brazil, but it is... More nature really” (Interviewee C on February 16, 2017)

From this statement, the interviewers asked if her customers were looking for something related to cacao, and the interviewee confirmed:

“Surely the solution for Ilhéus is cacao. For everything, in every aspect, cacao is the story of this place. It always has been and now it is being again.” (Interviewee C on February 16, 2017)

The interviewee D – the owner of the cacao farm – says that he receives two types of Brazilians who go to the place: the one with “the open mind” (in his words); and people motivated by the soap operas, that he said they do not find what they are looking for since on his farm there is no big house and there is nothing that refers to this imaginary. However, the interviewee believes that he still manages to receive the visitors by offering another experience, which is to explain about cacao and its processing and the new phase of Bahia and, thus, he thinks he can satisfy the consumer. The owner seeks the subjective answers of consumers pointed out by Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2009) as important for the experience to be successfully socially built.

From the statements of the four interviewees, it is clear that A and B have a more embracing view of the profile of the tourists in the destination (by their positions) and affirm that most tourists are uncritical and look for low-cost tourism mainly focused on Sun & Sea. C and D – entrepreneurs of (a) an adventure tourism agency that serves mainly foreigners and (b) a cacao farm – believe that despite the majority of Sun & Sea tourists, there are already other types of tourists that visit the region, e.g., tourists that know more about the place and have specific desires – but they are still a minority. It is perceived that greater planning is necessary so that the identity of Ilhéus becomes more consistent and, thus, the image can be understood and spread satisfactorily according to the objectives and potentialities of the locality (Crompton, 1979; Aaker, 1995; Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000).

5.3 The brand (re)positioning movement of the tourist destination of Ilhéus, BA

According to interviewee B, there were three important steps towards strengthening the local chocolate culture. The first was to make chocolate part of the agenda of the region, a successful venture that was accomplished through the creation of the chocolate festival in 2009.

Therefore, the second stage was to make cacao a valuable asset for the region. The third was to offer chocolate experiences for tourists in the region. Thus, according to the interviewee, there is a flow to the cacao farms in the region, which he says are still maturing. It is noticeable that the interviewee strategically planned the local brand through systematic actions, an essential fact for the destination to achieve a consistent brand, concerning identity and image (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000; Ekinci, 2003; Molainen & Rainisto, 2009). The construction of a strong identity according to Molainen and Rainisto (2009) is crucial to define how the destination intends to be experienced. This aspect of the brand is relevant to how the consumers will see it.

In addition to the brand issues, the path to planning the experiences described by the interviewee is relevant because it considers what Charters et al. (2009) report about wine tourism and that is brought to the cacao context in this paper: that is, the nature of these experiences involves the delivery of senses to the product and its aesthetic. Thus, the planning of the experiences reflects the experiential aspects present in the cacao/chocolate tourism of the region.

Despite the background and the responses of interviewee B, interviewee C (owner of the official Costa do Cacau agency) states that these efforts are not enough. She argues that Ilhéus still needs to reposition itself in the tourism market to guarantee its market differential and attract more people to the destination. According to her, only cacao confers a strong and unique identity to the destination, makes it different, and thereby generates a competitive advantage (Molainen & Rainisto, 2009; Costa & Pereira, 2020). In this sense, she states:

“There's a lot of tourism like this. Because, unfortunately, Ilhéus hasn't developed tourism... The beach is wonderful, but the other also beaches are. They have these huts full of people, full of garbage, among other things. So, unfortunately, Ilhéus couldn't stand out. Now cacao is capable... the only thing, in my opinion, that is capable of standing out to attract higher quality tourism.” (Interviewee C on February 16, 2017)

The identification of what is unique about the destination is important for emphasizing how it differs from its competitors (Ekinci, 2003). The last part of the interviewee's observation reveals the potential of the cacao experiences to attract (in her words) ‘higher quality tourism’. It is understood from her interview that she refers to people with interests more focused on culture, environment, and who are looking for experiences. In this case, as Gupta and Vajic (1999) state, the experience occurs when some sensation or knowledge acquisition results from service interactions.

Interviewee B has a similar view of the tourist interested in visiting the farms of Ilhéus. For him, this is a slightly more qualified type of consumer, a niche market (Nascimento, Maia, & Dias, 2012). And he goes on:

“Cacao farm, eating chocolate, sucking the cacao, telling the story (listing the items as suggestions). The tourist gets excited, doesn't he?” (Interviewee B on February 16, 2017)

In this quote, it is noticeable that this is not an ordinary experience for the consumer, but rather a distinct one that requires greater planning and motivation (Hanefors & Mossberg, 2003). Such knowledge can and should be part of the planning of the tourist activity that the region offers. Furthermore, a trip like this should not be restricted to purely functional benefits, but rather extend to the consumption of experience in its entirety (Leighton, 2007).

It is noticeable that respondent B attempts to establish control over the local brand positioning, which Pike (2008) affirms can be controlled. Thus, he showed that he is trying to influence the identity and brand according to what he believes is best for the region. He does so by trying to attract tourists, not because of the appeal of Sun & Sea in the region, but because of the rural experience with chocolate; by occupying his political position; and having already accomplished everything he has done, one realizes that his actions are being successful and contributing to the region. Furthermore, the literature states that this new position must necessarily correspond to the local reality to be successful, which occurs, according to the three other interviews (Crocket & Wood, 1999).

About the experiences that are already offered on the farms today, interviewee B comments that the way they relate cacao to chocolate is still very amateurish. However, things are being directed to intensify this type of tourist experience in the region, including the change of name of a road to “Estrada do Chocolate” (Chocolate Road). This road is a project of the government together with the local management. On the road are some of the large cacao processing industries and some historic or chocolate producing farms. This road is also part of the project of the managers to make chocolate and cacao part of the local tourist route and part of the image of the destination (Hosany, Ekinci & Uysal, 2007). The interview shows details of the planning for the road:

“We will build two portals initially. We will change the name of the road, from BR 264, 265, to Estrada do Chocolate; we will have the two portals; we will put a structure to monitor the road to... cleaning, signage throughout the road, catalog the products, make the registration... Sebrae will prepare this class, and then (...) we will have a tourism product”. (Interviewee B on February 16, 2017)

While talking specifically about the services already offered by the farms, the interviewee says that the consumer only gets “what is left”: the barge (structure for drying cacao) shown to the consumer is the one that has always been used, the house stays the way it is, and so forth. However, he sees the need for professionalization, e.g., the preparation of the farms to receive tourists in an attempt to qualify the service to create better experiences (Mondo, Talini, & Fiates, 2016; Nascimento, Maia, & Dias, 2012), thus making the business more profitable.

The interviewee was emphatic in saying that the idea is to meet the tourist's expectations. The problem is that – as things are still done very amateurishly – sometimes consumers may come across unpleasant experiences, such as visiting a farm and not finding cacao. This concern is relevant and consistent with the existing literature. Different authors state that destinations that offer experiences should consider offering complete products, regarding their functional and emotional characteristics so that experiences are positive and memorable (Song et al. 2014; Knobloch et al., 2014).

Together with the brand repositioning movement of the tourist destination of Ilhéus, this is why there is an attempt to professionalize services, with which interviewee B also professes to be concerned. He says that some farmers, mainly those from historical farms, have some difficulty in following this process, but that they are likely to collaborate:

“they are individualistic, isolated, but I realize they are willing, available, and good. No, it won't be difficult.” (Interviewee B on February 16, 2017)

Thus, the interviewee says that he has not had any problems with the support of the farmers for the Estrada do Chocolate so far. There were difficulties for the government in accepting the product, changing the road, making the signs, and getting the partnership with Sebrae to format it and prepare the farmers. One can observe its objectives with Estrada do Chocolate in the following statement:

“But what I wanted with the chocolate road was a deal. I'd take 10 products, make a deal. This year I want us to invest, I want you to commit to open from Tuesday to Saturday, with one person or 100 (...). Because if you get that and start making a profit, then they will say: let's do it for another year.” (Interviewee B on February 16, 2017)

The owner of the tourism agency responsible for marketing the Costa do Cacau (C) confirms the importance of offering good services:

“because there is this thing called... qualification of the farm. There should be a bathroom on the farm, there should be a lot of things (...) to receive tourists, to qualify the farm” (Interviewee C on February 16, 2017)

The property of interviewee D is also an example of a differentiated experience that is offered to consumers. The farm sells daily walks on the property, allowing the tourist to get to know the farm, the harvesting and post-harvesting processes, and, in the end, to taste cacao juice, nibs, cacao beans and chocolate made with the cacao from the farm. Thus, visitors have experiences that involve the physical and cultural aspects of the region. Sparks (2007) reports that this involvement with the region is relevant and characteristic of experiences in wine tourism environments. The literature on wine tourism discussed in this paper enables us to reflect on cacao farming according to their similarities. For Huang and Gao (2018) this involvement with the locality may extend the stay in the destination and, according to Gu et al. (2019), it has the potential to generate economic benefits. Furthermore, due to the characteristics of the experience described, it can be observed that all senses (sight, touch, taste, hearing, and smell) are awakened in the tourist, another experiential characteristic (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982).

Finally, through reflections on the interviews with the four research subjects, the authors observed that Ilhéus as a brand is still fragmented, as defined by Moilanen and Rainisto (2009). However, according to the initiatives of the local management and the progress of the historical facts, the perspectives have changed.

Given the discussions presented, it is noticeable that there was the intention to start tourism professionally in the region since the 1990s. However, since the 2000s, the beginning of the artisanal chocolate movement that motivated the farmers to produce better quality cacao – and then to make chocolate – gave rise to the experiential tourism on cacao farms. In 2009 the first chocolate festival took place in the region and more farms started to offer experiences to the tourists. Gradually, more and more visitors look for these experiences. Therefore, Ilhéus as a brand has been repositioned to an experiential destination for cacao/chocolate.

6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper examines the brand (re)positioning movement of the tourist destination of Ilhéus from a traditional destination of Sun & Sea to a destination of experiential chocolate tourism. To address this development, qualitative research was carried out through interviews with public and private managers of the destination.

From the collected data, it was possible to analyze and build a historical survey of tourism in Ilhéus, and also to realize that there is a movement of repositioning of the brand that has begun.

It was also perceived that there is agreement among those interviewed on the relevance of chocolate and cacao for the identity of the tourist destination of Ilhéus. It was also highlighted that cacao is the differential of the destination, and that it is genuinely present in the memory, references, and history of the place and people. Therefore, it is understood that its insertion into the brand of the destination can bring benefits to the locality.

There is also the unanimous perception among those interviewed that Ilhéus currently has a greater propensity to receive mass tourists – less informed visitors who travel collectively and follow travel itineraries made by travel agencies. The problem with the weak critical sense of the tourists was highlighted by the Deputy Mayor, who also highlighted the problem of lack of preparation among local tour guides. This data is relevant since the City Hall can then invest in qualifications and training for people working within tourism.

Despite the massive influx of Sun & Sea visitors, there is also a movement involving experiential tourism – both by tourists in search of hedonic experiences, and of the local services focused on local cultural aspects, e.g., the cacao farms that open their doors to receive tourists, the implementation of the 'Estrada do Chocolate', and the local cacao and chocolate festivals.

The tourism experiences that already exist in Ilhéus, which were discussed in this paper, have an important experiential aspect when analyzed in light of the literature, both from the concerns of the managers and the aspects of the consumer's immersion in the activities of the farm.

From what has been presented, it is noticeable that it is beneficial for the destination to be aware of its culture and its historical and environmental potential, given the identity, social and economic benefits that may emerge. In 2018, the cacao from the south of Bahia obtained an Indication of Origin (Geographical Indication), which values the local *terroir* and may also contribute to the tourist interest in the region.

For future research, it is suggested to carry out an investigation in which consumers are the subjects of research. Then, it will be possible to understand their visions about the destination, which is interesting since the aspects of the image are known according to the consumers themselves and thus deepen the understanding of Ilhéus as a brand.

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