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Heritage preservation vs. Political Policies. The Pueblos Mágicos program and the cultural tourism in México

Based on the ongoing need that the Mexican government has, which is to help small town economies (towns of less than 20,000 people), the federal-based Program “Pueblos mágicos” was created in the year 2000. This Program was designed to provide economical aid for touristic development of several sites identified as “Magical”, in an attempt to attract national and international cultural tourists. In addition, this would provide economical benefits for these locations, which otherwise, would not have other sources of income.

The Pueblos Mágicos federal program tries to preserve the traditional environment of small towns (under 20,000 inhabitants), through economic investments, legislation, and legal aid. After 13 years of applying the Program, it seems necessary to review the successes or mistakes generated from its application, sometimes indiscriminately applied on locations spread out all over the Mexican territory. Until 2014, there were 111 registered Pueblos Mágicos spread among 30 states. The research initiated in 2012, is analyzing eight towns located in the state of Michoacán, because it is the federal entity with more Pueblos Mágicos. The mechanics of the study include field work, survey applications, contrasting information with the SECTUR 2014 study, among other factors like social and demographic data, geographic information and media research. The results obtained until today, show mistakes and successes in the application of this public policy, but specially, point out the few local society participation, the almost non-existing economy increase, and a big change in the local lifestyle, like modifications to cultural traditions, and overall, the constant risk of losing cultural heritage.

