

Spanish and Portuguese **hotel corporations** on the **Northern Littoral of Bahia** and the challenges of **environmental policies**

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Abstract | In light of environmental and territorial policies, this study focuses on the investments in Brazil of Spanish and Portuguese hotel chains, particularly in tourist-residential establishments on the Northern Coast of Bahia. Based on an inquiry conducted among representatives of these corporations, it was observed that the main obstacles faced in their internationalization to this region were administrative red tape, the environmental licensing process and a lack of knowledge of the market. The framework of environmental and urban policies has been the main point of conflict between the companies and the environmental and licensing institutions. The reduced number of skilled technicians capable of assisting the needs of the companies at the state and municipal levels is a crucial factor to explain the delays in the approval of the projects, often causing significant financial damage to the companies, as expressed by their representatives. This study presents a paradigmatic case by which to analyse Brazilian environmental policy, taking into account the on-going process of economic transformation of the country, particularly with regard to its relations with foreign investors.

Keywords | Environmental licensing and regulation, Residential tourism, Socio-environmental conflicts, Foreign direct investment.

Resumo | Considerando as políticas ambientais e territoriais, este estudo centra-se na análise dos investimentos no Brasil das cadeias hoteleiras espanholas e portuguesas, particularmente em complexos turísticos residenciais no Litoral Norte da Bahia. Na base de um inquérito realizado junto dos responsáveis de um conjunto destas empresas, constatou-se que os principais obstáculos que enfrentam na sua internacionalização para o Litoral Norte da Bahia são as peias burocráticas, o moroso processo de licenciamento ambiental e a falta de conhecimento sobre o mercado. O enquadramento ambiental, territorial e urbanístico dos projetos é a principal área de conflito entre as empresas e as instituições que superintendem o ambiente e o licenciamento. O reduzido número de técnicos capazes de ir ao encontro das suas necessidades ao nível estadual e municipal é um fator determinante na explicação dos atrasos na aprovação dos projetos, muitas vezes causando prejuízos significativos às empresas. Este estudo apresenta um caso paradigmático a fim de analisar a política ambiental brasileira, levando em conta o processo em curso de transformação económica do país, em particular no que respeita às relações com investidores estrangeiros.

Palavras-chave | Legislação e licenciamento ambientais, Turismo residencial, Conflitos socioambientais, Investimento direto estrangeiro.

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1. Introduction

The context of growing global competition and the move towards international expansion due to the saturation of tourist-destination supply in Western Europe is leading the large hotel chains to adopt different strategies in order not only to maintain their position in their domestic markets, but also to be increasingly present in the international markets, particularly in emergent countries. In their international development, the hotel corporations are in search of scale economies, geographical and product diversification, in addition to reduction of costs. As a consequence of this dynamics, a strong trend towards the internationalization of Portuguese and Spanish hotel groups became clear by the end of 1990s and the beginning of the new century.¹ A region much favoured by Iberian hotel networks for the establishment of their ventures was the Brazilian coast, more precisely the littoral of the Northeast region, which offered vast expanses of land at competitive prices. In this paper, we look more closely at the investments of Spanish and Portuguese hotel networks in a sensitive region of Brazilian northeast from the environmental point of view: the Northern Littoral of the state of Bahia.

This outward expansion was strengthened through strategic alliances between the sectors of tourism, accommodation, real estate and institutional investment funds for the construction of new projects known as tourist-residential resorts, mainly orientated to second-residence purposes, a relatively recent phenomenon in Brazil. This development may be highlighted by the appropriation of large parts of the territory, in which are included areas of environmental protection (*Áreas de Proteção Ambiental* – APA). APA are supposedly protected by norms and specific environmental legislation that guide and rule on the use of soil, as further developed below. Within this framework, the present paper will discuss the main challenges faced by the hotel networks of Spain and Portugal in the establishment of their tourist-residential resorts on the Northern

Littoral of Bahia, taking into account the public environmental policies. Initially the study derived from an inquiry conducted among representatives of eight Iberian hotel corporations.² Although the interviews were focussed on several issues, one of the most salient was the Brazilian environmental landscape of their projects.³ From this point of view, and according to Gomes (2011), it became clear that the main obstacles confronting the companies in their efforts to establish in the region were the official red tape, the lack of transparency of the environmental licensing, and insufficient knowledge of the market.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2, as regards relevant environmental issues, describes the institutional and regulatory framework at national, state, and regional level that such corporations face in the establishment of their tourist-residential projects in Brazil. Section 3 examines their socio-environmental impact at different stages, focussing on the case of the Northern Coast of Bahia. Section 4 presents an overview of the actual and planned tourist-residential investments in the region, not only of the hotel corporations that have been directly inquired, but also of other of different origin. Finally, in section 5, some conclusions of the previous analysis are drawn.

2. Environmental and regulatory policy framework of the Iberian tourist-residential projects in Brazil

The merchandizing of nature and culture by economic agents of tourism has produced significant changes in the landscape, socio-environment and culture in the regions and localities of the Brazilian coast. The impacts are of different type, intensity and magnitude; they can hardly be measured by objective criteria, given the complexity of such processes, particularly as far as the socio-cultural environment is concerned. There are different methodologies that

allow the quantification and qualification of the socio-environmental impacts entailed by economic activities that aim, among other objectives, to define the costs inherent in the application of the polluter pay principle. These initiatives face obstacles of different types, such as the identification and quantitative evaluation of socio-environmental impacts generating conflicts among different actors, which often lead to judicial procedures.

In Brazil, the environmental sustainability of relevant areas is framed by the Conservation Units (*Unidades de Conservação – UC*), which have attracted high public and private investments to these ecologically preserved environments of outstanding scenic beauty and biological interest. This natural and cultural heritage is at risk of being appropriated by economic agents of tourism, being transformed into a mere raw material in the composition of the so-called tourist product. Of course, it is important to note that increasing urbanization and the expansion of tourist activities within a context of economic growth will imply, to some extent, a sacrifice of the environment, bringing, for example, changes in the landscape and intensification in the use of the land. However, it is vital that these processes are harmonious and do not compromise the future of the region, or the benefits of future generations. In order to prevent the negative outcomes, or at least to minimize its risks, the Law n.º 9.985/2000 created the National System of Conservation Units (*Sistema Nacional de Unidades de Conservação – SNUC*). According to this legislation, the above-mentioned APA are

generally large areas, with some degree of human occupation, endowed with a-biotic, biotic, aesthetic or cultural attributes, particularly important for the quality of life and wellbeing of human populations. The SNUC ascribes to the APA such basic goals as the protection of biological diversity, discipline in the occupation and use of the land and in securing the sustainability of natural resources. APA are considered by the SNUC as Conservation Units that are capable of sustainable use, thus being more flexible and appropriate in the use and occupation of the land to the occurrence of economic activities than other types of UC, which is also valid with respect to the regime of land ownership (Bechara, 2009).

It must be stressed that being considered as major reserves of value, APA have large and diversified ecosystems in a good state of conservation, comprising lagoons, river estuaries, mangrove forests, dunes, wetlands and endemic flora and fauna species. Many of these areas are being threatened by rapid demographic and urban expansion, as well as by the new wave of investments in tourism, hotels, and real estate, as is the case of the Northern Littoral of Brazil, and more particularly in the Northern Littoral of Bahia. Indeed, the growth of tourism in protected areas, associated with intensive urbanization, has produced a number of controversies and divergent standpoints regarding the specific difficulties in integrating public policies of tourism, environmental management and urban planning. In general, these policies conflict with each other, in spite of the fact that, in abstract terms, they aim to reconcile economic interest with sustainability and to overcome contradictions created by the new type of urbanization primarily intended to respond to the demands of tourists, real estate agents and international hotel chains.

The new rationale of production in the space related to the dynamics of tourism and urban development oriented towards the establishment of tourist-residential resorts is termed by Mullins (1991, p. 331) as 'tourist urbanization', which is

¹ This was also part of a wave of investments of Iberian countries in Latin America, although we will not deal.

² Four Spanish groups (Iberostar, Fiesta, Singlehome and Invisa International) and four Portuguese groups (Pestana, Vila Galé, Tivoli Hotels & Resorts and Reta Atlântico Brasil) were directly surveyed on the core issues of this paper. The head offices of these hotel corporations were visited in Portugal (Lisbon and Algarve) and Spain (Palma de Mallorca), as well as their subsidiaries in Brazil, where the interviews with representatives took place.

³ For more details on this research work, and particularly on results of these inquiries, see Gomes (2011).

defined as “urbanization based on the sale and consumption of entertainment, i.e., cities and tourist centres specifically constructed for leisure and pleasure”. The author argues that the symbols that characterize tourist urbanization are the blend of natural landscape with constructed landscape, including the set formed, on the one hand, by the sea and the natural vegetation, and on the other hand, the implantation of diverse constructions, such as resorts, hotels, marinas, bars and restaurants, shops, sport and leisure centres. Mullins (1991) also considers that the main product to be supplied in the tourist complexes is nature (mainly in tropical countries) through such attributes as the sun, sea and sand, among others, enticing the tourists to feel attracted by the consumption of such amenities. The outcome of this process is the densification of these areas due to tourist-residential mega-establishments all along the maritime rims. Indeed, Brazil is no exception in this respect and in every viable coastal area of the planet, more and more hotels, second residences and closed condominiums are being constructed, the valuations of which are in function of their proximity to the sea.

In Brazil, the public authorities at federal, state and municipal levels have implemented territorial and environmental policies aiming at the orientation, discipline and monitoring of the process of economic and urban development in the Littoral. In the case of the Northern Littoral of Bahia, the legal instruments for these policies are the *Zoneamento Ecológico-Económico* (ZEE – the establishment of zones according to ecological and economic criteria) and the *Plano de Manejo* (Direction or Administration Plan), a technical document that, based on the general objectives of the UC, establishes the use and the adequate workability of natural resources, also targeting the control and regulation of occupation and use of the land, as well as the economic activities in urban centres inside the protected areas.

With respect to the development of tourist, hotel and real estate activities, the instruments required are the Study of Environmental Impact

(*Estudo de Impacto Ambiental* – EIA), Environmental Licensing, and the Environmental Compensatory Tax (*Compensação Ambiental*), which are closely related. The EIA is a prior study into the likely impacts arising from the establishment of large-scale projects, and is a pre-requisite for the licensing of activities with a high potential for pollution and that may considerably harm the environment. Examples of such projects include factories and other industrial buildings, the construction of roads, projects of urbanization, tourist and leisure complexes, ports, airports, among other possible ventures involving at least 100 hectares, or in areas of relevant ecological interest. The EIA is an instrument of environmental management for the identification, prevention and equilibrium of the alterations induced by projects or actions with significant environmental impact. Considered as a polemical instrument as far as their coming into effect is concerned, the EIA and related environmental licensing are the main points of collision and conflicts of interest between corporations, licensing bodies and the civil society.

The Environmental Compensatory Tax may only be raised after the licensing process is concluded, and, once in vigour, it creates many apparent conflicts, often associated with the slowdown of the licensing process, being a major point of disagreement between environmental bodies and corporations. Indeed, it is at this stage that the countervailing measures are objectively defined, by the competent environmental body; as referred to above they will counter the effects of the establishment of the project; it is ruled that the tax will represent at least 0.5% of the total amount of the investment.

All along the coastal strip of the Northern Littoral of Bahia, we find small and medium-sized tourist establishments, as well as large units. The former are classified as guesthouses (*pousadas*) and small hotels, generally belonging to local and national entrepreneurs, whilst the latter, i.e., the large-scale developments, belong mainly to international hotel networks, although they are often associated with

national and local partners, in particular from the real estate and construction sectors, in order to make their investments more viable. One of the most attractive advantages to foreign investors interested in the construction of tourist and hotel mega-establishments in the Northern Littoral of Bahia is the price of land, which can be acquired in large parcels of hectares as rural soil, then later transformed into urban soil through municipal decision, regardless of the creation of infrastructures. This conversion of rural soil into urban soil offers more possibilities for use and division into smaller lots, with urban indicators that are more advantageous for hotel and real estate establishments, since it generates greater profitability for the investors. At the state level, the Environment Law nr. 10.431/2006, through the Decree nr. 12.353 of 25/08/2010, defined the typology and size of the establishments that must be submitted to licensing, permission and terms of reference of environmental responsibility (Gomes, 2011).

The *Plano de Manejo* of the APA of the Northern Littoral of Bahia and its respective ZEE were approved by the Resolution nr. 1.040 (21/02/1995) of the State Environment Council (*Conselho Estadual do Meio Ambiente* – CEPRAM) and they establish the uses and parameters of occupation compatible with the fragility of local eco-systems. In spite of these instruments of territorial planning, the APA of the Northern Littoral is being pressed to change the uses and parameters of occupation, in order to satisfy the interests of investors. In practice, what has been observed in the application of these instruments, and particularly in the case of the APA of the Northern Littoral of Bahia, is that the state has played a dubious role in relation to the control of the use and occupation of the land in this area. The state, in addition to performing the role of supervisory and regulatory agent, is responsible for environmental planning and the management of the APA, yet acts at the same time on another level that is contradictory to the previously mentioned role, i.e., it is the promoter of the establishment of hotel

and real estate complexes, not only providing basic infrastructures, but also altering the parameters of occupation that were envisaged in the ZEE. An example of this process was provided by the change in the uses that were previously established for the *Zona de Proteção Visual* (ZPV – Area of Visual Protection) by the Law 11.476, dated 01/07/2009, sanctioned by the state government, with the objective of giving more flexibility to the ZEE, in order to bring it more into line with new ventures of the corporations. In practice, this amounted to granting permission for the occupation of the ZPV, ensuring the construction of vast tourist complexes on the thin littoral strip of the dunes, thus affording the views of the ocean so coveted by tourists from their rooms and terraces located among the palm trees.

3. Socio-environmental impact of hotel tourist activity in the Northern Coast of Bahia

In the different stages of the process of setting up tourist, hotel and real estate establishments, significant changes in the physical, biotic, and socio-economic environment may take place. Table 1 summarizes the most significant stages and impacts of this process in the case under analysis, not necessarily the same as those prevailing in similar establishments for example in the European countries of the Mediterranean.

The first stage includes the elaboration of socio-environmental and technical studies that will analyze the sustainable viability of the establishment, verified by environmental bodies of several spheres the political power, using the legal norms to be applied and taking into account the relevant environmental legislation. At this stage the local impact is of little importance. This is also the stage when the Environmental Diagnosis is conducted and the EIA/RIMA – the study of environmental impact – is elaborated, followed by a public discussion. A

Table 1 | Stages and impacts in the creation of tourist-residential establishments.

PLANNING STAGE
1. Elaboration of environmental and technical studies Elaboration of the environmental studies required by CONAMA as well as by EIA/RIMA; Socio-environmental planning of the project, elaboration of EIA/RIMA and public audience; Growing expectations of local population, mobilization of the population by the companies and local power in order to participate in the meetings and public audience.
CONSTRUCTION STAGE
2. The creation of conditions for the launching of works and the construction process Risk of contamination of the water and the soil. Increase of the anthropic pressure on the biotic environment. Increase in the risk of dissemination of infectious-contagious diseases. Increase in the creation of direct and indirect jobs. 2.1. Implications of the construction of basic infrastructure Risk of erosion of the soil and of siltation of rivers, lagoons, mangrove forests, and small watercourses. Interference in the local hydrodynamics. Changes in the landscape. Interference in the local biodiversity. Interference in the reproduction of maritime turtles. Restrictions in the passage and in the use of the area under intervention. Seasonal increase of the population. Intensification in the local economic dynamics. Changes in the local infrastructure. Interferences in the sites of interest from the historical, cultural, archaeological and landscape perspectives. Significant reduction of the workforce after the construction of the establishment. Emissions of noise and particulate material.
OPERATION STAGE
3. Occupation of hotels and residential resorts establishments Increase in the risk of contamination of the soil and water. Increase in the anthropic pressure on the aeolian formation. Interferences in the local biodiversity and risk of proliferation of plagues and diseases. Changes in the way of life of local population. Changes in the use of passage by local population. Increment in permanent and temporary workforce. Regional economic development. Increase in the basic services of support and infrastructure available to the population. Increase in the fiscal receipts.

Source: Adapted from Bensal do Brasil Holding e Participações Ltda (2009).

final recommendation is produced by the CEPRAM and the *Instituto do Meio Ambiente e Recursos Hídricos* (INEMA – Institute of Environment and Water Resources) on the licensing process. The total cost of this stage for the investing firm is estimated, on average, at R\$ 500,000 *reais*.

The stage of construction corresponds to the works that lead to the erection of new buildings and other installations of the establishment, together with interventions to guarantee the basic infrastructure. The impacts on the physical, biotic and socio-cultural environment are high. According to the EIA, measures must be taken in order to mitigate

and countervail these impacts, and the competent bodies to achieve that objective must closely monitor the process. Changes in the socio-cultural environment are also significant, with an increase in the company’s demand for direct and indirect jobs, which can lead to migrations (attracting workers from other regions). Indeed, it is when the greatest intake of the workforce occurs. An establishment of exceptional size employs a contingent estimated at 2,500 workers, which is often quite higher than the local population can supply. From the ecological and landscape perspective, the impact is also high, with a reduction of local biodiversity

and a risk of contamination of water and the soil due to the suppression of vegetation during the construction work, the opening of internal ways and the construction of villas, hotels and other buildings.

At the stage of operation, the functioning of tourist-residential establishments implies significant changes in the socio-economic and cultural patterns of the local population. There are changes in the local way of life, an increase in basic services of support and infrastructure available to the population, an increase in tax receipts and in the number of jobs on offer, either permanent or temporary. Spatially and environmentally, the social effects on the landscape are quite visible, with different types of occupation and use of the soil, which also signify a spatial differentiation, as illustrated in figure 1.

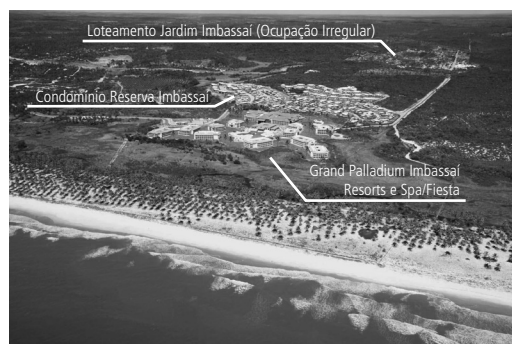
The changes in the territorial dynamics, deriving from the setting up and operation of tourist and residential hotels and resorts, are of a diverse nature, such as socio-spatial segregation, rather different occupation and use of the land, concentration of the property of land and restriction or even termination of the right of passage in the areas in which the establishments are erected. This type of land occupation makes the access to, and the use of, natural resources much more difficult for local populations that previously used these areas for extractive purposes, fishing and leisure. The real estate valuation of coastal areas, deriving from the

presence of hotel establishments and infrastructures, induces the local inhabitants to sell their homes located in the small coastal communities and to migrate to inner regions that often are of far less value and without infrastructures. This implies the irrevocable loss of neighbourhood ties and common cultural activities and values. After the installation and launch of the hotels and resorts, the right of passage is changed, due to the construction of buildings and infrastructures that most frequently imposes limits on the free access to beaches, rivers and lagoons, meaning a real loss for the traditional resident population.

4. Actual and planned investments in the Northern Littoral of Bahia

Enterprises of different nationalities have invested in the region under analysis. However, according to figures provided by the Secretary for Tourism of the State of Bahia (SETUR, 2012), the Spanish hotel networks are responsible for 70% of the total already invested up to 2011, and 82% of the planned investments up to 2014. Portuguese groups have a much smaller share, with 8.8% and 6.7% respectively of the total. Domestic Brazilian companies represent 12.2% of the total. Other European countries with companies making relatively minor investments in this domain are Italy with 4.7% and Belgium with 0.8%. Thus, Spanish and Portuguese corporations are the main foreign hotel groups investing in the region. As far as their modes of entry are concerned, Iberian groups have also differed in their local strategies: Portuguese hotel networks have been more inclined to acquisitions and management and rental contracts, whilst the Spanish groups have mainly opted for greenfield investments (Gomes, 2011).

According to SETUR (2011), during the last two decades, the flow of private investments, including not only those in operation, but also under



Source: SETUR (2011).

Figure 1 | Territorial dynamics in the APA of the Northern Littoral of Bahia: Imbassai Resorts and surroundings.

construction, located in the Northern Littoral of Bahia (the tourist area known as the '*Costa dos Coqueiros*') amounted to approximately US\$ 399 million for 6,321 UHs (rooms). The forecast of SETUR is that until the end of 2014, another US\$ 462 million will be invested for 6,328 UHs. Thus, the sum of current and planned investments in the region up to the end of 2014 is expected to reach US\$ 861 million for 12,649 UHs. These investments are essentially destined to the construction of hotel establishments associated with second-residence purposes, i.e., of the type of tourist-residential resorts described above. According to the same source, it must be underlined that 78% of these establishments are still in the stage of licensing or proposed project. In their construction stage, it is estimated that they will generate 18,863 direct jobs (SETUR, 2013).

In the course of this research, and with regard to Spanish hotel networks, it was observed that Iberostar and Fiesta have already been operating in the region since 2005 and 2010 respectively, whilst others, such as Trusan/Bensal/Brasil, Sol Meliá, Singlehome, Prima Inova and Invisa International are still in the licensing or planning stage. Furthermore, the Portuguese hotel groups Vila Galé SA and Tivoli Hotels and Resorts have been operational since 2005 and 2008 respectively, in the municipalities of Mata de São João and Camaçari, both in the southern part of the Northern Littoral of Bahia. Another Portuguese group, Pestana, has concentrated its investments in the city of Salvador, prioritizing the urban segment, orientated toward business and historical-cultural tourism. In the Northern Littoral of Bahia, the Pestana group also managed the hotels (*pousadas*) of the '*Costa do Sauípe*' Complex in 2008/2009, but then proceeded to transfer this management to the ultimate owner, PREVI (pension fund of the employees of the *Banco do Brasil*). In 2010, reinforcing its urban orientation in the region, the same group inaugurated the first tourist-residential complex in Salvador (the state capital), the Pestana Bahia Lodge Residence, in the quarter of *Rio Vermelho* (centre of the city and close to the beaches).

The fact that Brazil is to be the host nation of both the FIFA Soccer World Cup in 2014 (Salvador will be one of cities to stage matches) and the Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games in 2016 has necessitated immense public and private investments in transportation infrastructures (particularly in airports and ports), security, construction or enlargement of stadiums and accommodation, in addition to the assembly and training of a professional workforce. The awarding of these mega-events has created high expectations among entrepreneurs and in the society as a whole (Table 2). Moreover, related to these events, the Brazilian government's plan of investments in infrastructures has attracted the attention of many foreign investors, as has been noted by international media and institutions (Leahy, 2012). All of this process has its effects on the hotel and tourist industry. According to the executives of the Iberian companies interviewed during our research, the benefits of investing in Brazil, and particularly in the '*Costa dos Coqueiros*' will be increased by the World's two greatest international sport events coming to Brazil in the near future.

In the context of these investments, it must be pointed out that incentives are being offered by the Brazilian government, at the federal level, through specific credits provided by the development banks: Banco do Nordeste and the BNDES. At the state and municipal levels, there are tax breaks, such as those of the tax on the urban patrimony (IPTU) and the tax on services (ISS) for a period of ten years. In spite of the need for a relatively rapid advance in the building of the venues and infrastructures, the executives consider that a clear disadvantage continues to be the numerous bureaucratic and administrative obstacles that create delays in the processes of environmental licensing, as well as the high operational costs due to labour charges and the tax system.

What is more, as in similar previous cases throughout the world, the most serious problems may come later, i.e., after the mega-events have taken place. As recently highlighted by the president

Table 2 | Planned investments for the Northern Littoral of Bahia.

Project	Origin	Estimated investment (thousand US\$)	UHs (Rooms)
The Reserve Paradisus Hotel	Spain/Sol Mélia	60,000	225
The Guarajuba Beach Resort	Spain/Sol Mélia	700,000	1000
Costa de Imbassaí Resort & Residence	Brazil/Cyrella Brazil Reality	450,000	2,714
Grand Palladium Imbassaí Resort SPA	Spain/Fiesta	90,000	210
Orissio Sul: I	Italy/Orissio Investimentos	14,500	533
Double Tree / Les Terrasses	Brazil/Doubletree by Hilton	30,000	110
Bahia dos Coqueiros	Portugal/Grupo Lena e Liz Construções	220,000	770
Iberostate (3ª etapa):	Spain/Iberostar	50,000	240
Complexo Turístico em Praia do Forte - Norte	Spain/Grupo Trusam	500,000	1,200
Complexo Turístico em Praia do Forte - Sul	Spain/Grupo Trusam	700,000	2,500
Plano Baixo	Spain/Grupo Ed. Prima	398,000	60
Busca Vida Bangalô Resort	Portugal/ Grupo Lena e Liz Construções	40,000	45
Costa Azul Bahia Golf Resort & Condomínio	Spain/Grupo Invisa	312,500	2,250
Fazenda Onça	Belgium/Inka Lodge	18,750	300
Naurigas	Spain/Naurigás	175,000	1,500
Quintas de Arempébe	Portugal/Design Resorts	150,000	400
Total		3,908,750	13,327

Source: SETUR (2013).

of the Bahia Hotel Industry Association (*Associação Baiana da Indústria de Hotéis*), the tourism market in Brazil and Bahia does not have sufficient demand to sustain the projected size of the sector, post-2016, arguing that: “At present, we have 60% occupation of the hotels’ capacity. The market is not growing it is stagnant. Possibly, demand will increase with the World Cup, but afterwards, there will not be enough guests for all of the establishments that are being created in the region.” (Correio da Bahia, 2012).

5. Concluding remarks

The conformity with environmental sustainability on the part of the hotel networks’ projects in Brazil, particularly in the Northeast and the North Littoral of the State of Bahia, must be evaluated from a

broader perspective. It is necessary to take into account that the experience of the corporations that were analyzed has been acquired in the Iberian Peninsula, since most of them have their headquarters and primary investments in this European region. In their Brazilian experience, the administrative aspects, particularly when linked to environmental regulation, and the lack of knowledge of the local market are the main obstacles confronting their implantation in the country, and specifically in the area we have studied in more detail. To this must be added the difficulties arising from the lack of organized, clear information and other aspects, such as cultural differences. Even in the case of Portugal, despite the linguistic and cultural proximity, the corporations’ representatives recognize the difficulties that impede their entry into the Brazilian market, which does not have the same characteristics as their domestic market.

Researchers such as Aledo et al. (2007) argued that the model of tourist-residential complexes developed on the Spanish coast demonstrates the immense process of increasing artificiality and densification of the littoral and the disappearance of local activities and cultures, substituted by undifferentiated, cosmopolitan global culture and patterns. Among other socio-environmental impacts, they underline the modification of the landscape as a result of the establishment of infrastructures for the development of the sector, the suppression of vegetation, the contamination of the soil and water due to the inadequate treatment of residual waters and solid wastes, deriving from the over-exploitation of some tourist destinations and the massive activities, the deficit of qualified services and infrastructures and insecurity. We believe that these negative impacts should be prevented or at least minimized in the Northern Littoral of Brazil, and in particular on the Northern coast of state of Bahia; indeed, even the environmental and economic sustainability of the investments would be threatened if the same model of development of the tourist-residential resorts found in the countries of origin were to be simply reproduced in this rather different area of the world. Similarly to what occurred on the Mediterranean coast, the Iberian hotel networks promise great economic benefits to the Northern Littoral and the north of Bahia, like more jobs, increased tax receipts and the improvement and enlargement of the infrastructures. But, as above underlined, in practice these outcomes have to be object of a closer scrutiny, and outweighed with long-term sustainable objectives.

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